

The Position and Significance of the Past Definite  
in French Classical Drama,

by

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The Position and Significance of the Past Definite

ical Drama,

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ders.

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in French Classical Drama.

The Past Definite tense represents a peculiar problem and contradiction in the French language. Obsolete in spoken usage, but persistent still in narrative literature and oratorical contexts, it appears to some grammarians a 'learned form' whose survival is regrettable, whose eventual disappearance certain. To others, its removal from the French language would be mutilation.

This study proposes to illumine the dispute and misunderstanding surrounding the Past Definite by an examination and analysis of its numerical incidence and basic function in the drama of the classical period and in particular in the theatre of Rotrou, Corneille, Racine and Molière.

Evidence of linguistic change was sought in drama because it is an art-form closely related to contemporary speech and because in recent years a number of brief studies have tentatively opened up this field of enquiry.

The classical period was chosen because in that period modern French took shape and because authorities recognise that the inner movement of the language which led to the obsolescence of the Past Definite took place between the end of the sixteenth century and 1660.

In determining the position of the Past Definite in classical drama it is hoped to assess its degree of obsolescence, the amount of terrain yielded to the Past Indefinite and in how far the latter tense was equivalent in function.

Our examination shows, origins and past history of the tense taken into account, that the two tenses, though in time theoretically equivalent, seldom interchange or mingle and that the prevalent phenomenon in their use is the attempt to distinguish between them.

The Past Definite became endowed with a temporary connotation of remoteness and acquired or recreated an aspect-value of severance from the present. The Past Indefinite dealt rather with the recent past and with events reverberating into present and future. The latter tense, from its form and origins, could only harrate on a subjective basis, unselectively and without building up to climax. Its mechanical convenience as an applied type of expression was gradually offset by its weakness on the ideal plane, its 'static' quality.

The Past Definite remained the perfect vehicle of skilled narrative proceeding towards climax but weakened in daily speech for two reasons:- the connotation of remoteness, for obvious reasons, made its incidence less and less likely; the particular value of aspect it possessed, though felt by the poets who defied the grammarians, was alien to the whole development of the French verb.

What happened then was that the French language took a 'wrong turning' and arrived at an impasse from which it has not yet emerged. If Camus writes L'Etranger in the Past Indefinite and La Peste in the Past Definite it is not for reasons of time. Instinctively as an artist he feels the psychological distinctiveness of each.

This study proposes then to explain why the Past Definite passed from daily speech and why it survives in literature.

When mention is made of the significance of the tense in French classical drama this significance is related to the twenty four hour rule which governed both the verb and the classical stage. The Past Definite, officially banished from present time by this twenty four hour barrier becomes a colouring agent which picks out the weight of preterite time in the plays' structure.

At no point, therefore, is dramatic dialogue considered as mere linguistic evidence. The use of the Past Definite becomes a guide to proper aesthetic appreciation which enables us to offer a new analysis of several well-known passages in the old masterpieces. It reveals the basic difference in time-structure of tragedy and comedy and in particular defines the evolution of comedy in the seventeenth century.

This is a study of tense and time in relation to language and drama, based on exhaustive counts of Past Definite frequency, and offering a completely new linguistic and aesthetic synthesis.

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## Chapter 1.

### The Terms of the Subject.

(General definition -- the need for comprehensive examination -- the value of drama as linguistic evidence -- origins of this study -- Ullmann and Vossler -- the seventeenth century a decisive moment -- dramatic dialogue and daily usage -- limitations of drama as linguistic evidence -- its virtue in relation to the verb -- the twenty four hour rule of grammar and stage -- importance of the art-form and its time-structure -- interchange between linguistic and aesthetic approach -- past time in drama -- drama a moving present -- particular relation of genre to the Past Definite and vice versa -- controls available -- value of variants -- accepted theories -- counts of Past Definite frequency and their interpretation -- Poulet's theories confirmed and extended -- the problem in its full context.)

This is a study of Tense and Time; of the Past Definite tense as it is used by the authors of French classical drama; and, by extension, of the changing role and scope of past time in the presentation of the 17th century tragic and comic plot. It is, therefore, by further extension, a study of the nature of stage drama itself.

No textbook on French morphology and syntax is without its chapter on the Past Definite, its peculiar persistence in the literary medium in spite of its obsolescence in daily speech. This contradiction in the tense has not failed to interest grammarians and historians of language and has called forth a number of short studies<sup>1</sup>. which have attempted, if not to solve, at least to clarify the problems which it raises. There exists, however, no synthesis of the various viewpoints offered, no longer work

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1. The most impressive of these is, of course, that of Lucien Foulet:- "La disparition du prétérit", Romania, XLVI, 1920, pp. 271-313.

work which seeks to determine all the implications of what is in essence a process of linguistic change which has not reached its final term.

The lack of a full and authoritative statement has its origin not only in the fact that this process of change is still continuing, but also in the difficulty of procuring evidence of how the tense was used in the spoken idiom of earlier centuries.

For this latter reason particular attention has in recent years been focussed on drama as the literary genre most closely associated with the spoken word and most likely to mirror the contemporary trends of language. There seems no reason to doubt the validity of this procedure. Subject to certain important qualifications, whatever conclusions are reached in this study on the position of the Past Definite in 17th century French are based on counts of Past Definite frequency in French classical drama.

Our point of departure is to be found in the article by Stephen Ullmann which appeared in French

French Studies in January, 1948.<sup>1</sup> This article provided a count of Past Definites occurring in the plays of Racine as the best means of verifying whether, as implied by Vossler<sup>2</sup>, the great dramatist and poet showed a tendency in his later works to replace the Past Definite by the Past Indefinite. Objective numerical evidence, it appeared, afforded little justification for Vossler's hypothesis. Indeed, in many specific cases the opposite seemed true.

While these conclusions may seem negative they provide a salutary warning as to the dangers of Vossler's impressionistic theorising<sup>3</sup>, and emphasise the value of a systematic factual approach.

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1. Pp. 35-53:-

2. "The Vitality of the Past Definite in Racine", hereafter, in gratitude to Stephen Ullmann, to be referred to as "Article of Origin".

2.K. Vossler: Frankreichs Kultur und Sprache, 2nd Ed., 1929, pp. 280, 281.

3.c.f. W.v.Wartburg:- "Il n'est rien qui cause des dommages aussi sensibles à l'étude des langues qu'un raisonnement imprudemment général et qui n'est pas fondé sur des connaissances solides." Problèmes et Méthodes de la Linguistique, 1946, p. 92 n. --  
a quotation from Guillaume de Humboldt.

It is interesting that Stephen Ullmann had previously examined the position of the Past Definite in modern drama and had been able to reach the following more positive standpoint:-<sup>1</sup>.

On pourrait presque dire que nos temps n'ont quitté le style dramatique que pour rentrer par l'autre porte, sous forme de moyens d'évocation et de caractérisation.

Positive conclusions are, of course, easier to achieve as regards the language of to-day since it is possible to gather accurate evidence of spoken usage.

But it is the 17th century that naturally awakens our interest since it was the period during which the French language assumed its modern shape. It was between 1560 and 1660<sup>2</sup> that the crucial change in Past Definite usage took place. The subsequent retreat of the Past Definite into literature can only be understood in the light of what happened at that time.

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1. "Le passé défini et l'imparfait du subjonctif dans le théâtre contemporain", *Le Français Moderne*, VI, 1938, pp.347 - 58.

2. Foulet, op. cit.

The withdrawal of the Past Definite from daily speech had as its corollary that it was replaced by the Past Indefinite.

Vossler visualises drama -- classical drama -- as being the art-form that encouraged the spread of the newer tense into literature proper:-<sup>1</sup>.

Man darf wohl annehmen -- und es wäre die Mühe wert, der Sache nachzugehen -- dass die dramatische Literatur vor allem es gewesen ist, in erster Linie die komische, in zweiter die tragische, die dem pragmatischen Perfektum aus der täglichen Rede in die schriftliche Kunstsprache hineingeholfen hat.

It would be idle to deny that drama mirrors spoken usage, that the language of any play must have the same syntactical structure as the language spoken by its audience during the entr'acte. It will be implicit in our approach to the Past Definite tense that, since it is a vital expression of time necessary to the dramatic authors of the 17th century, its examination in their plays will repay our efforts. Its position in the language, its future development will be clarified, even if

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<sup>1</sup>.Op. cit., p.281.

if we allow that in high tragedy and poetic comedy its use may be subject to aesthetic, or rather, non-linguistic factors which must be taken into account..... In these genres the time-lag between spoken and written usage will be greater. In prose comedy there will be little or none.

Vossler is correct when he underlines the importance of examining drama and particularly comedy, but it would be well to expose at once the fallacy in his argument that drama breached the walls of literature to admit the Past Indefinite, made, so to speak, an 'honest' tense of it.

Art-form and art-form differ always in their time-structure. A tense that is valuable to drama may be of little value to other genres. Indeed, there was no need to conceive an intriguing theory at all since any student of French knows that the tense exists in literary French from the beginning of the language, wherever the art-form has to quote or echo the spoken word. A much more valuable and necessary contribution to linguistic knowledge would have been to explain why the Past Indefinite, made literarily respectable in drama, failed to oust the

the Past Definite in the novel, even after the latter tense had become completely obsolete in the daily idiom.

It is obvious from the very outset that we are dealing with a complex subject that demands the greatest probity and caution. It is necessary, therefore, to meet all possible objections to the method of approach we intend to adopt.

While emphasising, for example, the close relationship between drama and contemporary usage, we have admitted that there exists a considerable gap between the language of poetic drama and that of its spectators. As far as the Past Definite is concerned, of course, this element of distance is not so pronounced in the classical period as it is to-day since the tense was then still alive, if slightly perishing, in the streets of Paris. In other words, the tense remains a common aural phenomenon in the seventeenth century but exists to-day mainly in the visual context of the printed word.

Time -- and tense, its expression -- is the natural field of exercise for high intelligence. In lower intelligences the conception of time is

is rudimentary, the verb looms over them as a limited number of applied, and misapplied expressions doing rough justice to the language.

This is an important point to make for so much modern <sup>4</sup>linguistic research has been done in the realm of things, so many tools and implements have been dug up with the rich peasant earth-word still clinging to them that to approach the language in anything but hobnails is by many deemed not only mistaken but unseemly.

Now, in the realm of usage, where complexity arises, it will always be the poet that will be most instructive. For the poet not only absorbs the contemporary spirit of his language, but he knows its tradition and feels the trend of its future development. He works to the full limit of expression in his medium, which is the language. And he works intuitively. The prose-writer may work coldly with one eye on the grammarian critic. The poet writes more than he knows. At his best he is not conscious of the choice of his terms of expression. The expression inflicts itself on him. There is no way round it.

It was, no doubt, in this way, that Corneille wrote in *Le Cid* Quand je lui fis l'affront, incurring the criticism of the Académie which induced him to substitute later Quand je lui ai fait.....<sup>1</sup>. He was undoubtedly wrong in terms of that average usage which Academies consecrate. It is certain that he was not completely wrong, that for some good reason this wilful Past Definite seemed to him right as it flowed from his pen.

And if Racine, without incurring the displeasure of the Académie, committed the same mistake in the récit de Thérémène when he wrote Le flot qui l'apporta recule épouventé, he did so -- and of no poet could this be more true<sup>2</sup>. -- under inner compulsion.

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1. Act II, Scene I.

2. Il avait sur les règles de la langue toute la science des plus habiles grammairiens et n'a jamais écrit en grammairien. Il brave souvent les règles qu'il connaissait bien et il les brave pour servir la langue dont il méprisait les règles quand il en consultait le génie! Louis Racine: *Oeuvres*, ed. Le Normant, t.V. , p.271, quoted by Gonzague Truc: Jean Racine.

Drama, as written by the poets of French classicism, becomes then our implement not only because it approximates to the spoken language of their time, but because it does that and something more.

In relation to time and tense the drama of Racine, Corneille and Molière possesses in addition a unique feature which makes close scrutiny of Past Definite usage imperative: from Mairet's Sophonisbe onward<sup>1</sup>. the dramatic authors of the 17th century conform with that tyrannical rule which demanded that the play should present its action within the scope of one day. Corneille quickly accustoms his rugged genius to this necessity. Racine and Molière conform instinctively and without effort.

Since the grammarians at the same time are banishing the Past Definite to events more than twenty-four hours distant from their telling the Past Definite assumes in drama the quality of a

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1.i.e. from 1634.

a colouring agent which shows the approximate weight of past time (outwith the twenty-four hour limit) in any properly classical dramatic plot.

The value of this linguistically is that drama silhouettes the meaning and function of the tense most clearly. Marginal cases, events situated on either side of the artificial time limit, achieve in drama a peculiar significance according as the dramatist ignores or accepts the grammarian's rule. Furthermore, the province of the Past Definite in drama, from its very restriction, lends itself easily to a quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Aesthetically, however, this marriage of grammar and dramatic poetry which the twenty-four hour<sup>rule</sup> represents is of an importance completely unrealised up to this moment. For in this century the poetic genius of France is seeking to endow the art-form of drama with its true structure, a structure distinctive from that of other genres in one particular sphere:- the presentation of time. The Past Definite, relegated to the middle past and assuming temporarily a quality of remoteness and severance from the present, records the exact measure and placing of preterite events in the fabric of the play.

As this new field opens up one is compelled to pause and consider all its implications in this work.<sup>1</sup>.

It may be objected that though contiguous to the linguistic sphere of our activities it has no direct relevance to our essential subject. Such an objection has this to recommend it that it keeps our examination within ideally narrow confines. A much more serious objection is, however, as we shall attempt to prove, that such a limitation invalidates the whole linguistic purpose of a numerical count.

Drama is not dialogue suspended in thin air. It is dialogue wedded to action proceeding towards climax. It is part of a literary structure. The actual incidence of the Past Definite depends on the proportion of past actions exercising impact, direct or indirect, on the action of the play. It depends equally, of course, on the ratio of Past Definites in contemporary speech in contexts similar to those of the play. In synthesis, then, our linguistic examination must concern not only the nature of the Past Definite in contemporary spoken and written usage, but also the nature of drama.

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1. These implications are well expressed by Ch. Bally, *Traité de Stylistique*, 2nd ed., p.262:-  
Il est donc suffisamment clair qu'un grand nombre de faits syntaxiques donne prise à l'observation stylistique et trouvent par elle leur véritable explication.

A passage from Le Cid or Athalie may be analysed in vacuo in order to prove some peculiarity of contemporary usage. It cannot be analysed in toto unless it is considered in relation to the dramatic moment at which it occurs. The strict time values which must be observed in drama, the economy and condensation which are the essence of its form, provide an illumination of usage, of meaning and connotation that not only enriches our knowledge of the language, but also our understanding and appreciation of classical drama. It is not too much to say that any critic who has not closely scanned the Past Definite usage in classical drama -- however much he may preach the potency of Racine's verbs -- has yet to extract from the masterpieces of our great dramatists their full and fervent flavour.

To understand what is meant by the 'dramatic moment' and to clinch the question of whether or not one can legitimately ignore the peculiar nature of stage drama we must return to the nature of stage drama itself.

As an art-form it is distinguished by severe mechanical rules of structure made necessary by the fact that it presents in two or three hours actions and situations belonging to a much broader time scheme.

Between act and act, tableau and tableau, time may flow swift or slow, adjusting itself in the mind of the audience to the basic time-scheme behind the plot. Within the act no reduction or expansion of time is possible; physical movements, mental reactions of characters on the stage are geared to the rhythm of daily life.<sup>1</sup>.

But those pauses in presentation before which the curtain falls permit the dramatist to cut and choose the truly scenic elements of his fundamental plot. The action of drama, though geared to the rhythm of life as the spectator knows it, is not identical with that of daily life, or seldom..... For scenic presentation favours progression towards climax and is linked with coherence and significance; this fact, which implies a series of dramatic moments, taken with those brief interludes of silence in which the closed curtain restores the elasticity of time, permits the

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1. That herein lies the fundamental difference between the novel and drama is abundantly clear. P. Lubbock's work, *The Craft of Fiction*, still seems the most revealing as regards the vital distinction between the scenic and panoramic method of presentation.

the dramatist to weave his own pattern of time over the bare texture of life.<sup>1</sup>.

In that pattern the thread of past time is, of course, included. A major test of the dramatist's skill is, however, precisely this that the past must make its weight felt on the stage scene with strict economy and as an unavoidable necessity. For the greatest tyranny of time over stage drama lies in the fact that its vehicle is the present. It is a moving present, a present born of the past and moving swiftly into the future. Drama is, as Barrault says,<sup>2</sup>. 'l'art même du Devenir'.

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1.C.f. Jean Louis Barrault, *Réflexions sur le Théâtre*, Paris, 1940, p.121:-

La façon dont se succèdent les actions n'est pas la façon ordinaire. Parmi des raccourcis choisis, ces actions ont été filtrées, épurées. Elles ont une forme circulaire et jouent les unes sur les autres suivant une parfaite symétrie.

2.Two other passages in Barrault's work are relevant. Speaking of the silence which it is his business as an actor to 'make vibrate', he says:-

... il m'est arrivé parfois de le retrouver, mais cette fois au milieu d'une scène flambante de projecteurs, dans une situation dramatique chauffée à blanc et devant ou plutôt parmi mille personnes, mille coeurs humains "partageants", partageant le moment présent (*italics his own*) avec moi. (op.cit.,p.24.)

and again:-

... l'art du théâtre traite essentiellement du Présent et du Simultané.... (ibid.,p.139)

The lines of synthesis now become clear. The incidence of past tenses, particularly of the Past Definite, depends in classical drama on the nature of the art-form more than it does on the pattern of daily usage. The fact that drama is in thrall to the present tense is a non-linguistic factor rigidly controlling all past tenses.

But again, paradoxically, the linguistic side of our subject benefits in a way that offsets any disadvantage it thus incurs for the vital difference between the Past Definite and the Past Indefinite, as will later be shown, is to be found in the different relationship of the two tenses to present time. Throughout drama they are in the position of constantly demonstrating their true nature.

If at ~~at~~ some dramatic moment a choice is made of the one as against the other -- particularly if that choice is contrary to accepted rules -- there will be valuable evidence to be garnered in the realm of meaning and connotation.

The text of classical drama has other peculiar merits which recommend it as a source of evidence on changes in daily usage. Not only does it offer an

an echo of that usage. There is a positive control to the numerical count of the Past Definite in this that the number of five-act plays of approximately equal length is considerable. It is possible therefore to ascertain the common norm of occurrence in tragedy and comedy at different periods. In addition, it is possible to follow changes in that norm when a basic plot produces over a period of time several dramatic versions by different authors. Finally, and this applies particularly to Corneille, since plays tend to date quickly in terms of language and expression, later editions and stage productions that revive old masterpieces requires linguistic renovation. Changes in the dramatic text, made often after a lapse of generations, are probably the soundest literary evidence available to the historian of language of the trend of spoken usage. Specifically, the variants which appear in the later editions of Corneille comprise the most valuable record of the precise nature of contemporary Past Definite obsolescence.

It should now be clear that it is neither proposed, on the one hand, to present in these pages an unimaginative numerical count, nor, on the other, to beg the essential linguistic question by impressionistic dabbling. It is

is our intention to present a quantitative and qualitative analysis of Past Definite usage in French classical drama.

The subject -- our method of approach being taken into consideration -- is conceived as falling naturally into two parts which do not prevent, but rather justify a final synthesis. The first of these concerns the position of the Past Definite in French classical drama, it being assumed that the position of the Past Definite in the language during the second half of the 17th century is therein implied, subject to allowance made for the nature of the art-form under study.

Many questions have yet to be answered as to the precise connotation and function of the Past Definite during the classical period. In seeking to clarify the position of the Past Definite in the language at that time one is committed to explaining the fundamental paradox which underlies the position of the tense in modern French: although it passed from speech with comparative swiftness in the 17th and

and 18th centuries it remains solidly entrenched in various literary genres even to-day.

It is implicit in most works concerning the obsolescence of the Past Definite that the process of change affecting the tense assumes the quality of a slow withering away of older usage. It is often, if not generally, accepted that the Past Indefinite from the classical period onwards duplicates the work of the Past Definite. Is this particular viewpoint exact and scientific? Does it not leave too much unexplained? Why, for example, has this specific and widespread transmutation -- the perfect tense assuming a preterite role, the language feeling its way towards a further perfect to replace the old -- operated so swiftly in French in comparison with the other members of the Indo-European group? Why, considering the

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1. c.f. Antoine Meillet: "Sur la disparition des formes simples du prétérit", *Linguistique Historique et Linguistique Générale*, 2nd ed., 1926, p. 154.

the speed of this transformation in spoken French, does the Literary Standard so stubbornly retain the Past Definite, as if during the classical period the common tongue had taken a 'wrong turning' which an élite of the nation -- and not so much a learned as an artistic élite -- cannot in conscience yet accept?<sup>1</sup>.

To provide an answer to these questions is to break new ground and expose past error. We are convinced that in determining the true position of the Past Definite in the French language during the period of cartesian crystallisation this can be done.

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1.c.f. J. Damourette & E. Pichon, Essai de Grammaire de la Langue Française, 1911 - 36, p.335:-

Il ne semble pas douteux que, dans le français d'aujourd'hui, l'expression du passé puisse être suffisamment exprimée par le toncal pur (i.e. the Imperfect) et par l'antérieur pur (i.e. the Past Indefinite), et que le priscal (i.e. the Past Definite) ne constitue une ressource surnuméraire permettant une nuance spéciale. Mais de cette précieuse ressource, le français littéraire fait un usage si large que se la voir supprimer serait une véritable mutilation.

"Songez", dit très justement M. Thérive (Note given: André Thérive: Le français, langue morte, V, p.101.) "que presque tous les récits rétrospectifs des romanciers, des journalistes, des historiens, sont encore à ce temps."

To accomplish this an examination and a numerical count of the Past Definites in the plays of Corneille, Racine and Molière was undertaken. Later the vast theatre of Rotrou was included. In the process, as we have explained, the importance of non-linguistic factors became so obvious, the conception of classical drama as an evolving art-form so helpful, that the field of enquiry opened up to include facts leading to purely literary conclusions. The Past Definite, once its position was determined, revealed itself as a sign-post pointing the way to a deeper appreciation of classical drama. Its significance in classical drama became the second part of our subject.

It did so by raising a number of questions arising directly from our linguistic investigation. How could one account for the narrow limits within which it moved in tragedy -- the counts registering a ceiling of slightly over 100? For the fact that there appeared to be an optimum Past Definite density, that the greatest tragedies lay within fairly narrow limits, that, in other words, they avoided the two extremes, a scarcity of Past

Past Definites and a superfluity? Why does Corneille betray a certain malaise<sup>1</sup> when the weight of the past affects his tragic plot too much? Why is such an attitude absent in Racine? Was the rapid diminution of Past Definite occurrence in the century's comedy and particularly in that of Molière a stylistic or linguistic phenomenon? What is the explanation of the fact that, though Rotrou, Corneille, Racine and Molière conform with scant exception to the accepted rules of usage, the counts of Past Definite frequency vary considerably as between author and author, genre and genre, and within genres --- and why in all genres is a common norm, or movement towards a common norm, so evident?

The carping critic may see in all these questions following on those concerning linguistic phenomena an improper extension of the subject material or even a disintegration of the subject itself. In our view it is only when the net of enquiry is fully spread that the subject reaches full integration.

For, as we have said, this is a study of Time.

It is the changing and clarifying of the conception of

1. " Moins on se charge d'actions passées plus on a l'auditeur propice par le peu de gêne qu'on lui donne en lui rendant toutes les choses présentes, sans demander aucune réflexion à sa mémoire que pour ce qu'il a vu..... (Discours des Trois Unités.) (Oeuvres, Vol 1, p.116)

of time that brings differentiation between tense and tense in the classical period. It is a new aesthetic conception of time that revolutionises the French theatre and endows the art-form of drama with a structure still clearly discernible to-day. Our subject, whatever divisions its presentation demands, is one and indivisible.

It was the appearance of a critical study of Georges Poulet in 1949<sup>1</sup> that dispelled any doubts still remaining as to the correctness of this conception and showed that, however modest and obscure the way chosen in this work, it ran parallel to the new highway in literary criticism that Poulet had opened with honour.

In his Etudes sur le Temps Humain the thought of the centuries, the manner and style of the creative artist is appreciated, seized and clarified by relating it to the conception of time out of which they grow. As the Middle Ages differed from the Renaissance in this respect so

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1. Etudes sur le Temps Humain, Edinburgh University Press.

the creative author differs from his fellow or diverges from him within the bounds set by their respective historical periods. So, in terms of time, the tragic vein of Corneille distinguishes itself from that of Racine and the comedy of Molière reveals its nature.

In this direction our statistical evidence on Past Definite frequency was already guiding us. The tendency of the tense to increase, to show a rising curve as Racine's tragic genius reaches towards its zenith, finds its explanation:-<sup>1</sup>.

..tout le drame racinien se présente comme l'intrusion d'un passé fatal, d'un passé déterminant, d'un passé cause-efficiente, dans un présent qui cherche désespérément à s'en rendre indépendante....

Past and present wrestle in Racine like Jacob and the Angel. The exposition of his tragedy does not dismiss the Past Definite. It reintrudes in a secondary peak in the fourth act.

But in Corneille there is one peak of occurrence and that at the beginning of his tragedy. Thereafter the past is a gradually fading echo:-<sup>2</sup>.

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1.Poulet, *ibid.*, p.139.

2.*Ibid.*, pp. 126 and 134.

A l'amour-passion, esclavage insidieux où l'être se trouve sans relâche balancé d'un pôle à l'autre de la durée, succède une passion volontaire où l'être ramasse en le vouloir présent son moi prêt à l'action. .... Le drame cornélien est fait de moments et de la préparation de ces moments.

So in Corneille the graph of Past Definite occurrence is a diminishing one from the first act of the play onwards and where any tragedy leans too heavily on the staff of past time he is uneasy.

And what of Molière? Why, in contrast to the comedies of Rotrou and Corneille do his plays show so few Past Definites? Why does the tense steadily diminish as his comic vein develops, as he turns from verse to prose? The narrow linguistically-minded inquirer might hail such diminution -- particularly in the light of the prose factor -- as abundant evidence of the obsolescence of the tense in daily speech. But is this so? Or does comedy with Molière, blending French farce with elements of the Commedia dell'arte and linking it with the study of character, not in fact detach itself from mere imbroglio and swim out into the waters of present time where its genre belongs?

Le comique de Molière, c'est d'abord la présence actuelle d'un certain comportement qui est immédiatement présent au spectateur.<sup>1</sup>.

The linguistic facts of the case seen in juxtaposition to the intuitive findings of M. Poulet justify, it would seem, the impression of parallelism between the two fields of enquiry if such justification is required.

Our own field now assumes its proper definition and organic shape and the terms of the subject become clear:- to assess in terms of origin and development the meaning and function of the Past Definite in the classical period; to determine by a numerical check of its incidence in classical drama over a period of fifty years the degree of obsolescence it has reached; to account for this obsolescence and define its true nature; to demonstrate the factors in drama which modify the statistical facts of our enquiry; to show how the Past Definite in classical drama indicates the evolution of the art-form and the differing

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1.Ibid., p.118.

differing structures of tragedy and comedy; to add to our appreciation of the language of classical drama and the genius of its authors; in brief, to see and understand in its full context the problem of Past Definite usage in French classical drama.

## Chapter 11.

### The Past Definite in Perspective.

#### I) Divergent Opinions.

(Position of the Past Definite in modern French -- eclipse of the tense in speech, early origins and crucial phases -- Is the Past Definite a 'dead' form? -- grammarians at variance -- Past Definite, the story tense -- fashions in tenses -- functional equivalence with Indefinite form -- Is the Past Indefinite a preterite? -- psychological and mechanical factors -- modern definitions -- the need to return to source.)

#### II) Origin and Emergence of the Past Indefinite in French.

(Vulgar Latin -- auxiliary of present possession and participle of completion -- identification with the present -- Past Indefinite to partial preterite -- Indo-Germanic context -- the analytical tendency -- advantages of the composite tense -- resistance of the Past Definite -- Foulet's analysis.)

#### III) The Past Definite in Old French.

(Changing concept of time -- Imperfect tense in O.F. -- loose time-relationships -- dominant role of the Past Definite -- psychological factors -- opposition between Past Definite and Past Indefinite -- theories of Lerch -- subjective and objective distinction -- penalty of the Past Indefinite's origins -- its clear restrictions in O.F. )

#### IV) The Advent of the Grammarian.

(Decisive changes in the XVIth century -- Henri Estienne -- new time distinctions, the 'remote' and 'recent' past -- stages of evolution -- the twenty four hour rule -- Past Definite withdraws from proximity of the present -- Sentiments sur le Cid -- Maupas: the time factor modified -- the question of aspect -- complexity favouring Past Indefinite -- the 'pregnant' use -- 'mystical' factors.)

V)/

V) Basic Implications.

(Past Definite and Past Indefinite: differences of origin and associations -- these not explicable in terms of time only -- different planes of experience -- their equivalence more than doubtful -- mutual relationship to the Historic Present -- clear opposition of Past Definite and Past Indefinite in classical period -- moments of change -- the mechanical and ideal factor -- the need for direct evidence. )

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### Divergent Opinions

Any linguistic change, no matter how far distant in the past centuries the crest or trough of its wave, must be seen against the background of modern usage.

To-day the Past Definite, still active though under threat in the novel, still alive in the newspaper report and the traditional fairy tale, has passed from daily speech:-<sup>1</sup>.

Dans le français courant de Paris et dans un vaste rayon autour de Paris, le prétérit simple, dit passé défini, du type il eut, il fut, nous crûmes, il partit, est entièrement sorti de l'usage parlé. La forme s'écrit encore, sinon dans le style courant où elle tend à disparaître, du moins dans les textes didactiques dont la langue est traditionnelle et artificielle; la grammaire enseigne à l'employer dans le récit, où la forme du passé composé serait contraire à l'usage classique; mais cet emploi ne répond plus au sentiment actuel des sujets parlants. L'Atlas linguistique de MM. Gilliéron et Edmond montre que, dans tout le

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1.A. Meillet, Op. cit., p. 150.

le français le prétérit simple est une forme morte..... Au Nord de Paris pas trace de "passé défini"; au Sud il faut aller jusqu'aux départements de l'Allier, de la Creuse et de la Vienne pour commencer à en trouver quelques-uns sur les cartes; à l'Ouest la limite est plus proche; le prétérit simple existe encore en Normandie.....

Whether the Past Definite is a 'dead form' or not -- opinions differ as to its demise and its degree of moribundity -- the 'geographic' position of the spoken Past Definite is not in question. It is associated particularly with Provence where it is still to be found in local dialect.

Meillet is of the opinion that the elimination of the Past Definite from everyday speech must have begun early in the evolution of the language and must have been complete at a relatively early stage, since the nineteenth century speech of a town as meridional as Moulins offers no examples of it, neither

Meillet, *Langue française*, p. 111. A. Cohen,  
1910, p. 111.  
F. Meillet, *Revue de linguistique*, XLVI, p. 100.

neither does it exist in Canadian<sup>1</sup>. though the French of Quebec was founded in part on that of Normandy.

Most historians of language agree that the obsolescence of the tense did indeed begin early,<sup>2</sup>. that though in Old French it dominated other past tenses in speech and literature the Past Indefinite was from the outset reducing ~~this~~ domination by rapid infiltration into the positions of its rival:-<sup>3</sup>.

Il est inutile d'aller plus loin et le fait est acquis. Un emploi, né dans la langue familière, évité longtemps par la langue de la prose et le parler soigné des gens cultivés, puis accueilli timidement au <sup>XIV</sup>e siècle par la langue de la conversation élevée, se répand de plus en plus au <sup>XV</sup>e siècle où il se montre fréquemment dans des textes non littéraires pour triompher enfin au <sup>XVI</sup>e au point de pénétrer jusque dans la littérature.....

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1. For a contrary opinion see F. Brunot & C. Bruneau, Précis de Grammaire Historique, 1949 ed., p.380.

2. The only authorities who seem to question its obsolescence are J. Damourette & E. Pichon, Op. cit., pp.333 - 381.

3. L. Foulet, Romania, XLVI, p.290.

The crucial phase in this process of change occurs, according to Foulet, between 1560 and 1660. His picture of a rising tide of popular usage which breaks the dyke of literature in the classical period to flood the various written genres seems to satisfy most authorities.

Unfortunately, as regards the position of the Past Definite to-day and its probable evolution, there is not the same degree of agreement. Its vitality in relation to that of the Past Indefinite is a subject which reveals radical differences between grammarians.

A. Dauzat<sup>1</sup> notes its acquiral of a solemn quality, already proof of its archaism, in the seventeenth century, the common people having failed to 'rescue' it by the adoption of one set of verb-endings in an instinctive effort at simplification. Literature maintained it as a narrative tense, but authors who have a true feeling for the language avoid its use

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1. *Etudes de Linguistique Française*, pp. 63 - 70.

use unless in the 3rd person. Even poetry has retained it for the sake of its harmonic value. In other words the Past Definite is 'sick'.

If Meillet and Foulet are less emphatic they seem to accept as a fact that the process of change affecting the Past Definite is inevitable and continuing towards the climax of its complete elimination.

Gilliéron frankly rejoices:-<sup>1</sup>.

Lorsque nous disons: "je fis mes préparatifs de voyage; je mis dans ma malle mes livres....", nous faisons là un bel effort grammatical auquel se soumettaient nos prédécesseurs.....

Il était logique et opportun, que cet état de choses illogique et inopportun prit fin, que l'esprit unitaire y mît ordre.....

The dry verdict of Brunot<sup>2</sup> is no less categorical:- Le passé défini est une forme de langue savante.....

Since no one would lightly oppose such a consensus of opinion it is interesting to find other authorities ready to question and qualify it.

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1. La Faillite de l'Etymologie Phonétique, p.105.

2. La Pensée et la Langue, p.476.

De Boer<sup>1</sup>, proceeding from the standpoint of Buffin's work (*Remarques sur les moyens d'expression de la durée et du temps*), concludes that Meillet and Foulet, in accepting that the Past Definite and the Past Indefinite are fully equivalent in meaning, may be wrong, that where there is a possible choice between two such forms there is essentially some difference, that in effect, as Buffin had stated earlier, the Past Definite which some were so eager to proclaim dead has by its absence from spoken usage left a regrettable void in the language. He seems prepared to reopen the whole question when he suggests that the real enemy of the Past Definite may be the Imperfect and not the Indefinite form.

MM. Damourette and Pichon<sup>2</sup>, in a chapter remarkable for its examples of the Past Definite's survival in modern speech, propound an equally original and stimulating view:-

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1. Introduction à l'Etude de la Syntaxe du Français, pp. 96-103.

2. Op.cit., p. 381.

...Henri Estienne nous apprend que, de son époque, il était ridicule d'employer le priscal (i.e. the Past Definite) hors de saison, mais qu'on pouvait très facilement employer à peu près toujours l'antérieur (i.e. the Past Indefinite) là où le priscal aurait semblé recevable. et, dans les conversations que nous a transmises le théâtre le priscal est rare.... Dans ces conditions il est permis de se demander si la fréquence du priscal a jamais été beaucoup plus grande qu'elle ne l'est aujourd'hui. La question est d'importance, car si la regression est un mythe, le pronostic de mort prochaine devient injustifié. Il se peut que le priscal ait toujours eu un petit domaine, mais s'y soit toujours maintenu. Comme nos documents sur la conversation courante des siècles passés sont insuffisants, ce que nous disons là est une pure hypothèse. Nous souhaitons pourtant qu'elle empêche les linguistes de parler à la légère de la disparition et de la mort d'un tiroir qui appartient encore pleinement au français d'aujourd'hui.

G. and R. Le Bidois<sup>1</sup> qualify Meillet's statement that in and around Paris on a wide front the Past Definite has passed from current usage by insisting that the tense will always maintain its place in narrative, that true developing narrative will never be able to do without it.

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1. Syntaxe du Français Moderne, Vol.1, p.441.

Support and further clarification is given to this point of view by Ch. Millon:<sup>1</sup>.

Le fait est acquis: le passé simple est le temps du récit. Pour s'en convaincre il n'est que de lire une nouvelle de Jean Variot: "La Peau du Mercenaire", écrite au présent et au passé composé (avec un passé simple pourtant); elle a une allure traînante, aveuillée; le récit manque de nerf parce qu'il manque de nuances et qu'il n'est pas rendu cursif par le passé narratif.

Millon remarks on the scarcity of Past Definites in modern drama, on the flourishing state of the tense in the novel. . He explains the former as reflecting spoken usage and the 'mise à l'index' of the tense by many men of taste and learning.

In relation to the novel mention should be made of the tendency of existentialist authors to discard the older tense in favour of the Past Indefinite. One wonders if this is a purely linguistic phenomenon or if the qualities Millon associates with the Past Indefinite are not precisely those of existentialist man. There are, indeed, fashions in tenses. The vogue of the Imperfect in the Naturalist novel is one of those which have left traces but created no major

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1. Le passé simple chez les romanciers et les dramaturges, Le Français Moderne, IV, 1936, p. 245.

Major upheaval. There is as yet no obvious sign that the Past Definite is in retreat in literary narrative.

Indeed, one of the reasons for grammarians differing as to the probable fate of the Past Definite is to be traced to the natural contradiction that a tense, eclipsed in speech, is still widely used in literature. Some historians seem inclined to forestall, if not to hasten, the continuing evolutive process which may eventually eliminate it. Others, more traditionalist, seem eager to halt, or at least obstruct, that process.

Another factor which must be taken into account is the functional equivalence of the Past Definite and the Past Indefinite. In the realm of actual performance each can express events happening in the past - the same events. The Past Indefinite has the advantage that it can be both written and spoken. Its steady expansion over the centuries may readily convey the impression that it is only a question of time before it drives the Past Definite from literature.

Not the least difficulty of those interested in linguistics is that the subject of their study is also the vehicle of their interpretations.

Thus, Foulet and Meillet credit the new analytical form with a preterite function because early in the history of the language it could duplicate the task of the Past Definite in the realm of dead time. The validity of this assumption is questioned by de Boer:-<sup>1</sup>.

...il me semble permis de se demander si cette vue est exacte. Serait-il vrai que la langue avait fini par "ne plus faire de distinction de sens entre la forme simple (le passé défini) et la forme composée (le passé indéfini)"<sup>2</sup>. J'avoue qu'un étranger, qui a eu tant de peine à apprendre à se servir à peu près correctement du passé défini et du passé indéfini, reste un peu sceptique devant cette assertion! Que le passé indéfini puisse avoir, dans le langage journalier, un sens assez "neutre", n'exprimant au fond que le passé, nous l'admettons... Nous admettons également, au besoin, que même à une époque qui possédait encore trois temps du passé, le passé défini ait pu avoir quelquefois cette valeur "neutre". Mais que le passé indéfini aurait jamais ou aurait jamais eu, le sens d'un prétérit, cela nous semble difficilement admissible.....

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1.Op.cit., p.105.

2.Meillet, op.cit., p.155.

Here the truth of the matter would seem to depend on what one means by "preterite". From a purely mechanical point of view Foulet and Meillet are no doubt correct. The test of an implement of language is its usefulness. If it is useful and convenient it will be more and more widely used until little distinction is made between it and the older tool it replaces. On a purely functional basis one can take the new implement as completely equivalent to the old.

But the essence of any change in language is its complexity:-<sup>1</sup>.

Nous avons établi, au début de cette étude une distinction entre l'expressif et le mécanique. Cette distinction se justifie à condition qu'elle ne nous ferme pas les yeux à l'élément psychologique que recèlent tous les phénomènes linguistiques, même les moins affectifs, et aux entraves qu'imposent à toute innovation affective le système préexistant de la langue. Dans les phénomènes que nous pouvons à juste titre qualifier de mécanique, le dosage psychologique, toujours présent, peut varier.

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1. This passage is to be found, appropriately enough, in an article by J. Orr on the problem of verb endings in French and English, *Le Français Moderne*, 1936, p.128.

One wonders if the element of disagreement which one finds to-day over the nature and future of the Past Definite is not reducible to a difference in the method of approach of grammarians and historian. To the historian it may seem that the Past Indefinite is the complete quantitative equivalent of the Past Definite, whereas the grammarian is interested in proving the qualitative shortcomings.

Be that as it may, it is not the purpose of this study to support one side or another in this mild modern quarrel. Whatever the Past Definite is it is the sum of its origins and its associations. That is our reason for consulting its position to-day.

As regards the function and meaning of the Past Definite in modern French there is a fair measure of agreement. Differences of interpretation lie in the realm of nuance. MM. Damourette and Pichon who make the most imposing claim for the continuance of the Past Definite even

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even in spoken French base that claim not on the chronological value of the tense, but on its psychological distinctiveness.

The following definitions<sup>1</sup> of Past Definite and Indefinite can be taken as representative of modern opinion:-<sup>2</sup>.

- L'antérieur peut être pensé de deux façons:-
- a) Comme passé pur, c'est-à-dire parfaitement distinct, absolument détaché du présent, et sans rapport d'aucune sorte avec le présent. Il n'est pas nécessaire, pour qu'on le pense de cette façon, qu'il soit lointain; il suffit qu'une division nette de la durée, qu'une indication temporelle précise marque bien la séparation par rapport au présent. Si je parle d'une action faite hier, ou l'an passé, ou il y a trois siècles, la distance de ces époques par rapport à aujourd'hui est certes fort différente; mais cela n'importe pas; ces trois époques, pour plus ou moins lointaines qu'elles soient, ont ce trait commun d'être nettement et absolument séparées du moment actuel, du moment où je parle. Elles sont, en somme, du passé pur.
- b) Mais l'antérieur peut aussi s'envisager comme faisant partie d'une durée, qui, à l'heure actuelle, n'est pas entièrement finie d'écouler, donc comme poursuivant son cours actuellement, (par exemple

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1.G.&R. LeBidois, op.cit., pp. 439 - 440

2.c.f. G. Gougenheim, *Système Grammatical de la Langue Française*, pp.208-210; Ch. Bally, *Linguistique Générale et Linguistique Française*, pp.352, 353; G. Guillaume, *Temps et Verbe*, pp.68-70; C. de Boer, *Syntaxe du Français Moderne*, pp.200, 201; F. Brunot, op.cit., pp. 475, 476; J. Damourette & E. Pichon, op.cit., p. 363.

(par exemple la semaine, le mois, l'année, le siècle qui sont sur le point d'être du passé pur, mais qui pourtant n'en sont pas encore). Il s'agit là d'un aspect particulier du temps, d'une durée en continuation qui à une portion plus ou moins prolongée d'antérieur en joint une autre, fort appréciable encore, de présent; donc passé très extensif et très complexe, qui comprend aussi du présent, ou qui du moins, aboutissant à l'actuel, s'engage et retentit dans le présent.

There ~~are~~ refinements of this analysis. The Past Definite is credited with serving an objective intention, the Past Indefinite a subjective. A Past Definite records an event seen in the light of events preceding it; the Past Indefinite, on the other hand, sees the event in the light of events succeeding it or yet to come. Perhaps the simplest distinction to make is that, whereas the Past Indefinite carries over into the present with emphasis on a state of things, the Past Definite records an action 'à perspective zero'.<sup>1</sup>

Modern usage, as regards the two tenses, is usually explained in terms of that of the classical period. It is generally agreed that to-day the

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1.G. Guillaume, op.cit., p.67.

the distinction between the two tenses is no longer so clear, nor so well maintained. We are, it is evident, still in the presence of a process of change, whose earliest beginnings must be examined.

The Voice suffered a complete revolution. The active form, which was the only one retained, was of a completely new type which was, of course, more expressive. In particular, a new auxiliary 'have' was pressed into service.

The type 'I have done' has its origin in the perfect participle which denoted a state of completion. The perfect participle has this function to that of denoting a state of completion. The perfect participle is equivalent to the perfect participle of the perfect participle. By this change, the perfect participle has the meaning of the perfect participle. The perfect participle has the meaning of the perfect participle. The perfect participle has the meaning of the perfect participle.

11.

### Origin and Emergence of the Past Indefinite in French

Vulgar Latin operated profound changes in verb content and form. New values were acquired by tense and mood, periphrastic forms arose. The Passive Voice suffered a complete revolution. Archaic forms, forms little in use were replaced by others of a composite nature which were, no doubt, more expressive. In particular, a new auxiliary 'habere' was pressed into service.

The type 'j'ai parlé' has its origin in the Latin construction Haben + Past Participle which in essence denoted a state of completion. The passage from this function to that of denoting a past action is equivalent to the perishing of a metaphor through repeated use. By this change, caused undoubtedly by the weakening of the perfect connotation in the Classical Latin Perfect tense which combined a preterite with a present perfect

perfect function (c.f. 'Troia fuit'), a new tense emerged in Old French and assumed eventually part of the function of the Past Definite. This tense, for convenience, we call the Past Indefinite.<sup>1</sup>

From originally expressing an idea of possession the Past Indefinite moved towards expressing a completed action bearing some relation to the present, no doubt aided by a change in word order which brought the past participle closer to the auxiliary.

Such changes in form and content of past tenses are by no means confined to Vulgar Latin. Throughout the whole Italo-Celto-Germanic group there is a tendency to distinguish tense more clearly at the expense of aspect. The great Indo-European division -- infectum and perfectum --, still obtaining in modern Russian, did not come unscathed through Classical Latin and disappeared

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1.C.f. on these general points: A.O.Ewart: The French Language, pp.252 - 253.

disappeared almost completely in the West.<sup>1.</sup>

The obsolescence of the Past Definite which is already implicit in the creation and spread of the Past Indefinite would seem to be only the first stage in a vast cyclical development affecting all Indo-European languages. In this cycle there is a tendency for the perfect to weaken as it replaces the preterite, this weakening necessitating the creation of a new perfect:-<sup>2.</sup>

Le cycle est désormais parcouru, et, pour se donner un parfait, le français devra recourir à quelque tour nouveau, dont on n'entrevoit pas encore la naissance.

Foulet has suggested that there are dialectal indications that the Parfait Surcomposé may fill the role to be vacated by the Past Indefinite.<sup>3.</sup>

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1.A.Dauzat: Histoire de la Langue Française, pp.298 - 299.

2.A.Meillet: op.cit., p.143.

3.'Le développement des formes surcomposées', Romania 11, pp. 203 - 252.

Indo-European issues<sup>1</sup>. apart, the replacement of the Past Definite by the Past Indefinite is a striking symptom of the analytical tendency in French morphology.<sup>2</sup>.

This tendency, as it affects the past tenses in question, is most graphically expressed by Gilliéron:<sup>3</sup>.

La disparition -- actuellement consommée dans le langage usuel -- du parfait défini, des temps de l'indicatif et du subjonctif qu'il composait et qu'il dérivait, est une véritable révolution dans le langage.

Avec elle commence une nouvelle ère, c'est un acèminement vers l'état du verbe où il n'y aura plus comme voiles que des auxiliaires faisant manoeuvrer une coque qui porte l'idée....

As regards this 'revolution' in language Meillet agrees, placing it in its proper perspective.

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1. A further account of these and an excellent bibliography are to be found in I. Jordan - J. Orr, An Introduction to Romance Linguistics, p.307 and its footnote.
  2. See F. Brunot: op.cit., p.477 where he gives as a simple general reason for the replacement of the Past Definite by the Past Indefinite the development of the 'esprit d'analyse'.
  3. Op.cit., p.104.

perspective as the beginning of an evolution already completed by the French and adding:-1.

Située dans l'ensemble dont elle fait partie, l'élimination du préterit simple est un moment du grand développement qui entraîne les langues indo-européennes à passer du mot-forme variable au mot fixe une fois pour toutes.....

It is helpful to accept Meillet's perception of two 'moments' in the disappearance of the Past Definite from current usage. These are:-

- 1) The creation of a composite form of the preterite.
- 2) The generalisation of this form at the expense of the simple preterite.

The first of these is general, as he points out, throughout the Indo-European languages, the second affects only some.

The new composite preterite gained ground rapidly because of its simpler analytical form.<sup>2</sup>.

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1.Op.cit., p.158.

2.That there are other factors is, of course, certain. For possible phonetic influences, modifications due to sentence structure see: G. Millardet, *Linguistique et Dialectologie Romanes*, pp.146 - 147.

On the other hand, the formal complexities of the Past Definite, the distinctive changes within conjugations ( -âmes, -âtes, -èrent) and between them ( -ai, -is, -us) demanded too great an effort and led to confusion and error. To add to this, the commonest of verbs, the so-called irregulars (faire, mettre, naître, mourir, vivre, pouvoir, prendre, tenir, savoir, voir, etc.), through their change of radical, presented two different verbal faces while others ( dire, rire, suffire, etc.) had in the Past Definite singular forms identical with those of their present indicative.

Comparison between the modern and Vulgar Latin period is made by Dauzat:-<sup>1</sup>.

La lutte entre prétérit et parfait, en français moderne, reprend dans les mêmes conditions qu'en latin vulgaire. Le parfait composé (j'ai chanté) glisse au sens du prétérit. Mais l'issue du combat est différente; le prétérit traditionnel est éliminé de la langue parlée (Exception made, of the Midi in footnote) pour n'être plus conservé que par la langue littéraire comme passé narratif: encore son emploi se cantonne-t-il de plus en plus à la troisième personne. L'abondance des formes irrégulières qu'offre ce temps a contribué pour

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1.Histoire de la Langue Française, 1930 ed., p.302.

pour beaucoup à sa disparition; bien qu'on l'enseigne toujours dans les grammaires, on ne sait plus le conjuguer, et les écrivains eux-mêmes commettent en l'employant, les plus grossiers barbarismes.....

There seems little reason to resist such opinions since Dauzat is in a position to quote in a footnote to this passage numerous remarkable 'barbarisms' found in modern writers.

But it must not be imagined that the Past Definite yielded easily to the incursions of the Past Indefinite. There was an unsuccessful attempt to strengthen its threatened position by regularising its forms. The West, whose dialects preserved the tense adopted the endings in -is which never took root in the Paris region.<sup>1</sup>.

Later attempts in the Ile-de-France at grafting all verbs on the stock of the first conjugation with endings -ai etc. were not more successful.

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1. Gilliéron, op.cit., p.105.

P. Fouché<sup>1</sup> quotes examples of the first category in Anglo-Norman dialect of the 12th century, remarks on their frequent use in the 13th in this dialect and that of Picardy, in that of Lorraine in the 14th and of their occurrence in the literary language of the 15th -- this latter fact being proof of an increasing tendency. Occasionally, as we know, the literary language of the 16th and 17th centuries registers such forms too, but rather in the manner of Molière, i.e. as a peasant eccentricity:-<sup>2</sup>.

"un petit enfant de douze ans se laissait choir -- il se relevit sur les pieds et s'en fut jouer à la fossette."

Fouché's verdict<sup>3</sup> on this ingenuous attempt at 'normalisation' by the adoption of one set of verb endings is exact and entertaining:-

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1. P. Fouché: Le Verbe français, p. 285.

2. Le Médecin Malgré Lui (1, v.)

3. Ibid.

"Les grammairiens de l'époque les signalent, généralement pour les condamner... Les satiriques n'ont pas d'ailleurs manqué de se moquer de ces formes qu'ils considéraient comme vulgaires et dialectales (c.f. l'épigramme de J. Marot: "Sur quelques mauvaises manières de parler".....

Collin s'en allit au Lendit,  
Où n'achetait ni ne vendit,  
Mais seulement, à ce qu'on dict,  
Derobit une jument noire.  
La raison qu'on ne le penda  
Fut que soudain il responda  
Que jamais autre il n'entenda  
Sinon que de la mener boire.

The narrative

Such an epigram is proof enough that attempts at this type of 'normalisation' had led nowhere and had already stamped themselves as uncouth barbarisms, that the composite form of the preterite was establishing itself as helpmeet and competitor of the older form throughout spoken and written French.

As regards the entry of the Past Indefinite into literature proper Foulet<sup>1</sup> offers the clearest exposition of the stages through which the new tense passed. Setting aside the distinction he makes between prose and verse in

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1. Romania, XLVI, p.282.

in Old French, one finds his general theory convincing. In his opinion the use of the Past Indefinite as a substitute for the older preterite was in Old French something of a vulgarism; but it was a vulgarism which, apart from the simpler mental processes it involved, could add vivacity to a narrative by bringing the events of the narrative nearer to the speaker and his audience, by inducing one to suppose that the action had just taken place and that the narrator was still affected by the emotions it inspired in him.

(In this connection it is worth while considering how the use of the Present in a Historic sense likewise became a literary device, graphic and still valid to-day in most European languages and run-to-death in the American yellowback of the Damon Runyan species!)

Foulet states:-

...c'est précisément dans cette orientation du

du passé vers le présent qu'il faut chercher l'origine de la transformation du parfait en prétérit. 1.

By this means a narrative acquired picturesque relief. As time passed, however, -- in Foulet's opinion--these qualities were lost. The Past Indefinite became simply an alternative rendering of past time.

As early as the 12th century, then, the Past Indefinite which had been correctly employed since its emergence as a perfect is in the process of acquiring a meaning in the spoken language of the time which makes it a competitor and rival of the Past Definite.

It is this phenomenon which undoubtedly conditions the further evolution of Past Definite usage which we must now consider in its earliest shape.

was in the beginning of the modern age.

1. Foulet, *ibid.*, p.274.

### The Past Definite in Old French

It has been noted by many authorities, and is, indeed, obvious that over the centuries that have passed since the dawn of civilisation man's concept of time has altered. This is not the least of the difficulties we encounter in any attempt to project ourselves into the mind of a French author of the 12th century with a view to understanding his use of the different verbal tenses.

The conception of time which lies behind a modern grammarian's interpretation of tenses is one belonging to the modern age:-

A la différence du moment actuel qui, dans la ligne figurant la durée générale, n'est qu'un instant indivisible, un point, le passé et l'avenir sont des segments plus ou moins étendus. Mais tandis que le passé se conserve en nous par la mémoire, c'est

c'est notre imagination seule qui perçoit l'avenir. Aussi y a-t-il beaucoup plus de formes temporelles distinctes pour l'indication du passé que pour celle de l'avenir. Le verbe français ne compte pas moins de cinq temps principaux du passé, pour l'indicatif seulement; imparfait, passé simple, passé composé, passé antérieur, plus-que-parfait; et ces trois derniers temps ont des formes surcomposées, pour rendre certaines nuances de l'antériorité; cela porte à huit le nombre de nos temps du passé pour le seul mode indicatif, (et encore le futur antérieur, et sa forme surcomposée n'y sont-elles pas compris). On voit si c'est avec raison que l'on a dit du français qu'il peut rendre le passé avec un véritable luxe de nuances.....1.

Such a clear-cut analytical approach to time and tense must be discarded or considerably modified if we wish to assess tense usage in Old French. It is true, as MM. Le Bidois say, that the past represents a vast segment of time. It is obvious that this segment varies quantitatively with different historical periods; but, in a contrast between ancient and modern French it is the qualitative differences which are the most striking. It is doubtful if Old French could describe the past with that wealth of nuance

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1.G.& R. Le Bidois: op.cit., Vol.1, pp. 426, 427.

nuance remarked on by MM. Le Bidois. It is certain that such nuances as did exist were different from the modern.

To crystallise this difference it is worth while to cite the case of the Imperfect tense which, in its straight traditional use, is in modern French a vital ingredient of every past narrative and which from the period of the Naturalist novel onward has increased its scope to the point of whimsicality. In the Chanson de Roland it occurs some forty-odd times or, roughly, once only in every hundred lines.

A plain fact such as this must give us pause. For our guidance there can be no better signpost than the words of MM. Brunot and Bruneau:-<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>.Op.cit., Ed. 49, pp. 373, 374.

La notion de temps abstrait, telle qu'elle est symbolisée par la pendule, pour les secondes, les minutes, les heures; par le calendrier pour les jours, les mois; par la chronologie pour les siècles, les millénaires, les périodes géologiques, est une notion récente dans l'histoire de la civilisation. Au fur et à mesure que l'on remonte le cours des âges, les temps expriment d'autres idées que celles du temps, et l'idée même de temps devient indistincte, troublée qu'elle est par des émotions et des sentiments.... Dans les textes du moyen âge les temps ont souvent une valeur expressive, descriptive: ils servent plutôt à montrer, par exemple, le degré d'achèvement de l'action à un moment donné, qu'à classer les différentes actions les unes par rapport aux autres dans le passé ou le futur.

It is this apparent failure to classify events in an exact time-relationship which has led to the mystification surrounding Old French verb usage. Foulet, remarking on the peculiar mixture of tense possible in Old French narrative gives this excellent example:-<sup>1</sup>.

Dedenz une garderobe entre  
ou une pucelete estoit  
Qui aus piez du lit se gisoit,  
mes ele ne la pot veoir,  
El lit s'est lessie cheoir  
là chastelaine mout dolente;  
Iluec se plaint et se demente;  
et dist: "Ha! sire Dieus, merci!"

(La Chastelaine de Vergi, 726 - 733)

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1. Petite Syntaxe de l'ancien français, p.220.

He suggests that the determining factor in the choice of tenses here is the desire for variety, that the change of tense is sometimes a literary device. With this opinion MM. Damourette and Pichon are inclined to agree,<sup>1</sup> adding in justification that when one passes from literary narrative to the narration of history matters are entirely different -- i.e. time sequence is more carefully observed.

These general principles are, however, not our main concern. We have simply endeavoured to indicate the difficulties surrounding the whole question of tense in Old French before passing under review the rules governing the use of the Past Definite and Past Indefinite during that phase of the language.

The striking fact in the use of the Past Definite in Old French is its domination of the other past tenses and in particular of

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1.Op. cit., Vol.5, p.369.

of the Imperfect. We have already mentioned the scarcity of Imperfects in the Chanson de Roland which is a direct result of the omnivalence of the Past Definite:-<sup>1</sup>.

Il eut les yeux brillants et le visage tout à fait fier; il eut le corps gent, et les flancs, il les eut larges; il fut tellement beau que tous ses pairs le regardent pour cela avec admiration.

This description of Ganelon is quoted by MM. Brunot and Bruneau<sup>2</sup> along with another interesting example from the same source:-

Le roi Marsile en fut très effrayé; il tint un javelin empenné d'or.

Such examples are so numerous as to make detailed reference to them superfluous. 'Son nom fut' which occurs in Lafontaine is a vestigial remnant of this particular usage.

MM. Brunot and Bruneau suggest that the use of fut in Old French is more dependent on

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1.v.283 - 285.

2.op. cit., p.376.

the essential difference of approach between ancient and modern French in a passage such as that describing Ganelon proceeds from the fact that the former presents a series of actions conceived as belonging to the same plane whereas the latter would emphasise the principal action:-

Le roi Marsile fut très effrayé  
and group the others round it in the relative Imperfect tense.

Ewart accounts for such phenomena in more general terms:-<sup>1</sup>.

This development is part of a wider change in outlook; the modern tendency to envisage the past as a scene or picture, whereas to the medieval mind it appeared above all as action.

MM. Damourette and Pichon are of the opinion that the distribution of Imperfects and Past Definites in Old French is more dependent on psychological factors than on 'brutal' grammar.

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1.Op. cit., p.254.

grammar. They quote Meyer-Lübke (Grammaire des langues romanes, p.113) in support:-1.

Il faut voir ici un phénomène stylistique plutôt que grammatical. L'ancienne littérature française qui s'efforce plus de raconter des faits que de décrire des objets, offre aussi, sous la forme grammaticale d'un fait passager, des choses qui exigent proprement la forme indiquant l'état durable....

They disagree categorically, however, with his further dictum -- and this is of the greatest importance to our study -- on the respective values of the Past Indefinite and the Past Definite:-

A travers toutes les périodes de son histoire, le français maintient entre chantai et ai chanté une entière équivalence d'emploi et de sens.

They quote the opinion of MM. Brunot and Bruneau (Précis de Gram., 1933 ed., p.500) that in Old French the opposition between the two tenses is very clear, the new composite tense presenting at that time a nuance now rare, that

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1.Op. cit., p. 368.

that of the action 'qui est présentement accomplie'.

Turning to their source we find the useful quotation:-1.

(Naime dit au roi): Vous l'avez bien entendu:  
Voilà ce que le comte Ganelon vous a répondu

(Chanson de Roland, v.232-233)

MM. Brunot and Bruneau explain that here 'vous l'avez entendu' would mean, according to their definition 'vous le savez maintenant'.

MM. Damourette and Pichon conclude that here a more direct feeling for the language than that possessed by Meyer-Lübke is necessary to appreciate the nuance of difference.

Foulet, our main authority, noted that in the prose of Aucassin and Nicolette the Past Indefinite is used, but only with a perfect meaning, i.e. as a past which is prolonged into the present, and states unequivocally:-2.

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1.Op.cit.,p.379.

2.L.Foulet: Romania, XLVI, pp. 272, 273.

quand il s'agit de situer un fait dans le passé, en dehors de toute attache avec la réalité actuelle, le prétérit seul intervient, ou le présent.

This usage he found general in the chansons de geste, romans courtois etc., which seems entirely probable to us if we keep in mind that these two tenses are so different in origin and at the time of the creation of the new tense so different in meaning and function that one could scarcely expect their complete equivalence -- if, indeed, there was ever complete equivalence between them -- to establish itself so swiftly.

So much ink has been spilled on the subject of whether the composite form was, has been or can be a true preterite that we hesitate to re-open such a question. Meillet refers to the newer form quite bluntly as a preterite, even at its earliest appearance:-<sup>1</sup>.

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1. AOp. cit. l. p. 154. cit., p. 154.

Presque partout on voit se créer une forme composée du préterit, qui existe d'abord concurremment avec le préterit simple, et qui exprime le résultat acquis par une action donnée qui ainsi tient la place de l'ancien parfait.....

But it would seem here that his use of 'preterite' is loose and already undermined by the definition accompanying it. This becomes clear when he goes on to say:-

Les deux types de préterit, le type simple et le type à participe et auxiliaire peuvent se maintenir indéfiniment côte à côte avec leur différence de sens initiale. Mais.....

And there we have the difficulty: the initial difference in meaning which is admitted. All that we intend to say is that this initial difference in meaning between the Past Indefinite and the Past Definite -- if Foulet is to be believed, and there are convincing grounds for our credence -- still had its effect in Old French. In other words, the Perfect which in daily speech may have begun to oust the Past Definite, could not yet replace it in dignified prose narrative.

Without wishing to obscure the issue it might be well for us to pause here and consider briefly the interesting theories of Lerch.<sup>1</sup>

Lerch's work is a further development of that of Etienne Lorck<sup>2</sup>. and is concerned mainly with the Imperfect tense. Lerch supports Lorck (as against Vising and Delbrück) in maintaining that the different uses of the Imperfect can be traced back to an original unified and fundamental meaning which was not that of duration. The important point in Lerch's theories, as far as we are concerned, is his assertion, with good reason, that a study of Old French usage is essential to the understanding of modern French and his insistence on what is common to both; his numerous illustrations of how the Naturalists' treatment of the Imperfect is no new phenomenon in

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1. Eugen Lerch: Hauptprobleme der französischen Sprache, Hamburg, 1930.

2. Etienne Lorck: "Passé Défini, Imparfait, Passé Indéfini", Heidelberg, 1914. (also Romania, VI, 43ff)

in the language and in no way a fundamental deviation from basic usage, the germ of its future development having been always present in the older language, are worthy of serious examination.

In the same way we must accept that the modern uses of the Past Indefinite, its replacing of the Past Definite in conversation, had somewhere their root in Old French. The connection between modern and Old French usage is perhaps best seized by accepting (as many others have) that the past may be envisaged in two clearly distinct fashions: objectively and subjectively. Felt subjectively -- that is, as part of one's own past, overflowing into one's own present -- past action and being is expressed by the Past Indefinite. Felt objectively -- let us say, seen through the eye of the remote observer -- past action and being of an equivalent nature is expressed by the Past Definite.

Lerch has much greater refinements of this plain distinction to offer and even a general reason for the eventual shrinking of Past

Definite usage:-

Der naive Mensch mit seinem robusten Seinsgefühl ist eben wenig geneigt, sich objectiv in die Vergangenheit hineinzusetzen; er gebraucht das Passé Composé selbst da, wo er nicht mehr eigene Handlungen, sondern die eines Dritten erzählt; er sagt nicht nur: je l'ai frappé sondern auch... il l'a prise par la taille, was eigentlich zu deuten ist als;... und schon hatte er sie genommen (als genommene), wobei also, wie in der volkstümlichen Erzählung so oft, das Präsens (il a) an Stelle des eigentlich erforderlichen il avait gesetzt wird.....

S/

He illustrates from the Chanson de Roland (v.499):-

Quant l'oït Guenes, l'espée en ad branlie,  
which he interprets as = "da hatte er schon das Schwert als geschleudertes", observing that the same connotation persists in the pluperfect, among his examples being:-

Marie de France, Geissblatt-Lai (Bartsch Wiese 50,113):  
... pur les paroles remembrer, Tristram, qui bien savait harper, en avait fet un nuvel lai....

which again = "und bald hatte T. einen neuen Lai gedichtet" (= dichtete).

This usage he attributes to the popular tendency to communicate, not the action as it arises and develops (i.e. objectively), but rather the situation ensuing (i.e. subjectively).<sup>1.</sup>

Now, putting aside the terms subjective and objective which may be abused, it seems that here we have an essential analysis of the connotation of the Past Indefinite in Old French. In brief, it still contains the element of possession implicit in the original 'habere' and is concerned with the situation arising from the action.

It is interesting to note that the first element will progressively perish and in so doing will facilitate the penetration of Past Definite

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1.Op.cit., Vol. 1, p.141.

Definite terrain. The second if we are to believe Bally<sup>1</sup>, persists to-day:-

Cette victoire (of the Past Indefinite over the Past Definite) a renforcé la tendance statique du français. Un récit en langue parlée; "Je me suis levé à cinq heures, j'ai pris le train....." présente les événements comme une série de faits accomplis.....

While not accepting in full the intriguing theories of Lerch -- his illustrations from Old French are, nevertheless, intensely interesting and convincing -- we cannot help feeling that such a synthesis (he is careful in his conclusion<sup>2</sup> to qualify it as a few steps taken in an almost untouched terrain!) is of infinite value. No evolution of language is completely without coherent links and stages and the final product is qualified and clarified by them. More specifically; in the present study we shall see the Past Definite and the Past Indefinite tenses

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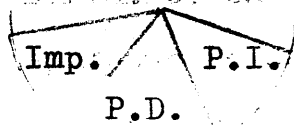
1.Ch. Bally: Op.cit., p.353, footnote. (Ling. G. et Ling. Fr.)

2.Lerch, ibid. pp.232 - 4.

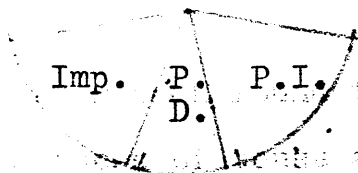
Tenses of the Classical period of drama nourished by roots that strike far back into the earlier centuries.

There is one factor that might be emphasised in the usage of Old French. We find it nowhere clearly mentioned. It is this: that in the beginning of a language and a literature much usage may be vestigial (the perishing umbilical cord, the rudimentary tail, reminiscent of parent and ancestry); much is certainly as experimental as a child's first steps. There is a naïveté, not to say, a joy in the tense usage of Old French, an imitation of parent, an experimenting on its own account. Out of this usage the maturer language will grow, discarding and inventing... after the manner of any evolutionary process which proceeds towards a more civilised plane, i.e. according to the laws of natural selection and the survival of the fittest. Much may be modified in the process but little that is fundamental changed.

It is in this light that we conceive the varying attitudes to time and tense at varying epochs in French. It would appear that in the Old French period the same pendulum swings on the clock-face of the past as at the present day. If we visualise the past as an arc with three divisions.. (there are, of course, many more!) as follows:-



then modern usage might appear thus:-



and Old French usage thus:-



The various verbal means of expressing the past depend on the movement of the line of demarcation between tenses and, what concerns us in particular, is that movement as it affects the Past Definite and Indefinite.

It would appear that in Old French the new composite perfect had not yet sufficiently outgrown the associated meanings of its parts and was probably accomplice in a vulgarism when it replaced the older form. It was, in other words, certainly not a preterite in the true sense of the word.

The Past Definite, on the other hand, was almost a multi-purpose tense, combining a preterite and perfect function with descriptive incursions into the realm we now associate with the Imperfect.

Against this background the modern preoccupation with exactness of tense and tense sequence appears unusual:-<sup>1</sup>.

C'est par un souci artistique qu'en français moderne on conserve dans une même phrase, le même temps, et que l'on ménage les transitions entre les différents temps.....

C'est dans l'emploi du passé simple que l'usage de l'ancien français s'éloigne le plus du

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1. Brunot and Bruneau: Op.cit., 1933 ed., pp. 499, 500.

du français moderne.

En français moderne, le passé simple est un substitut littéraire du passé composé. L'enfant, le journaliste, qui disent "j'ai fait", écrivent "je fis", qui a le même sens, mais qui leur paraît plus distingué (précisément parce qu'il ne se dit plus). En ancien français, le passé simple est vivant dans la langue parlée comme dans la langue écrite. Il a exactement la valeur de notre passé composé actuel: il exprime qu'un fait s'est produit à un moment quelconque du passé. L'opposition est très nette entre le passé simple et le passé composé, qui présente alors une nuance rare aujourd'hui, celle que l'action est présentement accomplie.

While it is possible to disagree with the assumption that there is complete equivalence between the tenses in modern French and the reason offered for still using the Past Definite for the written word, we see here a picture of the task to be done; to show how the gap between the Past Definite and Past Indefinite gradually closed, how, in other words, the line of demarcation between them became dim to the point of obliteration until the Classical period, instinctively hostile to hazy outlines in the realm of meaning, created a new line of demarcation.

It is impossible, however, to leave the field of Old French without a glance backward. Against the background of modern usage the vitality of the Past Definite in the older language stands out impressively. Within that language, and for several centuries, in spite of the increasing pressure of the younger analytical form, it dominated all other tenses of the past and entrenched itself so thoroughly in various genres that even to-day when it has passed from the lips of the people its past refuses to let it die.

IV.

The Advent of the Grammarian.

With the advent of the grammarian in the 16th and 17th centuries the historian of language is able to call convincing witnesses in support of his theories. The result is that most authorities find themselves in general agreement on the problem of past tense usage which is our immediate concern.

Foulet, our frequently quoted authority, has given a convincing account of the gradual process of change which took place during the Middle Ages. As regards the Past Indefinite, he credits it with the acquiral of a full preterite function -- while still retaining its perfect connotation -- by the middle of the XVIth century.

As regards the Past Definite at the same period the change is more striking. Though still alive

alive in literature and conversation it has lost ground. Its invasion of what is to-day the accepted realm of the Imperfect -- past description and atmosphere -- has ceased, sentences such as: 'le château fut sur un rocher', already rare in the 15th century, disappearing almost completely by the 16th.

On the other hand it would appear throughout the Middle Ages that the Past Definite not only expressed happenings in the remote past, but also actions past, but recent and connected with the present: a usage, as Foulet remarks, inherited from Latin.

This latter function: the description of actions in the recent past and still connected with the present disappears suddenly in the 16th century. For proof of this phenomenon, which in our opinion cannot be overestimated, Foulet and every other authority on the subject has recourse to the famous passage in Henri Estienne:<sup>1.</sup>

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1. Conformité du langage français avec le grec,  
p.107. (1565, ed. Fougère)

Quand nous disons, J'ai parlé à luy, et lui ai faict response, cela s'entend avoir esté faict ce jour-là; mais quand on dit, Je parlay à luy, et lui fei response, ceci ne s'entend avoir été fait ce jour même auquel on raconte ceci, mais auparavant, sans toutefois qu'on puisse juger combien de temps est passé depuis. Car soit que j'aye faict cette response le jour de devant seulement soit qu'il y ait ja cinquante ans passez, ou plus, je diray, Je luy fei response, ou, Alors ou Adonc je fei response.

In actual illustration of this rule Estienne is categorical, pointing out how ridiculous it is for the foreigner to say 'il me vint veoir aujourd'huy'; but on the general plane he finds it difficult to draw clear distinctions between the two tenses, admitting that there is 'un secret caché sous cet aoriste, quant à son nayf usage' which he had not yet been able to penetrate.

One major distinction is, however, clear to Estienne: the Past Definite is the tense used for remote time, the Past Indefinite overlaps into the present. It is noteworthy also -- as Damourette and Pichon emphasise<sup>1</sup>.-- that Estienne does not

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1.Op.cit., Vol.5, p.374.

not criticise replacement of the Past Definite by the Past Indefinite. It is probable that it was with regard to the wide scope of the latter that he found exact definition difficult. He was able, however, to say that the Past Definite is usually accompanied by a temporal complement while the Past Indefinite can do without.

The findings of Estienne can be summarised as showing clearly the first two stages in the perishing of Past Definite usage. They are:-

- 1) The ejection of the Past Definite from the realm of the Perfect.
- 2) The creation of a neutral zone between the two tenses.

The ejection of the Past Definite was not, however, complete since the neutral zone was the recent past outwith a twenty-four hour limit. Actions belonging to 'yesterday' as opposed to 'to-day' could be expressed by the Past Definite. If accompanied by the specific adverb 'hier' or some equivalent which set the action categorically

categorically outside the time-limit of to-day the use of the Past Definite was compulsory. Artificial though this last rule may appear, it is still applied in certain southern patois in which the use of the Past Indefinite is confined to past action related on the day it happened.

The essential point to seize, however, would seem to be that the pressure of the Past Indefinite drove the Past Definite away from the zone of the present, destroying its Perfect connotation and reinforcing its remoteness from the present. It was no longer possible to say! -

Et si ne bu huis matin Ne mengay c'une soupe en vin<sup>1</sup>.

More important still, the scope of the Perfect has widened to embrace the whole past seen from a subjective angle; the Perfect, where

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1. *Miracles* de Notre Dame, quoted by Foulet, Romania XLVI, p.292.

where no specific adverb or limiting phrase accompanies it can be used instead of the Past Definite.

The 'règle des vingt-quatre heures', first stated by Estienne, is of interest as revealing a terrain in which the Past Definite still flourished to such an extent that a rule had to be found to explain this phenomenon. Dauzat has pointed out that the term is incorrect 'car la coupure est formée par la nuit qui précède la journée présente, et non par un délai horaire'.<sup>1</sup> The rule has also been referred to as the 'grammatical pendant',<sup>2</sup> of the twenty-four hour rule which dominated the classical theatre -- a fact which emphasises the usefulness of examining the occurrence of the Past Definite in drama. Its formulation by Estienne is, no doubt, an endeavour to group and explain a number of

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1. Etudes, p.64.

2. G. and R. Le Bidois, op. cit., p.440, footnote.

of constantly recurring Anwendungstypen rather than to clarify the fundamental connotation of the Past Definite. Nevertheless, the Academy, when it expressed itself in the Sentiments sur le Cid, condemned the use of the Past Definite 'quand je lui fis l'affront' because 'il ne s'était point passé de nuit entre deux'.

But the rule has the appearance of stating the terms of an uneasy truce between the two tenses in question. It is a truce which cannot last. For if Estienne disapproves of foreigners saying 'Il me vint veoir aujourd'hui. Car ce jourd'hui qu'ils adjoustent porte leur condamnation.' we find Voltaire in his *Sophonisbe* writing:-

.....ce billet tout sanglant  
Qui peut-être aujourd'hui fut écrit pour vous-même.  
(11, iii.)

In other words, by the middle of the 18th century the basic sense of the rule has become obliterated, however much grammarians may insist on it.

For help in understanding the difference between

between the Past Definite and the Past Indefinite during the classical period we must turn with most recognised authorities to the grammarian Maupas on whom MM. Le Bidois enlarge and comment:-<sup>1</sup>.

Voici comment un bon grammairien du début de cette époque, Maupas, formule la nouvelle doctrine (en 1607): "Le passé simple infère toujours un temps pièce passé et si bien accompli qu'il n'en reste rien en flux". Un temps pièce passe, c'est un temps passé depuis une bonne pièce de temps. A cause de cette distance temporelle, le passé simple "requiert une préfixion et prénotation de temps", autrement dit l'indication précise d'une date. Et à cause de la valeur propre de ce temps, "il sert dans les récits d'histoire". Tout cela est fort bien vu.

Le passé composé n'est pas moins bien compris par notre grammairien: il "vient en usage, lorsque nous signifions bien une chose passée, mais non si éloignée, que nous ne nommons point le temps quand elle est passée, et bien, si nous ne le nommons, ce temps reste encore en flux, il en reste encore quelque chose à passer: Le Roi a obtenu victoire de ses ennemis, puis leur a pardonné. Ou encore: De notre siècle sont advenues choses memorables, (ce siècle qui n'a pas achevé de s'écouler). (Histoire de la Langue Française, I, III, p.582)

One cannot but admire the clarity of Maupas' definition, undertaken at a difficult time since these two tenses were still something of a mystery to Henri Estienne so shortly before.

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1.Op. cit., p.440

One feature of the definition requires emphasis: Maupas assumes naturally and correctly that a 'temps pièce passée' implies a 'distance temporelle' from the present. That is true, but the fact remains that the basic connotation of the tense in the Classical period may be obscured if we do not insist on the essential irreducible quality of the Past Definite at that time and since, which is that the actual point in time is not the only determining factor in a choice between Past Definite and Indefinite. What also dictates -- in the classical period -- the use of the Past Definite is the fact that it connotes an action having no direct overflow into the Present. Since the 17th century Past Definite usage has changed; the tense, as we know has been eliminated from speech; it has been driven further into the remote past by the complete reduction of its role as a recent past qualified by a time adverb. But basically, one fundamental element of the meaning has not altered. We have mentioned it already. It is now, as then, a past tense 'a perspective zero'.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See footnote p. 47.

Maupas' broad interpretation according to which 'tel événement vieux d'une heure, pouvait être au passé simple, si l'on estimait qu'il n'avait plus aucun lien avec le présent',<sup>1</sup> is obviously correct. Unfortunately, in practice, it presents the writer, but, above all, the speaker, with difficulties. Let us illustrate:-

By the 17th century the reigning tense for action past, but happening on the day of its relation, was already the Perfect. The facility of its analytical form represented an economy of effort in comparison with former usage. Its use represented one mental process which placed the action in the past and automatically connected it with the present. But -- supposing our citizen of 17th century Paris is speaking of a good friend who has died that day saying 'he was my friend'; he must say, according to our fundamental rule, 'il fut mon ami'. This statement would involve more than one mental process. Habit, dictating 'a été', would have to be resisted, perhaps; at

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1. Brunot and Bruneau, op. cit., 1933 ed., p.501.

at the least, a choice between 'a été' and 'fut' would have to be made first, since the true spontaneity of the spoken Past Definite had been lost in connection with events occurring on the day of telling. Let us suppose further that the friend had not died but that the two had quarrelled irreconcilably. The choice of 'il fut' would represent a conscious rejection of 'a été', a desire to convey to the listener that the speaker had made a decision on the value of his friend's friendship. Stephen Ullmann has referred to such uses of the Past Definite as 'pregnant'. It is an admirable word, since it implies at least gestation.

This gestation, or rather, this complicated -- perhaps finely intuitive -- mental effort is beyond the capability of the average mortal. If we offer a few examples of it, this fact will be at once obvious:<sup>1</sup>.

Ne vous suffit-il pas que je l'ai condamné...  
Que je le hais; enfin, Seigneur, que je l'aimai.

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1. Andromaque, IV, 111.

MM. Damourette and Pichon interpret this much discussed quotation accurately, in our opinion:-<sup>1</sup>.

Hermione marque ici que la condamnation qu'elle a portée contre Pyrrhus doit avoir des effets actuels, tandis qu'elle entend rejeter dans le passé périme l'amour qu'elle a eu pour lui.

There is actually more than that, if we care to seek it. Hermione also conveys to Oreste that her love for Pyrrhus is dead and therefore the way open to him. Again, while admitting her love for Pyrrhus openly for the sake of convincing Oreste that he must kill Pyrrhus, she compensates him for the pain her confession must cause him.

We are indebted to these two authors likewise for a quotation from Baudelaire which they give in further illustration:-<sup>2</sup>.

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1.Damourette and Pichon: Op. cit.,p.378.

2.Ibid., p.343.

Dans les plis sinueux des vieilles capitales;  
Où tout, même l'horreur, tourne aux enchantements,  
Je guette, obéissant à mes humeurs fatales,  
Des êtres singuliers, décrépits et charmants.  
Ces monstres disloqués furent jadis des femmes.....

Our authors illuminate the use of 'furent'  
thus:-

Baudelaire aurait à son gré indiqué la liaison  
entre des femmes et ces êtres décrépits. Par  
"furent" il noie dans un inaccessible passe, la  
fémininité de ces malheureuses.

One thinks also of the phrase in Sertorius:-  
Le grand Sertorius fut son parfait ami.

(V,iv.)

Sertorius has dominated the play. He is  
murdered. Shortly afterwards these words drive  
home the full import of his death, there being  
no time lapse that justifies the usage, for  
Sertorius dies on the same day as the announce-  
ment is made, in fact, an hour or two before  
that announcement.

If it has been found necessary to linger  
over such examples the reason is that, having  
had recourse to the grammarians Estienne and  
Maupas, we still find in the Past Definite some  
dubious, not to say, mystical value which  
requires clarification.

Estienne, avowing himself not fully cognisant of the facts connected with the use of the Past Definite, speaks of a 'secret hidden' behind the tense. Maupas, while pointing out that 'un temps pièce passé' infers a temporal distance from the present, is careful to say 'infers' and to admit that in pure logic this need not be so.

Stephen Ullmann, in an admirable analysis of the whole question of the arbitrary twenty-four hour rule, mentions the fact that Oudin, a disciple of Maupas, reverted to the more orthodox interpretation of it: 'J'ai vu aujourd'hui -- hier je vis Monsieur.'<sup>1</sup>

One must deduce that in daily usage, as time wore on, the 17th century grammarian

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1. Article of Origin, p. 38.

grammarian observed a tendency to conform with,  
or give justification to, the more rigid formula.

In plain terms, however, the mystical or  
secret element in Past Definite usage appears simply  
to be this, that driven from proximity with the  
present by a new tense which could duplicate its  
function the Past Definite between the 14th and 17th  
centuries retained or developed qualities of aspect.

The hesitancy and mystification of grammar-  
ians was entirely natural since this trend was  
contrary to the whole development of the French  
verb and since they were thinking in terms of  
pure time.

It is natural to assume that the persistence,  
side by side, in daily spoken usage of these two  
tenses led to such an attempt at differentiation.  
It may even be that this early differentiation  
granted the Past Definite a breathing space and

and ensured its survival in the literary medium to-day.

It is not, however, our business to settle such a question, but to seek the guidance available to us in our examination of the text of classical drama. If, in this relation the witness of the grammarians is invaluable, it is not entirely conclusive.

It is not, however, our business to settle such a question, but to seek the guidance available to us in our examination of the text of classical drama. If, in this relation the witness of the grammarians is invaluable, it is not entirely conclusive.

From an examination of the role of the ... in ... in ... in ... in its

V.

Basic Implications

It may be objected that more should be said on the actual process of change which affected the Past Definite between the 12th and 15th centuries. We have preferred to emphasise the point of departure in that change and the moment of crystallisation since it is not our aim to write the history of the Past Definite, but to prepare a basis on which the usage of classical drama will be more easily understood.

From an examination of the role of the Past Definite in preceding centuries an important point emerges:- the tense in its

its origins was one of enormous scope and vitality. It combined preterite, perfect and imperfect functions. This very fact determined, no doubt, that in the long run, used by a developing civilisation and culture, it was bound to cede some of its territory to other forms. At the same time it was bound to build up -- particularly in literature -- a number of associations which added to its authority and eventually revealed its most proper function in the language.

Of all these the association of the Past Definite with recorded history has been the most persistent.

While Foulet<sup>1</sup> is able to quote examples of the Past Indefinite in Froissart they have, on his admission, the appearance of exceptions as

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1. Romania, XLVI, p. 276.

as compared with the usage of Villehardouin and Joinville:-

Villehardouin, capitaine et homme d'État, qui veut faire connaître à ses contemporains le rôle qu'il a joué dans les grands événements de son temps, écrit une langue grave d'où toute recherche est bannie, sauf celle de la dignité et de la clarté: il n'emploie donc que le prétérit pour marquer le passé accompli, et parfois quand l'action devient pressante, le présent. De même Joinville, qui écrivant sans doute comme il parlerait dans "la chambre des dames" emploie avec une fine bonhomie la meilleure langue de son temps. Froissart est bien différent de ses deux prédécesseurs; c'est un historien doublé d'un artiste et d'un poète.....

In other words, when the normal language of history is used the Past Definite is to be expected.

Since early history was closely connected with anecdote and legend the correlation of Past Definite usage with the telling of a story, if possible a story possessing sufficient authenticity to go on written record, is inescapable. As Stephen Ullmann has pointed out<sup>1</sup> the incidence of the Past Definite in classical drama is most pronounced when a developed récit occurs.

A feature of Foulet's description of the gradual penetration of the Past Indefinite into

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1. Article of Origin, p. 44.

into literature is his argument that the poet, in more need of effects than the prose writer and more likely to take them where he finds them (for example, in popular daily usage) is in the main responsible.

Whether this be true or not the basic implication that the Past Indefinite is more at home in popular speech, taken with what has been said of the association of the Past Definite with staid and sober historical record, confirms the impression that from the inception of the struggle between the two tenses the older tense exists upon a higher plane of reality and truth.

There is then in the background of the linguistic change which on a mechanical basis supplants the older tense by a newer more convenient one in the present and near-present, a natural differentiation in the association of each. The Past Indefinite is connected with the casual everyday utterances of large numbers of ordinary people. The Past Definite belongs in the mouths of the great, the wise

wise and the discriminating. The distinction is, of course, a loose one and lies outwith the realm of pure time and tense. It means that the emotive value of the two tenses, however much the Past Indefinite may assume of the preterite function of its rival, is different. It is logical to assume that, as the Past Definite withdraws more and more from daily speech, the emotive difference becomes even clearer. The importance of this in relation to the language of tragedy and comedy in the classical period is evident.

The fact that the two tenses are not completely equivalent, that there is some kind of differentiation is borne out by Malherbe's disapproval of mixing them together.<sup>1</sup>

While no explicit reason is anywhere given for avoiding such a mixture the independent existence of the two pasts is made easy, if not

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1. On this and the approval of Vaugelas for the skilful mixture of present and past definite see: M. Oberste & A. Haase: *Syntaxe Française du XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, p. 157.

not assured and encouraged, by the presence of a third party willing and able to act as go-between. This third party is the Historic Present.

The use of the present tense to denote a past action is shown by Foulet to have existed from the earliest times,<sup>1</sup> as also its ability to collaborate with the Past Indefinite and Past Definite and this use is not only colloquial, it would appear, but also literary.

The opposition between Past Definite and Past Indefinite during the 17th century is then real.<sup>2</sup> Had it not been one of the tenses would have perished.

Maintenant la langue française rejette tout ce qui est superflu; elle ne tolère plus les contours sémantiques estompés.<sup>3</sup>

Was there not, indeed, a haziness of outline affecting these two tenses which had somewhat

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1. Romania, XLVI, p. 282: 'le présent au sens d'un passé se retrouve dans tous les styles et tous les genres du moyen âge.'

2. c.f. G. Gougenheim, op. cit., pp. 208, 209:--  
"Il faut ... pour l'apprécier exactement, se reporter à la langue classique où elle était vraiment vivante"

3. W.v. Wartburg, Évolution et Structure de la Langue Française, p. 165, on the 17th century.

somewhat confused Henri Estienne: the Past Indefinite, applicable to recent and remote events, conceding recent action to the Past Definite only when that action had a specific qualifying time-word such as the adverb 'hier'; the Past Definite, used for remote events and, if adequately qualified, for events outwith a twenty-four hour limit -- or, more exactly, for events since which a night had elapsed -- but unable to connote recent events within that limit? Obviously such overlapping in usage is contrary to the fundamental economy of language.

And yet, the rules laid down by Maupas suffer subsequent modification. The further recession of the Past Definite after the classical period, the failure of modern French to maintain, and by maintaining justify, its classical usage -- as regards the twenty-four hour rule, for example -- these facts lead to the inevitable conclusion that in this one realm at least Cartesianism failed of its purpose.

To see the problem of the Past Definite in perspective is to remember this and the divergence of opinion still found among modern grammarians. It is to see three moments in the history of the Past Definite:-

- (1) The early centuries in which it dominated speech and literature.
- (2) The classical period in which it benefited by a temporary truce with its now stronger rival, the Past Indefinite.
- (3) Modern times in which it has passed completely from daily speech although it continues the vital role it assumed early in French literature.

It is to remember that the progressive obsolescence of the tense is affected by mechanical and psychological factors, that this linguistic change by which a new preterite, analytical in form, replaces the older synthetic form -- common in greater or lesser degree throughout the Indo-European group -- is not only external, but internal, not only morphological, but ideal.

And -- fundamentally -- it is to realise that the nature, the stages and the result of that change are not yet fully explained, nor the following contradictions:- that a tense scarcely spoken for three centuries still thrives in literature; that those who find the Past Indefinite equivalent in function and superior in form must continue to witness its stubborn survival; that those who bewail the mutilation that French has suffered through its partial removal must recognise that the spoken language will never revert to it.

We are convinced that there is an explanation and that our best hope of one will be found in an examination of the text of classical drama.

Chapter 111.

The Function and Connotation of the Past Definite in  
French Classical Drama.

- I) Remoteness and Severance from Present Time.  
( Mythological reference -- remoteness in time, severance from ordinary plane of living -- the 'prefixion de temps' -- strict observance of twenty four hour rule -- the tenses in juxtaposition, a time contrast -- 'remote' connotation and paucity of Past Definites in drama -- evidence in expositions -- Past Definite alien to present -- tense-pattern of transition to present time -- tense-pattern in dénouement -- emotive value of Past Definite -- destiny, birth, marriage, death -- the error of Brunot -- diametrical opposition between Past Definite and Present Indicative -- its value in the alexandrine -- the récit de Thérèse -- Past Definites without clear time value -- importance of aspect -- completion and severance a constant element. )
- 11) Le Récit.  
( The Past Definite 'undramatic' -- its connection with background and atmosphere -- the tense of factual information -- its value in narration -- a 'parallel' past -- Récit du Cid: a new analysis -- decisive evidence on connotation of severance to be found in plot-structure. )
- 111) The Pregnant Use.  
( The Past Definite within the twenty four hours -- death-associative Past Definite -- the epic and significant -- Past Indefinite not a complete preterite -- love and hate -- dream and reality -- stylistic possibilities depending on the cleavage between the rival tenses. )
- IV) Humorous Content.  
( Archaism, a source of humour? -- Les Précieuses Ridicules -- Imperfect Subjunctive, a different phenomenon -- humour dependent on context -- Les Plaideurs -- "effet d'évocation d'un milieu" -- possible humorous contexts -- the liar's tense -- humour of tone and atmosphere, not of verbal forms. )

I.

Remoteness and Severance from Present Time.

Perusing the text of classical drama and attempting to seize the particular virtue of the Past Definite, one is impressed by the frequency with which it associates itself with events remote in time or events having no carry-over into the present.

Of all contexts that silhouette these functions most clearly that in which reference is made to the lives of the Gods is the most striking. For in the stories of mythology which deal with long-established, if legendary, fact -- the fatal flight of Icarus, Orpheus and his lute, Paris and the apple -- the two qualities we have perceived in the Past Definite are naturally combined. In mythological reference the event is remote and, belonging to the Olympian plane, has no immediate significance for the present of man.

Speaking of the Gods, however, we must at once make a clear distinction. Where the Gods invade the reality of the play, where it is their blessing or curse that determines its outcome, then the Past Definite is unlikely to connote any action of the Gods immediately relevant to the action on the stage.

Such plays are few, of course, but two of the

the greatest, the Iphigénie and Phèdre of Racine, belong to this category.

To deal only with Phèdre, here is a play whose main character has the Sun as parent, while another, Thésée, invokes the intervention of his tutelary deity, Neptune, with tragic results. The Gods are, then, invisible characters in Phèdre of decisive importance to the present reality of the play.

Hippolyte's words -- and the tense he uses -- demonstrate this at once in the first scene:-

Cet heureux temps n'est plus. Tout a changé de face,  
Depuis que sur ces bords les Dieux ont envoyé  
La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaé.

Similar examples showing that the Gods have descended from Olympus to mould the present reality of mortal men -- all using the Past Indefinite tense -- are frequent<sup>1.</sup> in Phèdre.

If we use the term mythological reference for the sake of convenience from now on it is not in relation to such intervention on the part of the Gods but in relation to mythological events per se, the common events associated with <sup>the</sup>divinities of Olympus, the events that 'every schoolboy knows'.

In Phèdre itself we find a convenient example:-  
1. C.f. lines 64, 123, 360, 680, 816, 967, 1159, 1279, etc.,

J'ai visité l'Elide, et laissant le Ténare,  
Passé jusqu'à la mer qui vit tomber Icare.

In essence such references are essentially irrelevant, poetic grace notes, that the play might well do without, as for example, the following:-

Pareil à cet audacieux  
Dont la témérité fut telle  
Qu'il voulut s'éloigner de la troupe mortelle  
Et voler jusque dans les cieux....

Ixion autrefois n'embrassa qu'une nue,  
Et devint honteux d'insolent;....

(Rotrou, Agésilan de Colchos, I, i.)

Searching systematically through our plays for similar references we find, <sup>hem</sup> naturally enough, rather scarce, but amazingly consistent in their preference for the Past Definite tense.

Rotrou furnishes the following:-

... celui dont la voix  
Anima les rochers et fit danser les bois,  
N'eut rien de comparable aux charmes de la sienne.  
(Cléagénor et Doristée, III, i.)

There is, too, the speech in the prologue of les Sosies which deals with the histories of gods and goddesses and contains ten Past Definites.

Corneille's Médée conjuring up her power with fatal potions borrows the same tone:-

Python eut cette langue, et ~~sa~~ plumage noir  
Est celui qu'une harpie en fuyant laissa choir;

Par ce tison Althée assouvit sa colère,  
Trop pitoyable soeur et trop cruelle mère,  
Ce feu tomba du ciel avecque Phaéton;  
Cet ~~te~~ autre vient des flots du pierreux Phlégéthon;  
Et celui-ci jadis remplit en nos contrées  
Des taureaux de Vulcain les gorges ensouffrées.  
(IV, i.)

The usage is standard in the most casual reference:-

Telle Venus sortit de l'onde,....  
(Corneille, La Toison d'Or, 11, iv.)

Gods and goddesses descending to earth  
observe it faithfully in reminiscence. We think of the  
1.  
prologue of Psyché:-

Ah! que de ces trois mots la rigueur insolents  
Venge bien Junon et Pallas,  
Et console leurs coeurs de la gloire éclatante  
Que la fameuse pomme acquitt à mes appas!

This spiteful remark of Venus calls forth  
the rejoinder:-

Vante, vante, Vénus, les traits de ton visage;  
Au jugement d'un seul tu l'emportas sur nous;

The fundamental importance of this particular  
(and <sup>a</sup>drastically irrelevant) reference to mythology is  
not only that it is an easily identified pointer to the  
meaning of the Past Definite but also that it is the  
only context of past time uninvaded by the Past Indefinite.

Events remote in time, Events on a different  
plane of living are, then, the concern of the Past Definite.  
Remoteness and severance from the present comprise its  
basic connotation.

1. The prologue of this composite work is accredited  
to Molière, See Oeuvres de Corneille, p. 288.

The fact that in such examples as we have just quoted no specific mention of time is necessary justifies this conclusion. The need for a 'préfixion de temps' with the Past Definite occurs above all in the middle past. In our first example the reference to Ixion is particularly intriguing because the two Past Definites prepare, by anticipation, the mention of his name.

This may seem an unimportant point; but since the Past Definite is associated with the specific mention of time, it is a point worth making.

As regards the common time-words which are found in the company of the Past Definite it is difficult to see how the tense itself, from mere association with them, could fail to possess an intrinsic meaning of remoteness from the present.

It is true that Jamais, jadis, autrefois are found with the Past Indefinite, but in our dramatists the majority of examples of their use are with a Past Definite.

In the matter of the twenty-four hour rule there is an interesting phenomenon. It is

is obeyed strictly where a time-word such as hier accompanies the tense. There is only one occasion -- and that in comedy<sup>1</sup> -- where this is not so. This strictness was, of course, to be modified -- the rule, indeed, was to disappear completely -- by the 19th century, when the Past Indefinite ejected its older rival from the recent past. In the classical period it was categorically observed.

MM. Damourette and Pichon, emphasising the psychological difference in modern French between the two tenses, remind us of the dictum of Maupas, quoted by MM. Brunot and Bruneau:-<sup>2</sup>.

Un <sup>m</sup>homme qui dit: en ma jeunesse je fis, veut insinuer par là, "l'antiquité des ans!"

They add the famous lines of Athalie, in illustration:-

Par les traits de Jéhu je vis percer le père,  
Vous avez vu les fils massacrés par la mère.

(1, i.)

The basis of this 'psychological' difference is

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1. Molière, Amphytrion, 11, ii

"qui dit qu'hier mes pas se sont portés ici...."

But even in this example the present dit makes the Perfect possible since it maintains the sequence of tenses.

2. Op. cit., p.378.

is seen in the quotation from Maupas. It rests on the fact that the Past Definite, replaced within the twenty-four hour limit by the Past Indefinite, temporarily preserved in the recent and middle past by the buckler of a specific expression of time, is still entrenched soundly in the remote.

It is this very connotation of remoteness and severance from the present that is responsible for the remarkably small number of Past Definites occurring in classical drama for if action is to be dramatic it must not be remote from the action of the play, that is from present time.

A glimpse at the use of the Past Definite in expositions is an immediate confirmation of this. Seldom does a speech launch itself in the Past Definite unless previously announced as beginning a developed récit. Seldom too does it end abruptly in the Past Definite. There is a natural process of transition at beginning and end. Thus, Déjanire, in Rotrou's *Hercule Mourant*:-

Ah traître! ah déloyal! que d'une vaine feinte  
Tu me veux déguiser le sujet de ma crainte!  
Non, non, je ne suis plus cet objet si charmant  
Qui força l'inconstance à l'aimer constamment,  
Qui fit d'un infidèle un amant véritable,  
Qui s'acquitt sur tes sens un pouvoir redoutable,  
Qui te fut préférable au reste des humains,  
Et qui fit contre Nesse armer tes fières mains.  
Le temps, qui forme tout, change aussi les choses,  
Il flétrit les oeillets, il efface les roses;  
Et ces fleurs dont jadis mon visage fut peint,  
Ne sont plus à tes yeux qu'un triste et pâle teint.  
Iole a sur le sien l'ornement nécessaire  
À faire de ton coeur un lâche tributaire;

(1,ii)

The speech is in the mouth of Déjanire. Six lines continue her thought in the present tense and it concludes:-

Ta vie, en la fureur dont j'ai l'âme enflammée,  
Trame un pire lion que celui de Némée;  
Et ma jalouse humeur t'est un monstre plus fort  
Que tous ceux dont tes bras ont accourci le sort.

Dramatic action belongs from the co-presence of actors and audience to the present. Sudden diversion to the past damages its integrality, unless under rare and special conditions. It must, where necessary, be skilfully prepared for. Here then Déjanire finds the bridge between the present in which Hercule appears to her cold and fascinated by another and the past heyday of their love in the words:

Non, non, je ne suis plus cet objet charmant.....

Finally, as the speech and the scene close together she returns to the action of the play, succinctly indicating its inevitable trend.

It is significant that the speech ends with a Past Indefinite and that its beginning and end are transitions from the present to the Past Definite and back again. Past time in drama is more often time that impinges directly on the action of the play, that is, belongs to the Past Indefinite. Remote time and its events which serve, as in Déjanire's speech, the needs of illumination and contrast may be rich in emotive echos but can lead only indirectly to the immediate concatenation of further events which make the play.

The most obvious confirmation of this is, as we have said, the comparative scarcity of Past Definites throughout drama. Further evidence can be found in the fact that the Past Definite seldom occurs in short broken dialogue and, finally: the number of speeches in our four authors which end in the Past Definite can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Corneille was probably most conscious of the problem presented in drama by the remote past. His technique of exposition becomes as a result almost mannered and formal. At least there is a visible pattern:-

J'en attends peu de chose, et brûle de le voir.  
J'ai de l'impatience, et je manque d'espoir.  
Ce fils, ce cher objet de mes inquiétudes,  
Qu'ont éloigné de moi des traitements trop rudes,  
Et que depuis dix ans je cherche en tant de lieux,  
A caché pour jamais sa présence à mes yeux.  
Sous ombre qu'il prenait un peu trop de licence,  
Contre ses libertés je raidis ma puissance:  
Je croyais le dompter à force de punir,  
Et ma sévérité ne fit que le bannir.  
Mon âme vit l'erreur dont elle était séduite:  
Je l'outrageais présent, et je pleurai sa fuite;  
Et l'amour paternel me fit bientôt sentir,  
D'une injuste rigueur un juste repentir.  
Il l'a fallu chercher.....

(L'Illusion Comique, 1, i.)

There follows a series of Past Indefinites, no recurrence of the Past Definite. As the speech closes it returns to the present:-

L'enfer devient muet quand il me faut répondre,  
On ne me répond rien qu'afin de me confondre.

The pattern here observed is broadly:-

Present to Past Indefinite to Imperfect to Past

Past Definite to Past Indefinite to Present, or what one might term a parabola beginning and ending in present time, reaching at its highest point into the remote past.

If, in Racine, the transition from present to remote past is more sudden, perhaps more skilful, his expositions bear witness to the same need for care in the use of Past Definite. A brief excerpt from *Andromaque* affords a striking example:-

Ami, n'accable point, un malheureux qui t'aime.  
T'ai-je jamais caché mon coeur et ses désirs?  
Tu vis naître ma flamme et mes premiers soupirs:  
Enfin, quand Ménélas disposa de sa fille  
En faveur de Pyrrhus, vengeur de sa famille,  
Tu vis mon désespoir; et tu m'as vu depuis  
Traîner de mers en mers ma chaîne et mes ennuis.

(1, i.)

Here the use of depuis is interesting for it is often this word that acts as the signal of transition from Past Definite to the Present or Past Indefinite tense.

This well known speech of Oreste continues with a long consistent series of Past Definites and many Historic Presents which tense is in

in the classical period fully equivalent to the former, but long before the end these tenses disappear entirely as Racine returns to the intrinsic and immediate action of the play, reverting to the Present Indicative and its associated tenses.

In Molière this expositional pattern is not so obvious since his comedy seldom originates in the complications of past action. In the *Princesse d'Élide*, however, which has something nearer the tone of traditional drama in verse, Euryale completes her recital of more remote events, which required twelve Past Definites, in the following manner:-

Contre une telle amorce il eut beau s'indigner,  
Sa douceur sur mes sens prit tel droit de régner  
Qu'entraîné par l'effort d'une occulte puissance,  
J'ai d'Ithaque en ces lieux fait voile en diligence;  
Et .....

(1, i.)

The Present tense follows, as one would expect, since the action of the play must then proceed.

The pattern of usage in the dénouement is exactly similar. Thus, in that final establishing of identities so common in classical comedy:-

Ménechme Sosicle.

Qu'un favorable port m'a mis en cette rive!  
Que je serai content si cet honneur m'arrive!  
Mais, mon frère, qu'un mot à ce bonheur soit joint:  
Ma curiosité ne veut plus que ce point.  
Ayant été ravi, quelle heureuse fortune  
A pu vous exempter d'une vie importune?  
Je vous croyais plus mal: un captif rarement  
A reçu de son maître un pareil traitement.

Ménechme Ravi.

Celui qui me ravit fut touché de ma peine:  
Je n'éprouvai jamais sa rigueur ni sa haine,  
Il m'obligea toujours de son affection,  
Et je fus honoré de sa succession.  
Je me suis marié, j'ai vécu dans cette île  
Avec dessein pourtant de revoir la Sicile.  
C'est à vous, maintenant, de m'ôter de souci:  
Que font tous nos parents? et qui vous mène ici?

(Les Ménechmes, Rotrou, V, vii)

The most obvious example occurs in Molière's  
L'Avare in the long and complicated story of  
shipwreck and separation which made the play  
mechanically possible. Marianne continues where  
Valère leaves off, recounts the events involving  
herself and her mother in the Past Definite and  
concludes:-

.....et de là, fuyant la barbare injustice de  
ses parents, elle vint en ces lieux, où elle n'a  
presque vécu que d'une vie languissante.

(V, v.)

The subsequent speech of Anselme ~~mirrors~~ the preceding pattern, one Past Definite at the beginning balancing Marianne's reference to remoter events:-

Oui, ma fille, oui, mon fils, je suis Dom Thomas d'Alburcy, que le ciel garantit des ondes avec tout l'argent qu'il portait, et qui, vous ayant crus tous morts durant plus de seize ans, se préparait, après de longs voyages, à chercher dans l'hymen d'une douce et sage personne la consolation de quelque nouvelle famille. Le peu de sûreté que j'ai vu pour ma vie à retourner à Naples m'a fait y renoncer pour toujours; et, ayant su trouver moyen d'y faire vendre ce que j'avais, je me suis habitué ici, où, sous le nom d'Anselme, j'ai voulu m'éloigner les chagrins de cet autre nom qui m'a causé tant de traverses.

Harpagon.

C'est là votre fils?

Anselme.

Oui.

Harpagon.

Je vous prends à partie pour me payer dix mille écus qu'il m'a volés.

In the above we have included the interruption by Harpagon to show how skilfully Molière, sensing the hiatus in comic action caused by the necessary mechanical dénouement, hastens to return to the core of his subject. For there is a danger, particularly in comedy, that the Past Definite may become almost a foreign element dangerous to the dramatic illusion on which the success of the play depends. The need for skilful/

skilful transition to and from it is proof of this and corroborates our conviction that the tense itself, irrespective of adverbs, possessed or was assuming a quality of distance from present reality, that, in other words, though it was theoretically equivalent to the Past Indefinite and vice versa, there are signs of a division of labour. We have pointed out how comedy requires frequently in its dénouement a quick reference to the past which will clear up certain mysteries surrounding the main characters. Such mysteries naturally have their beginning in remote events surrounding the circumstances of birth and early childhood. Their solving necessitates the use of the Past Definite.

The masking of true identity is, however, not peculiar to comedy only. Indeed, is it not the basis of that most perfect of tragic stories, Oedipus Tyrannus? In this connection the neatest of illustrations is provided by Racine in Iphigénie:-

"Vous, Achille, a-t-il dit, et vous, Grecs, qu'on m'écoute.  
Le Dieu qui maintenant vous parle par ma voix  
M'explique son oracle, et m'instruit de son choix.  
Un autre sang d'Hélène, une autre Iphigénie  
Sur ce bord immolée y doit laisser sa vie.  
Thésée avec Hélène uni secrètement  
Fit succéder l'hymen à son enlèvement.  
Une fille en sortit, que sa mère a célée;  
Du nom d'Iphigénie elle fut appelée.  
Je vis moi-même alors ce fruit de leurs amours.  
D'un sinistre avenir je menaçai ses jours.  
Sous un nom emprunté sa noire destinée  
Et ses propres fureurs ici l'ont amenée.  
Elle me voit, m'entend, elle est devant vos yeux:  
Et c'est elle, en un mot, que demandent les Dieux."  
(V, vi.)

In this passage the initial transition to the Past Definite is direct though prepared by the Past Participle uni; but the movement back to the present is again made via the Past Indefinite. The mixture sortit and a cée shows, of course, that in isolated circumstances the two tenses are equivalent, but the transition to the Present tense via the Past Indefinite which happens so regularly is unmistakable proof that such mixtures as the above are probably caused more by the exigencies of the alexandrine verse than by grammatical factors.

We are concerned here to establish a broad distinction between the two tenses under discussion, a distinction made by all our dramatists. Even in Rotrou, for example, whose usage is freer, whose time-values are hazier than those of his successors, in whom mixtures of the two tenses are more frequent, the broad connotation of remoteness in the Past Definite is clear, for the mixture of Past Definite and Past Indefinite occurs with him mainly in the realm of the middle past. Belisarius, for example, in his final appeal for mercy on the grounds of the services he has rendered to his emperor must tell the story of his career as a soldier. The speech is long (V, v.) -- some 130 lines -- and divides naturally into two halves, the first dealing with more remote events narrated in the Past Definite, the second with more recent events told in the Past Indefinite: exactly the same pattern as we find in Phèdre where the events belonging to Athens and Trézène are distinguished in the same way.

It is, of course, in tragedy and particularly in Racine that the full emotive force of the Past Definite is seen:-

Nous étions ennemis dès la plus tendre enfance;  
Que dis-je? nous l'étions avant notre naissance.  
Triste et fatale effet d'un sang incestueux!  
Pendant qu'un même sein nous renfermait tous deux,  
Dans les flancs de ma mère une guerre intestine  
De nos divisions lui marqua l'origine.....  
Elles ont, tu le sais, paru dans le berceau,  
Et nous suivront peut-être dans le tombeau.  
On dirait que le ciel par un arrêt funeste,  
Voulut de nos parents punir ainsi l'inceste;  
Et que dans notre sang il voulut mettre au jour  
Tout ce qu'ont de plus noir et la haine et l'amour.

(La Thébaïde, IV, i.)

Here the words ont paru emphasise on a subjective basis the inevitable tragedy, determined long before and a phenomenon subsequent to the birth, corroborating it. Can it be doubted that the repeated voulut is full of significance? The very sound of it reveals that the fratricidal conflict which makes the tragedy is not a conflict between the brothers but a conflict with destiny, immutable destiny reaching far into the past and future. Destiny speaks in the Past Definite.

It might be well to pause and wonder why.....

the Past Definite is so full of significance.

Surely it is because of the association of the Past Definite with the remote event that has already happened, about which nothing can now be done. For remoteness has that association with inevitability which is the essence of tragedy... It has other associations.

The past of man is the memory of man. Man's recent past is full of inconsequentialities, events not yet clear in shape, facts that may turn to lies. Man's middle past is a collection of memories, half sorted out into significance and insignificance, half jumbled still. Man's remote past contains the salient, the significant, the epic, the historic, the authentic, the immutable and imperishable.

That the 17th century Frenchman used the Past Definite only with such grandiose implications is untrue, but nowadays one sees, perhaps imagines, in his casual reference to the early events of his own life a certain emphasis, though he may be concerned merely with a time-distinction when he uses the Past Definite rather than the Past Indefinite.

Les Dieux, quand tu naquis, te firent une soeur....

(V,x.)

says Lysandre in Rotrou's La Diane. This use of the Past Definite for the circumstance of birth is, with a few exceptions, remarkably consistent throughout our authors.

Marriage, another salient event of one's past, if it be remote enough, wears the same garb.

Quand j'épousai Syphax, je n'y fus point forcé:

(Corneille, *Sophonisbe*, II, iv.)

We have seen Racine deal admirably with prenatal phenomena in *La Thébaïde*.

In *L'École des Femmes*, Arnolphe tells with a few Past Definites how he found Agnès as a child and embarks on his description of his methods of educating her with the words:-

Je la fis élever.....

(I, i.)

If the usage of drama is any indication -- these examples chosen from plays very different in subject and style could be vastly multiplied -- the individual Frenchman of the period spontaneously and casually employed the Past Definite for the remoter events of his life.

At all points, then, whatever the accompanying nuance of meaning, the Past Definite implies at least severance from the present. In the majority of cases the quality of technical severance, of failure to overlap into the present, is assured by distance in time, by the connotation of remoteness.

.....

It is perhaps now apposite to ask ourselves if in emphasising the connotation of remoteness we are belabouring a dead horse. It will be immediately obvious that this is not so if we consider the opinion of Brunot on this question.<sup>1</sup>

In an ambitious work such as La Pensée et la Langue it is natural to find inequalities. In this work the comparatively few pages devoted to this question of connotation during the classical period are, no doubt, an excellent guide to a comprehension of modern French usage. Unfortunately the mystery surrounding the Past Definite has many facets which defy summary treatment.

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1. La Pensée et la Langue, pp. 473 - 474.

In brief Brunot admits that broadly the 'doctrine' of Maupas, Oudin and their successors Port-Royal and Chifflet considered the Past Definite to be proper to the remote past, the Past Indefinite to a past nearer the present.

On that doctrine he comments:-

Le passé simple était réputé être le temps du passé lointain.

(The word 'réputé' is already eloquent!)

Il l'est en effet dans certains cas.....

He quotes, for example:-

N'est-ce pas cette même Agrippine  
Que mon père épousa jadis pour sa ruine?

(Rac., Brit., 307)

and the lines that MM. Damourette and Pichon also found significant:-

Par les traits de Jéhu je vis percer le père;  
Vous avez vu les fils massacrés par la mère.

(Id., Ath., 151)

But, continues Brunot:-

Les exemples contraires foisonnent.....

We assume that by 'exemples contraires', Brunot means that the Past Definite is used frequently of the recent past. His manner of

of stating this suggests much more, for the examples he quotes refer to events within the twenty-four hours, events not yet a day old!

Now the fact is that though in Rotrou one may, owing to the peculiar haziness of his time-values in drama, argue that many of the events registered in the Past Definite must have happened within the twenty-four hour limit, with Corneille, Racine and Molière such examples are so rare as to be remarkable. If there is such a 'foisonnement' why does the Academy chide Corneille for one example of the kind in Le Cid?

Brunot would seem to be emphasising the general equivalence of the Past Definite and the Past Indefinite during the classical period. His conclusion is that even in the classical period:-  
le passé composé tend déjà visiblement à empiéter sur le simple.....

Actually the examples he quotes would suggest the reverse, namely, that the Past Definite was reinvading the realm of the Past Indefinite, the sacrosanct day of the event's occurrence when it is still closely linked to the present. Consider them:-

Comme il sonna la charge, il sonne la victoire (La Fontaine, Fables, II, 9). Il y a des passés simples dans le récit de Thérémène: Le flot qui l'apporta, recule épouvanté (Racine, Phèdre, 1624), comme il y en avait dans le récit de bataille de Rodrigue; Le flux les apporta, le reflux les remporte (Corn., Cid, 1318). Or, il s'agit d'événements qui n'ont pas un jour de date.

Now these examples, at least two of them, are so remarkable as to be very well known to the most casual student of the classical period. They have, if one looks at them again, a striking similarity of form. Each is a complete unit of sense. Each divides neatly into two balanced halves which are compared or contrasted. In fact, each represents a 'procédé littéraire' which abounds in the dramatic poem of the classical period: two hémistiches devoted to a contrast, the contrast reinforced by two diametrically opposed tenses, a contrast which the length of the alexandrine and the brevity of the Past Definite combine to make frequently possible, a contrast euphonious in many cases, such as those quoted, because of the change rung by the mute e of the second verb, a contrast in which the natural pause of the caesura is doubled by the gap in time between the two tenses.

Here are some further examples:-

Toi qui vis son amour et qui vois ses dédains,...  
(Rotrou, La Diane, 1,i.)

Je l'eus sans insolence, et le perds sans ennui,..  
(Rotrou, Florimonde, IV, ii.)

Je voulus vous aimer, et je ne le veux plus.  
(Corneille, La Galerie du Palais, 11,viii.)

Ce qui fut juste alors ne l'est plus aujourd'hui.  
(Corneille, Le Cid, IV, ii.)

Quel fut le sort de Troie et quel est son destin.  
(Racine, Andromaque, 1,iii.)

Vous êtes un ingrat, vous le fûtes toujours.  
(Corneille, Britannicus, IV, ii.)

Such lines are absent from Molière. Comedy is not interested in contrasts within a large segment time, but moves in the shallower waters of the present.

Now it is surely obvious from the additional examples we have given that the Past Definite has remoteness and severance from the present as its raison d'être; if this be not so the lines lose all force and significance. With the exception of the line from Britannicus which expresses the totality of Nero's ingratitude, these lines express a radical change of conduct, feeling, emotion etc.,

etc., occurring at some point between past and present. Each contains at the caesura a yawning, separating gulf, pregnant with recounted or unrecounted event.

How can we explain, however, the examples quoted by M. Brunot, since these refer to events within the same time sequence?

There is, of course, the explanation, based on the definition of Maupas, that the Past Definite could refer to an event an hour old if that event no longer impinged on present time. To appeal on these grounds may savour of mere technicality. Another way of stating the rule of Maupas would be to say that the Past Definite had retained values of aspect responsible for the puzzlement of Henri Estienne and succeeding grammarians. These examples presented by M. Brunot as casting doubt on the connotation of remoteness could actually be taken as proving the reverse. They are either vestigial remains of an older usage whose essence was severance from the present, this leading as we have previously stated, in a language alien to aspects, to the moving of the Past Definite further away from the present into more remote terrain where that severance depended on

on quantitative distance in time --- or they are a temporary innovation.

But, it may be objected, the Past Definites under discussion, sonna, apporta, apporta, in a century which specifically condemned such a usage through a national Academy<sup>1</sup>, record events within the twenty-four hour limit!

That is true. A further and convincing explanation is obvious:-<sup>2</sup>.

Racine, in the most famous of these lines, the quotation from the story of Théràmène, was technically in the wrong in using a Past Definite for an event taking place so recently. The Academy would certainly have disapproved. But there is a higher authority than Academies. Racine had the justification of using a device of language common in poetry when expressing a contrast. Had this contrast been in the nature of a pretty conceit the straining against a grammatical rule would scarcely have been justified. In actual fact this line

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1.c.f. Sentiments de l'Académie Française sur Le Cid.

2.Other opinions are reserved till the end of this section. See p. 139.

line has nothing of the ornamental or unnecessary about it. It stands, so to speak, at the peak of catharsis, in an extraordinary dénouement, the story of Théràmène, which may be among the most dramatic and poetic climaxes of the whole classical theatre, but is also, from its length and its subject -- the death of the young hero off-stage -- something of a tour de force over which actors and critics have argued for centuries.

This peak of catharsis -- we repeat the expression because the events recounted concern the fate of Hippolyte through whom every character in the play is connected and woven into a scheme of overpowering emotion -- depends on the appearance of a monster from ~~the~~ salty deep. There is nothing fortuitous about this appearance. It has been prepared by the cloud of Neptune's enmity that hangs over the house of Theseus. But Racine's task is to make the appearance convincing, at second hand, and to heighten the curve of tragic emotion by making the Gods accomplice and the elements partial. So the wave --- we see it roll forward throwing up its fateful cargo; we see, and

and the wave sees, the monster in all its horror in the bare light of day; there is the pause between ebb and flow, the slow gathering of the wave's strength, its drawing-back (it is only given to poets to see this as nature's nearest movement to recoil from crime and horror!).....

Le flot qui l'apporta recule épouvanté....

The line is breath-taking and if we have placed it at the highest point of tragic emotion in the play it is because now, with the recoil of the wave, the tragic détente begins, the ebbing of emotion, the return to the tragedy's surviving characters of that strange lucidity in which the pulse of destiny itself is heard to beat.

Apporta has little 'time-value' in this line; the important thing is not at what point in time the wave delivered the monster and at what point it recoiled from its burden. What is important is the gap between the two events. The whole emotive power of the line depends then on the natural, traditional gap between the Past Definite and the Present tense. This gap synchronises with the caesura, duplicates the division between the

the tragedy and its aftermath. In brief, the whole justification of the Past Definite apports lies in its aesthetic pattern of contrast which borrows strength and authority from being based on the much-used design of two sharply contrasting tenses.

It should be said, though this does not concern our subject, that undoubtedly such a contrast is made attractive to the ear by the change of verb or verb-ending which always accompanies it.

The vital point in our explanation which can be applied equally well to the other two examples or to any similar is that, far from suggesting entire equivalence between the two tenses, Past Definite and Past Indefinite, such lines emphasise that only the Past Definite had in these lines the qualities necessary for complete contrast. This completeness of contrast depends fundamentally on the basic severance of the Past Definite from the Present tense, this severance being made more pronounced by the connotation of remoteness which the Past Definite had acquired.

The matter then is not as simple as M. Brunot has supposed. It is rather astonishing that he and other great authorities have not been struck by the very form of the line he quotes. It is also rather regrettable that so many attempt to explain the Past Definite in terms of time.

~~Ever since~~ the concept of time - as opposed to aspect, for example - has come to dominate the grammarians' attitude to the French Verb the Past Definite has become more and more baffling.

To illustrate the complexities affecting its use let us once more look at the two lines:-  
Le flux les apporta; le reflux les remporte.....  
(Le Cid)  
Le flot qui l'apporta recule épouvanté.....  
(Phèdre)

They occur in the stories of Le Cid and Thérèse which have this in common that their bulk, their external phenomena (Moors and monster) threaten the structure of the play - they describe so much that is so vital, but so lengthy in detail, if not so unexpected. Between the flood and ebb of tide and wave so much happens

happens that must give us pause.....

As we said earlier of the prototypes on which the two lines are based: each line 'contains at the caesura a yawning , separating gulf, pregnant with recounted or unrecounted event'.

And each, by the Past Definite, dismisses the events and presses on, after a lucid objective pause, to their results.

The gulf we speak of lies between the Past Definite and present time. The examples that Brunot cites as evidence against the connotation of remoteness are based, thanks to the intuition of our poets, on innumerable others whose raison d'être is remoteness and severance from the present.

But there is this to be remembered:-  
Neither Racine nor Corneille could have written these lines we have examined if the use of the Past Definite for events within the twenty-four hour limit was quite ungrammatical.

The Past Definite, in other words, possessed in the 17th century some quality which the poets, seeking the full limit of expression, instinct-

instinctively felt and endeavoured to preserve.

It is not enough to say that that quality is in essence severance from present time. It is almost as if the tense has its back turned to all that may come after it.

... returning at this point to restate two  
... already mentioned.

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Footnote:- In our Article of Origin (p. 52) Stephen Ullmann refers to various opinions on the récit de Thérémène, particularly to d'Olivet's semi-facetious explanation of the 'apporta' which suggested that excess of grief led to Thérémène's neglect of grammatical usage. He also comments on Lorck's analysis: 'The ebbing tide fills the imagination so completely as to leave room only for a purely intellectual mode of vision' (reiner Denktakt). He himself credits this isolated Past Definite with registering priority in time, a 'phase in the swift-moving drama which is accomplished and no longer relevant'. We have no quarrel with either of the two latter opinions. They have been very helpful. We humbly submit, however, that our own analysis has more than probability to recommend it.

11.

### Le Récit

It is fitting at this point to restate two facts already mentioned:-

- (1) The Past Definite would appear to be the most appropriate tense when reference to mythology is made.
- (2) Its incidence in drama is small, though not negligible. It represents a fraction of one per cent. of all verbal tenses used.

The first statement explains the second, for if a tense has as its function to record the remote past on a different plane of living it is by definition undramatic. It is not a tense -- in stage drama --, to make the heart beat faster or the pulse throb.

This does not mean that classical drama could have done without it, no more than bread without leaven -- in particular, classical tragedy, if it were possible to substitute for it the Past Indefinite, would suffer from a peculiar anaemia.

anaemia. In exposition, registering the bare minimum of past events necessary for comprehending the present, it is employed to show the trend of destiny, inescapable destiny, since the tense is concerned with objective, indisputable fact. In dénouement, retracing the vital links of the chain of tragic happenings, it reconciles us to them through their inevitability.

It is therefore in tragedy associated with atmosphere, employed on occasion with instinctive skill to load the dice against the victim.

Valerie in Saint Genest tells in the exposition of her dream which foreshadows tragedy.

The audience will heed her dream because:-

Le premier des Césars apprit bien que les songes  
Ne sont pas toujours faux et toujours des mensonges;  
Et la force d'esprit dont il fut tant vanté,  
Pour l'avoir conseillé, lui coûta la clarté.  
(1, i.)

In these words three things are accomplished, the conviction of the audience and the evocation of that Caesarism which leads to the martyrdom of Christians, the passage from that first Caesar to his reigning descendant:-

Je connais son amour, mais je crains son caprice,  
Et vois qu'en tout rencontre il suit aveuglément  
La bouillante chaleur d'un premier mouvement.  
Sut-il considérer, pour son propre hyménée,  
Sous quel joug il baissait sa tête couronnée,  
Quand, empereur, il fit sa couche et son état  
Le prix de quelques pains qu'il emprunta soldat,  
Et, par une faiblesse à nulle autre seconde,  
S'associa ma mère à l'empire du monde?  
(1, i.)

The very paucity of Past Definites is eloquent. They silhouette what is important. From the few loaves of bread borrowed by Diocletian and his way of paying for them to the martyrdom of Adrian is but a step, for behind the Past Definite, the tense of history, the tense of remote and salient fact devoid of personal impression, lies credence and authority. Diocletian will not relent; his first decision to put Adrian to death will be carried out. The tragic conflict and uncertainty will rage where it belongs, but not in the bosom of Diocletian. All this and more is here prepared and implied.

But the function of the Past Definite in classical drama is not merely that of delicate suggestion. If there is one plain function of that tense throughout classical drama it is that of supplying factual information, that of laying down the

the clear facts of the dramatic situation as it is conditioned by past event.

If one realises this -- it is obvious throughout our four dramatists -- it becomes equally obvious why the Past Definite is scarce in drama for at no point in any drama must the audience have the impression of being given information as such. Nothing damages the dramatic illusion so much. The objective facts of the dramatic plot should register themselves imperceptibly in the mind of the spectator. Drama is an exercise of the emotions first and foremost.

But a modicum of information, however skilfully suggested or dissembled, is necessary -- certainly in exposition and probably in dénouement. We have seen the former in Saint Genest and the latter in the shipwreck story of L'Avare.

Where the facts of a dramatic situation stem from some past history, imbroglio or complicated series of events it naturally takes the form of a récit.

At this point we have no intention of considering the position of the récit in classical drama. We are concerned with stating that the tense chosen by our dramatists for the recital of past events which impinge on the intrinsic action of any play-- but at one remove-- is the Past Definite. This is best observed in a passage such as the speech of Alcandre in Corneille's 1. Illusion Comique (I, iii.), where the author has as his main concern the rapid evocation of the background of a character or situation. It is the story of what happened to Pridamant's son after he ran away from home:-

.. Il vous prit quelque argent, mais ce petit butin  
A peine lui dura du soir jusqu'au matin;  
Et pour gagner Paris, il vendit par la plaine  
Des brevets à chasser la fièvre et la migraine,  
Dit la bonne aventure, et s'y rendit ainsi.  
Là, comme on vit d'esprit, il en vécut aussi.  
Dedans Saint-Innocent il se fit secrétaire;  
Après, montant d'état, il fut clerc d'un notaire.  
Ennuyé de la plume, il la quitta soudain,  
Et fit danser un singe au faubourg Saint-Germain.  
Il se mit dans la rime, et l'essai de sa veine

---

1. We offer only one example because such passages, though generally shorter, can be found in almost any play having a total of more than fifty Past Definites. They are found, but less frequently, in dénouement.

Enrichit les chanteurs de la Samaritaine.  
Son style prit après de plus beaux ornements;  
Il se hasarda même à faire des romans,  
Des chansons pour Gautier, des pointes pour Guillaume.  
Depuis il trafiqua de chapelets de baume,  
Vendit du mitridate en maître opérateur,  
Revint dans le Palais, et fut solliciteur.  
Enfin jamais Buscon, Lazarille de Tormes,  
Sayavedre, et Gusman ne prirent tant de formes.  
C'était là pour Dorante un honnête entretien!

When it is realised that here in twenty-one lines there are nineteen Past Definites and that the whole play has only between four and five times that amount (93, to be exact) -- in other words, that four or five such passages would exhaust its 'quota' of Past Definites -- it becomes evident that the passage is worth analysis, that such analysis should clarify our ideas further on the connotation of the Past Definite during the classical period.

The key to our analysis is supplied by the speaker, Alcandre, the magician who later will reveal visually (i.e. who will conjure up the characters and the play!) what is happening to Pridamant's son. Alcandre, continuing, apologises for merely telling, not showing, these events he narrates:-

... je vous en fais un conte,  
Dont la peu de longueur épargne votre honte. e/

The Past Definite is the natural tense of the 'conte'. It has the gift of registering rapidly a chain of past events, no longer connected directly with the present -- events in series, each of them time-sufficient unto itself.

In saying this perhaps we say nothing new, for it is to say that the Past Definite is the main tense-vehicle of the 'roman' and the history book. It is to repeat ourselves and others if we insist once more that here the stuff of Past Definite usage is the remote event, complete in itself and clearing the way for the next in series. But we see these facts here in new and vivid form. Here the narrative is more condensed than it would be in prose. This may contribute to satirical and topical pungency -- for Alcandre hits off, not only Pridamant's son but a Parisian type -- but what demands rapidity and concision more than anything else is the fact that L'Illusion is a play, that the audience has not come to hear a novel, that necessary facts are being rapidly given, as medicine is

is given, and with the sugar-coating of humour. It is important to notice that the short synthetic form of the Past Definite has a distinct superiority over the Past Indefinite, leaves more syllable space in the alexandrine line, covers the ground of narrative more quickly.

The factors determining the numerous Past Definites in this speech are primarily: the ~~the~~ need for rapidity of exposition, the remoteness in time of the events recounted. The latter is seen clearly as Alcandre brings his recital to its conclusion and refers to more recent events which impinge directly on the dramatic situation:-

Las de tant de metiers sans honneur et sans fruit,  
Quelque meilleur destin à Bordeaux l'a conduit.

A series of Past Indefinites then follows.

This is the normal pattern of such speeches in exposition and dénouement. It is commoner in exposition, of course, because there the mention of remote events is more likely. It gives the impression of a line of events parallel in time to the events of the play -- parallel in every sense because the two lines do not meet or meet

meet only at infinity -- in the realm of infinite truth.

The Past Definite has, then, certain obvious virtues in the récit as employed by the dramatic author, but only when the stage-character keeps his story-telling within strict bounds. He can impart information necessary for the understanding of the plot; he can give the impression of ~~the~~ past hovering over the present, but the fundamental cleavage between the Past Definite and the pulsating present means that the tense must not occur too often. This factor conditions the incidence of the tense in every play and is basic to our whole study and whatever linguistic findings may accrue from it.

As regards the use of the Past Definite in the récit it is the most important point to seize and understand. It is for this reason that we turn to the Récit du Cid, an analysis of which should make the cleavage between the Past Definite and present time abundantly clear.

We have said that the very fact that the Past Definite is sealed off from the present robs

robs it of any obviously dramatic quality in a stage drama. That it can be dramatic in the novel is, of course, accepted, for the time-basis of the novel is the past; indeed -- even allowing for those modern novelists who have a predilection for the Past Indefinite -- it is true to say that what the present tense is in French drama, the Past Definite is in the French novel.

But the drama is not the novel and where a long récit makes its appearance in any drama there is the danger of throwing up a remote parallel plot destructive of the play's unity and a strain on the memory -- not to say patience -- of the spectator.

Where of necessity a story must be told at some length in classical drama -- in any form of drama, for that matter -- it must shy away from the dead past. In classical drama much use is made of the historic present, the isolated participle etc., in order to avoid the Past Definite. For the story must emerge from the plot and merge with it again without violence

violence being done to the fabric of the play.

In the Récit du Cid we see a peculiar phenomenon, unique in classical drama, a story of vital importance to the play, dramatic in itself as a story in which the hero, the Cid, is the central figure, but a story which in spite of all that is something of a flaw in dramatic construction.

Our attention was first drawn to the Récit du Cid because, as is well known, it employs several Past Definites although no night has elapsed between the events recounted and their recounting. That is, it shows several violations of the twenty-four hour rule governing Past Definite usage. Our attention was held when we noticed a remarkable phenomenon: the story ends abruptly in the Past Definite tense.

Now, it is almost axiomatic that a story in classical drama, before its end or at its end, must merge with the action of the play through the medium of some tense nearer that of present time. The Récit du Cid does not!

It behoved us to look closely at the story told by Rodrigue for the final Past Definite, by

by its reversal of a normal process, seemed to indicate something not frequent in drama, but something possible: a dramatist controlling subsidiary action, which may overlap dangerously on the main plot, by an intuitive manipulation of the verb.

Rodrigue's story is a lever applied at the fulcrum of the play's action to swing its whole movement in favour of Rodrigue. It is superfluous to say that it cannot have been written lightly. It is one of those tours de force that only genius can accomplish.

The events told by Rodrigue happened by necessity overnight. The invasion of the Moors had to be swift and secret to permit Rodrigue, a young and inexperienced soldier, to be in charge of the repelling forces and emerge from his state of pupation as the Cid, the hero destined to become legendary. This transformation was necessary for the continuation of the plot and the forcing of a dénouement ... so necessary that Corneille perforce commits himself to a breach of the accepted unity of time. The 'récit' is one that cannot be avoided since no stage could house the events it describes; it

it must furthermore be a detailed account enhanced by dramatic interest. It must underline the previous report of Rodrigue's victory if it is to bring the full change in Rodrigue's status home to the audience; it must enlist their sympathy and admiration and open up the perspective of dramatic action.

The speech of Rodrigue has naturally an intrinsic dramatic value: the vivid story of a battle, the conflicting fortunes of the hero and his followers, are certain to stimulate an audience. At the precise point in the play at which it is told it instills a new life and atmosphere into a plot which possessed nothing remarkably original -- a lover embroiled in feud with his sweetheart's family, forced by his own family loyalty to cross swords with her father and kill him. The Récit du Cid ~~silhouettes~~ in a remarkable effort of Corneille's genius the new note he has struck in tragedy: the tragic hero, conditioned by his past -- Rodrigue cannot act otherwise than befits the family from which he sprang -- but willing himself consciously from act to act. Rodrigue is launched upon his story at a moment when the

the audience, seeing no outcome from the impasse in which he finds himself, is in need of stimulation and guidance. The récit must lift them to the peak of climax. The seal of drama will be applied at its end with the entrance of Chimène:

Sire, Chimène vient vous demander justice.

(lv, iv)

Only now is the drama stated in its full terms, only now, in terms of plot does the play detach itself from the category of family imbroglio and its original title, a tragi-comedy!

But..... the sudden incursion of the Moors, the use of unexpected external action as a solution of an internal problem, is in very essence a constructional weakness. It is a threat to the whole unity of the play. The story told by Rodrigue, if improperly handled may become a fatal diversion of dramatic interest. The Moors must intervene swiftly and be gone as swiftly. It must be conveyed to the audience that when Rodrigue has finished his speech the night excursion is over, its only residue the increased stature of Rodrigue; their expectancy must not toy with a sudden appearance of

of turbanned captives, but with the reactions of Chimène. The events of the preceding night have a clear connection with the central action of the play, but only viewed as a sum total, not in their individual detail.

How is Corneille to achieve this? Obviously by the intuitive direction of genius rather than in strict terms of grammatical reference. That is why the Past Definite is found recording events within the twenty-four hour limit!

Once the story has begun it will be presented as dramatic action interesting for its own sake; the author will strive to make the details of the conflict real to the spectator as seen through the eyes of Rodrigue. The style will be varied in such a way as always to remind the spectator that the role of Rodrigue is capital; for a brief moment the spectator will be at Rodrigue's side, sharing his triumph and his danger. But the main content of the speech will be dramatic action told for its own sake. The danger-point in its presentation will occur at the beginning and the end, because there, of necessity, the speech must take its position in the development of the play.

Now, remembering that the action of this subsidiary plot must be sealed off, lest it affect the unity of the central action, what tense shall we expect Corneille to use, or what sequence of tenses? Will he begin with the Perfect, or Past Definite, move into the Present Historic, back to Past Definite or Perfect, concluding with a depuis and the Perfect or Present? That is his usual formula. But here the position and quality of the récit are unusual. There will be no succession of narrative Perfects, such as the rules of grammar demand, for with them each action recorded will spill over into the succeeding scene in which Chimène demands justice of the king. Nor, though the basic narrative tense is Past Definite, will this tense be found in concentration. Rodrigue is not supplying detailed and rapid information. The peculiar quality of the Past Definites used is seen from their position in the récit. Here is the actual tense pattern:-

✓  
1 Perfect  
3 Past Definites  
5 Imperfects  
2 Historic Presents  
2 Past Definites  
1 Imperfect  
1 Present  
1 Past Definite

1 Imperfect  
27 Historic Presents  
1 Imperfect  
15 Historic Presents  
1 Perfect  
5 Imperfects  
1 Perfect  
11 Historic Presents  
1 Past Definite  
9 Historic Presents  
2 Past Definites

(In this pattern we have called the Past Indefinite the Perfect to avoid confusion.)<sup>1</sup>.

Now this tense-pattern is so unusual in Corneille -- even allowing for any inconsistencies -- that it is of extreme significance. We can accept the first Perfect as being in order, forming a bridge between the Present and Past Definite. We can say that the récit is borne along mainly by the Historic Present, which again is normal in any prolonged story in classical drama, the

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1. The pattern is the more significant that Corneille pruned *Le Cid* with particular reference to Past Definite usage on which subject he had aroused the criticism of the Academics. In its first form the Past Definites were sprinkled evenly throughout the course of the récit. On a time-basis -- according to the rules of grammar -- nine of them were justified. On re-scrutiny Corneille sacrificed nine of them, every one he could. We can assume that those left were retained for a sound reason. (See later, pp. 302-303.)

the Historic Present having, as a compromise tense, the advantage of being graphic and grammatically possible. Where normality ends is where, instead of merging into the Perfect and thence into the stream of the play's present time, the Historic Present is succeeded and closed by two sharp Past Definites. These deliberately remove the details of the story from possible contact with the main plot. When Rodrigue says:-

Je vous les envoyai tous deux en même temps;  
Et le combat cessa faute de combattants.

He erects a barrier between the previous night and the day now before the eyes of the spectator.

He continues with the conventional cue:-

C'est de cette façon que, pour votre service....

~~Today~~ The cue is answered:-

Sire, Chimène vient vous demander justice....

Once more the main plot takes possession of the stage and the details of victory over the Moors are forgotten.

The violation of the rule of twenty-four hours in the Récit du Cid has drawn the attention of grammarians. Dauzat sees in the use of the

the Past Definite in this particular case an effort made, and a more or less conscious effort at that, "pour donner plus de solennité au morceau!."

It would not be wise to dismiss this opinion completely. There is a further aspect of the matter; whenever a developed récit deals with that fluid period of time existing between the previous evening and the day of its telling the verbal idiom may tend naturally towards the Past Definite, particularly if the events told have only retrospective and not immediate significance.

True, a solemn and dignified quality may be associated with the Past Definite, from the very nature of the company it normally keeps: the epic, the historic, etc. But after all, the whole atmosphere of the classical tragedy, and the cornelian version of it in particular, is one of solemnity and dignity. One must wonder, if Dauzat's opinion is accepted on this matter, how much of these qualities is added to the story of Rodrigue by making nine out of the ninety tenses in his mouth Past Definites.

Surely it is the position of these Past Definites that is important! At the beginning they situate the events to be recounted in a remoter realm than would the Past Indefinite -- the tense has therefore here an 'impressive', psychological value. At the very end they seal off the action and its details from the main plot.

It may be objected that Past Indefinites or Perfects, as we have called them here, also occur. It may therefore be submitted that there is no tense pattern, but only the lack of precision and clarity to be expected in the early work of any author.

The reason for the Perfects is, of course, sound and simple. The mixture of Perfect and Past Definite in a story is not frequent but occurs quite naturally where a main character is narrating to an important listener with whom he has a personal or official relationship. Indeed, the Past Indefinite used now and then during such a récit reinforces the atmosphere of vraisemblance by interweaving the main action and the main relationships of the play with the action,

action, viewed objectively, which has occurred off-stage.

We find therefore the following line particularly interesting:-

Et ne l'ai pu savoir jusques au point du jour.

At the beginning, when he uses the first person plural, he is viewing the conflict objectively. Viewed thus it has no carry-over into the present. Viewed subjectively, however, in the first person singular, it is still for Rodrigue, weighed down with the fatigue of the night's work and aware of the change that it has wrought in his favour, part of a past which is prolonged into the present. Only through him, by him and in him does the nocturnal battle belong to the main plot and this Perfect tense in his mouth, standing in complete contrast to the other tenses around it and particularly to the Past Definite which sets the tone of the story, since it introduces it and brings it to a close, is like a bright light focussing on the main figure and emphasising the limited significance of the remoter background details.

In fact, the Past Indefinites which occur in the Récit du Cid merely confirm what we have said regarding the peculiar use of the Past Definites which open and close it.

The function of these Past Definites is to act as a barrier between a brief sub-plot and the main action of the play. Their essential connotation is severance from present time. There are two possible explanations of how this came about.

(1) The Past Definite, entrenched in remoteness in the past, the only realm still safely in its grasp during the classical period, had acquired the quality of separateness from present time. Still oscillating from that remote realm into its former province of the near past, it has by extensive association assumed even there that quality of separateness. In other words it has added to its meaning as a time-word a quality of aspect, transcending the pure time element within it.

(2) The Past Definite had consistently retained the ability inherited from Latin to denote not only a perfect, but a preterite action having no connection with present time. The creation of a composite perfect threw it back upon the latter function which the new perfect could not assume.

Associated therefore with events normally remote in time (since such events have no connection with the present) its connotation of remoteness grew. But this was based on a value of aspect which still haunted usage and had not fully passed away in the 17th century. In other words, the basic connotation of the tense had more to do with severance from the present than distance in time.

This peculiar function of the Past Definite has not escaped the attention of Stephen Ullmann:<sup>1</sup>.

But if there is no sign of the Indefinite encroaching on the territory still left to the Definite by the precarious truce of the 'rule of twenty-four hours', there are one or two instances of the latter tense still clinging to some of the lost ground. These can be understood only if we approach them from the angle of the more liberal regulations laid down by Maupas. When Mithridate, his unseemly ruse exploded, bids Monime follow him forthwith to the altar (Act IV, Sc. IV), the Princess feigns some surprise:

Monime: Nous, Seigneur?

Mithridate: Quoi, madame, osez-vous balancer?

Monime: Et ne m'avez-vous pas défendu d'y penser?

Mithridate: J'eus mes raisons alors: oublions-les, madame.

But the ruse referred to took place that same day, only a few scenes earlier (Act III, Sc. V). And yet Mithridate uses the Past Definite to mark very forcibly that that stage belongs to the remote past, it has become completely irrelevant.....

Stephen Ullmann refers then to such a use as being a 'pregnant' one. The term is well found and the phenomenon to which it is applied occurs

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1. Article of Origin, p. 51.

occurs frequently enough to deserve special mention and consideration. Before passing on to a closer examination of it and as a final corroboration of our analysis of the Récit du Cid, let us emphasise these words 'completely irrelevant'. If there is anything with which a cold critic might reproach Corneille on the subject of the numerous details of Rodrigue's night excursion it is their fundamental irrelevance. And if there is a defence that Corneille might make in reply it is that he was aware of this, kept them to the dramatic minimum necessary for 'vraisemblance' and redeemed them with two Past Definites and the entrance of Chimène!

In other words, the formula employed by Stephen Ullmann to account for the passage in Racine's Mithridate which infringes the theory of the twenty-four hour rule, is -- and this was arrived at independently by us -- the basis of our analysis of the Récit du Cid.

111.

### The Pregnant Use

This use, as illustrated in the above passage, is not one of which examples abound. Searching our authors carefully reveals it as marginal only. By this we do not mean that it is negligible. On the contrary it is of the greatest importance: for even as the rare examples it was possible to find quote of the Past Definite used in drama for mythological reference silhouetted its fundamental connotation (since they showed a realm as yet uninvaded by the Past Indefinite), so this, the pregnant use, the only case in which the Past Definite remains in close proximity with present time, the only case in which the Past Indefinite is found inadequate within the twenty-four hour circle, unerringly points in the same direction, towards something fundamental in its meaning. J'eus mes raisons alors, says Mithridate, and severs his conduct of the moment and his new

new decision on Monime's future from all that had passed a few hours before. Once again, as in the story of Rodrigue, as in the story of Thérémene, the element of severance from the present takes precedence over the connotation of remoteness on which it is based.

We have wondered if this is an example of the Past Definite clinging to its former terrain or of the Past Definite reinvading that terrain by skilful extension of its new-found connotation of remoteness. Or is this usage, which emphasises the psychological remoteness of an event by expressing its occurrence in the Past Definite, based on analogy with an older one entirely logical? Is there, in other words, at this point in the evolution of the French language some realm within the twenty-four hour range of present time where the Past Definite is still superior to the Past Indefinite?

There is, if we follow our dramatists closely when the death of a main character has occurred or is, so to speak, in the air.

When someone has died, or is about to die, his actions cease to prolong themselves -- under normal and most abnormal circumstances -- into present time. When the hero dies his friends and enemies see his deeds and qualities with a totality and remoteness that, in the 17th century it would appear, demanded the Past Definite.

Thus, in Corneille's Cinna, Maxime, telling of Cinna's supposed arrest on a charge of conspiracy which, of course, means death, speaks of him to Emilie:

C'est votre amant en vous, c'est mon ami que j'aime;  
Et des mêmes ardeurs dont il fut embrasé .....  
(1V, v.)

These same ardeurs had burned consistently throughout the play up till that point. The 'fut' reveals that Maxime considers Cinna as good as dead and is meant by Maxime to convince Emilie that she had better flee with him.

Emilie, standing under the shadow of immediate death at the hands of Augustus, expresses herself with the objective lucidity of the condemned:--

Une haine plus forte à tous deux fit la loi;  
Je ne voulus jamais lui donner d'espérance  
Qu'il ne m'eût de mon père assuré la vengeance;  
(V, ii.)

These words express the course of events from remote to recent time within the action of the play and contribute from their position at the beginning of Emilie's speech to the impression of impending doom which is the fundamental quality of the last act of Cinna. They are the more powerful for being in the mouth of a young girl.

The Past Definite is again the ideal tense for great men philosophising in terms of past occurrence on enemies whose demise they have all too recently arranged.

De cette même main dont il fut combattu,  
Il verra des autels dressés à sa vertu

(Corneille, Pompée, V, iv)

says the conqueror of Pompey.

Again Pertharite, of the duke whom he has just killed:-

S'il fut digne de toi .....  
(Corneille, Pertharite, V, v.)

And Viriate immediately after the death of Sertorius is announced:-

Le grand Sertorius fut son parfait ami .....  
(Corneille, Sertorius, V, iv)

This case is particularly striking as Sertorius had dominated the first four acts of the play.

This usage, where death brings a standstill in the flux of time, is no less regular in Racine than in Corneille. Thus in La Thébàide Jocaste expresses herself to Etéocle on the subject of Ménécée who died but a few moments before:-

Ah! si le seul amour qu'il eut pour sa patrie  
Le rendit insensible aux douceurs de la vie,...  
(III, iv)

Death ends not only the victim's relationships with his fellow men and women. It ends theirs with him:-

D'ailleurs tu sais qu'Hémon adorait la princesse,  
Et qu'elle eut pour ce prince une extrême tendresse.  
(Ibid., V, iv)

On occasion it opens up the possibility of new relationships. It is with a Past Definite that Nero, fresh from the murder of his rival, buries him:-

Britannicus, madame, eut des desseins secrets.  
(Britannicus, V, vi)

On the lips of the dying it is particularly significant, for to realise that one's life now belongs to a vanishing scheme of things, to realise that one's life is all past is to see clearly and poignantly and to remove oneself with dignity from the human scene. So Mithridate, dying, hands the verdict over to history:-

De tout ce que mon trône eut de plus éclatant.  
(Mithridate, V, v.)

One remembers the poignant scene between Andromaque and her confidante in which the Trojan mother instructs Céphise on how to act after she has committed suicide at the marriage altar:-

Dis-lui qu'avant ma mort je lui fus engagée.  
(Andromaque, IV, i )

Andromaque here in her imagination projects herself beyond her own death. The poignancy of the scene lies in her calm acceptance of her own death and her concern for the minute arrangements that will guarantee, as she thinks, her son's safety.

We have previously lingered over the objective quality in the Past Definite, while being unwilling to handle the two terms objective and subjective as absolutes which will clarify the use of Past Definite and Past Indefinite. What strikes us, however, as regards this use of the Past Definite in the presence of death or the thought of it is its peculiar quality of detachment, even in the most trying circumstances. On the lips of those who tell of a hero's death it has the virtue of transferring the hero from the common scene of life to the stage of history and the world of legend. On the lips of the dead man's enemies it has the atmosphere of 'de mortuis nil nisi bonum'. And on the lips of the dying person himself?..... Let us think of the words of Seleucus in Rodogune, murdered at the behest of his own mother:-

Une main qui nous fut bien chère  
Venge ainsi le refus d'un coup trop inhumain;  
Régnez; et surtout, mon cher frère  
Gardez-vous de la même main.  
(V, iv.)

Again the astonishing quality is the detachment conveyed by the fut. There is no resentment in it, surely, in the true sense of the words. It

It merely registers fact, makes the unmotherly deed part of the earthly pattern of circumstance which Seleucus is leaving.

Restraint, detachment, euphoric objectivity, call this death-associative Past Definite what you will, it has its justification: the event of death is a hermetic seal between the past and future -- there is indeed no future, death is final on this earthly plane.

And here we come to the synthesis we should expect between this usage and that which we have already observed in reference to the events of mythology: those in whose mouth the Past Definite is found, whether dying themselves or speaking of the dead, have removed themselves momentarily to a different plane of experience -- not unlike that inhabited by the Olympic gods -- from the petty to-and-fro of human conflict is seen with passionless eyes and in remote perspective.

In this respect, however, there is an important point to be made: all the deaths of which we have so spoken are the deaths of heroes.

heroes. The Past Definites used concern the great and the heroic.

In Rotrou (Hercule Mourant) we shall step from the last sufferings of Hercules in Act IV to the recounting of his death by Philoctète in Act V. It can be assumed that the two acts describe events within a few hours of each other. There are, nevertheless, thirty-one Past Definites, a long transition in the middle of the récit to the Present Historic. There are two passages recording the direct speech of the dying hero; but the Past Definite undoubtedly contributes something vital to the tone of the passage:-

Il paraît seul content, et, riant de nos pleurs,  
Entre dans ce bûcher comme en un lit de fleurs.  
Jamais roi triomphant, environné de palme,  
Ne parut en son char plus joyeux ni plus calme;  
Son esprit toujours sain ne fut point altéré,  
Mais presque en un moment son corps fut dévoré.  
(V, i.)

The death of the poisoner Déjanire which took place within the third act of the play and is told in the fourth, is dismissed in a few brief words and has no distinct tense pattern:-

Agis, m'a-t-elle dit, un seul point me console;  
J'ai sans intention trame cet accident,  
Et mon dessein fut moins criminel qu'imprudent.  
(IV, iii.)

True, Déjanire uses the same kind of Past Definite as we have seen before in the mouths of others, but the story of her death is diminished by the 'a-t-elle dit'.

Now in Racine's *Thébaïde* we saw how Jocaste commented in the Past Definite on the qualities of Ménécée whose life had just ended. It is interesting to note that Antigone, who tells of Ménécée's death in the previous scene, uses the Past Indefinite.

It would seem then that where subsidiary characters are concerned there is an element of choice with the scales weighed against the Definite form.

This is natural since the great character in dying becomes history. The Past Definite, in other words, from its employment in the *Chanson de Roland*, through Joinville, Froissart and onwards down the centuries has acquired and retained a certain epic gloss.

This still does not explain the words of Mithridate: J'eus mes raisons alors.... which is the most explicit of the infringements of the twenty-four hour rule that we know.

I had my reasons then, I have them no longer... Is this not a case of a full preterite occurring but a short time before? There is no logical reason why a fully preterite action should not lie close to present time. The reason why it does not do so often is, of course, that the average event which is preterite lies in the distant past. We have, it seems here, disputed terrain between the Past Definite which is logically correct, according to its fundamental connotation and normal preterite function and the Anwendungstypus, the Past Indefinite, that has come to inhabit it.

What this means in terms of connotation is of cardinal importance:- despite the readiness of grammarians to credit the Past Indefinite with a fully preterite function, during the classical period, there is proof here

here that such was not the case. Used for events distant in the past it could perhaps pass for a preterite, the preterite effect being more implied by the understood lapse of time than by the Anwendungstypus itself. Used in close proximity to the present it seemed inadequate to the ear of the 17th century dramatic author when he wished to imply a sharp division or cleavage between the recent preterite event and time succeeding it.

Surely some such reason lies behind the oft quoted line:-

Que je le hais; enfin, Seigneur, que je l'aimai?  
(Racine, *Andromaque*, IV, iii)

For the love of Hermione for Pyrrhus has lasted up to that point in the play. To underline that her love is irretrievably lost, has become a thing of the past, is preterite, the Past Definite is used.

We have found death revealing. Love is no less so, in terms of 17th century <sup>grammar speaking</sup> syntax. For here is an emotion subject to sudden change.

change. Love blows hot and cold. Love may perish overnight, may flee as swiftly as it comes. During our reading of our four authors, remembering the above line, we paid particular attention to the verb 'aimer' and while we found no example so explicit, so pregnant, we came to realise that it did not represent the genius of Racine in an isolated moment of expressiveness. It is, indeed, this 'aimai', the rich inheritor of much usage that had preceded it.

In Rotrou the distinctions made between the Past Definite and Indefinite are not so clear as in our later authors, but we naturally prick up our ears at a line in his early work, *La Diane*:

Il est vrai que j'aimai cette jeune bergère...  
(II, iv)

for while the line is grammatically sound since the love is over some time ago the real meaning to be conveyed is that the character speaking is now ready to be loved by another -- the

the same meaning as we must give to the famous words of Hermione.

L'Innocente Infidélité, by the same author, affords rather a striking example of the Past Definite used to signify a radical change from affection to abhorrence within a few moments:- Félismond, the king, under the influence of a magic ring worn by the schemer Hermante, is fatally infatuated with her. A faithful retainer takes the ring away, threatening Hermante with his poignard. Félismond enters, snatching the weapon from him:-

O dieux! quelle insolence  
Te dispose, cruel, à cette violence?  
Ta mort réparera le mépris effronté  
Que tu fais à mes yeux de mon autorité.

(Regardant Hermante)

Mais quel horrible objet se présente à ma vue?  
Quoi! celle que je crus de beauté si pourvue,  
Qui m'ôta tout respect des hommes et des dieux,  
N'est plus à mes regards qu'un objet odieux!  
De quel enchantement fut mon âme charmée?  
(Hermante court furieusement s'arrachant les cheveux)  
(V, iv.)

The above example is the more striking that the king has been off the stage for a brief interval only.

Undoubtedly the finality and severance of the Past Definite irrespective of its pure time value is here the most important part of its meaning.

Is this not also true of the words of the Infante in the first Act of Le Cid:-

Quand je vis que mon coeur ne se pouvait défendre,  
Moi-même je donnai ce que je n'osais prendre,  
Je mis, au lieu de moi, Chimène en ses liens;  
Et j'allumai leurs feux pour éteindre les miens.  
(Sc. ii.)

The remoteness of the Infanta's emotion for Rodrigue gives justification to the tense. At the same time it conveys that she has successfully stifled her love. The same is true of the words of Pauline in Polyeucte:-

Je l'aimai, Stratonice: il le méritait bien;  
(I, iii.)

They imply correctly that there is no danger of this love recurring. They are echoed later:-

L'amour que j'eus pour vous tournerait tout en haine.  
(IV, v.)

And they recall her angry words to Polyeucte:-

Va, cruel, va mourir, tu ne m'aimas jamais...  
(IV, iii.)

There is no need to labour the point once one has read the plays of Rotrou. Those facile heroes of his, whose main adventure is that of falling in and out of love, make it obvious enough.

Such whimsicalities in love are not the business of Molière, but surely we see in one pregnant example of his in *Le Misanthrope* when Alceste, having discovered the letter of Célimène to Oronte, in a scene of anger and recrimination refers to her

traîtres appas dont je fus enchanté.  
(*lv*, iii.)

a precise example of this pregnant usage on the subject of love. Alceste in this Past Definite, entirely unjustified on a pure time basis, since his affection for Célimène has been implicit in his conduct up till then, raises a wall between himself and her.

That the opposition between the Past Definite and Indefinite offered stylistic possibilities is undoubted. That these stylistic possibilities stemmed originally from the fact that the tenses

tenses dealt with two different planes of experience seems probable. So far we have seen them separate the mythological from the human reality, life from death, love from indifference.

In Rotrou's *Cléagénor et Doristée* we have a case in which the author uses them to silhouette a dream against reality. This is particularly interesting as the standard tense in dreams observed by Racine and Corneille, when the dream is recounted the following day, is the Past Indefinite which makes no contrast possible.

The dream told by Dorante, like most dreams in drama, foreshadows the probable action of some part of the play:-

Comme je le baisais, mon mari paraissant:  
Lascive, me dit-il, impudique, effrontée,  
J'ai ta brutale ardeur trop longtemps supportée,  
A ce mot il s'élance, et d'un coup inhumain,  
Sur ma joue innocente il imprime sa main,  
Ce coup fit de mes yeux deux fontaines de larmes,  
Et je ne me servis que de ces vaines armes.....  
(II, iv.)

The three pure narrative tenses are Past Definites.

The dream concludes:

Ma main vengea sur lui mon courage offensé,  
Là mon oeil s'est ouvert, et mon songe a cessé.

Whether the tenses used here is a simple narrative Past Definite or not it certainly acts as a separator between dream and reality.

Such usage was doomed by the twenty-four hour rule which the Academy so explicitly stated in relation to the offending line in *Le Cid*:-

Quand je lui fis l'affront.....

Let us look at their condemnation again:-

Il n'a pu dire, je lui fis, car l'action vient d'être faite: il fallait dire, quand je lui ai fait, puisqu'il ne s'était point passé de nuit entre deux.

How seriously did Corneille take this criticism? Seriously enough to amend the line.

Here are the two versions:-

- 1) Je l'avoue entre nous, quand je lui fis l'affront,  
J'eus le sang un peu chaud et le bras un peu prompt:  
Mais puisque c'en est fait le coup est sans remède. 1.  
(11, i.)
- 2) Je l'avoue entre nous, mon sang un peu trop chaud  
S'est trop ému d'un mot et l'a porté trop haut;

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1. The original version, in editions 1637 - 56.

We must therefore conclude that where Corneille and others have used the Past Definite in its pregnant form, that is, for a special nuance affecting events within the twenty-four hour limit they were doing so deliberately and that their usage was justified by current usage -- as the broad, understanding theory of Maupas would also seem to imply. Corneille, the most exact and exacting of them all, though he has replaced certain Past Definites in his later editions, in no case has changed what we have defined as a Past Definite used pregnantly.

We must nevertheless conclude, from the scarcity of examples available that of the two elements in the Past Definite, remoteness and severance, the emphasis in applied types of expression was on the first, since the tense was destined to pass quickly from all direct contact with present time.

This fact can be considered as being in some ways regrettable since it robbed the regular language of a potent resource.

We think of Cléopâtre in Rodogune, announcing her abdication:-

Peuple qui m'écoutez, Parthes et Syriens,  
Sujets du Roi, mon frère, ou qui fûtes les miens,  
Voici de mes deux fils celui qu'un droit d'aînesse  
Élève dans le trône et donne à la Princesse.  
Je lui rends cet État que j'ai sauvé pour lui:  
Je cesse de régner, il commence aujourd'hui.  
(V, iii.)

Or yet of Rotrou's Antigone and the words of Polynice mortally wounded by his dying brother:-

Attends-moi, traître, attends, je vais suivre tes pas,  
Et plus ton ennemi que je ne fus en terre,  
Te porter chez les morts une immortelle guerre...  
(III, ii.)

It would appear that the pregnant use of the Past Definite was reserved for moments of extreme significance, that there is in it a certain emphasis. Emotional detachment, emphasis, irrevocability it has all these qualities. Stephen Ullmann did not err in naming it. Its other qualities of finesse and nuance, coupled with the mental process of choice between it and the Past Indefinite, were bound to condemn it in the long run as a popular usage. It is important for us to remember that during the classical period it had not yet perished.

IV.

Humorous Content

Not least among the reasons for the assumption that the spoken Past Definite is moving rapidly towards its total eclipse at the end of the 17th century is the fact that it is used by authors of comedy, in particular by Molière, but also by Rotrou, Corneille and Racine, as a verbal vehicle in connection with certain types of character in certain situations.

In dealing with the question of the precise scope of the comic use of the Past Definite during the classical period the 20th century historian of language should tread warily. It is so easy to assess this wrongly when one's mind has been influenced from birth by the fact that in our time the tense has been associated with the printed word and the childhood fairy tale. In other words, while any student of 17th century comedy will perforce admit that the Past Definite can be the ally of humour, that in certain circumstances it contributes to that

that incongruity which is the basis of the comic, the precise nature of that incongruity requires close and careful examination. The temptation to see the Past Definite as already pedantic and archaic in the 17th century is so great that few can resist it; as if any Past Definite cropping up in everyday conversation would smack of the scholastic and cause the raising of a reasonable eyebrow; as if the knell of the spoken Past Definite had already rung.

In determining the precise nature of the incongruity of the Past Definite in certain comic contexts the value of the method adopted throughout this study is obvious. Anyone who labours through every example of the Past Definite in Rotrou, Corneille, Racine and Molière must be impressed with its vitality and ~~sustained~~ persistence, too impressed to define the essence of its incongruity in certain specific cases as depending on acquired qualities of pedantry and archaism.

On the other hand it is possible for the

the historian of language, dipping casually here and there, to slip into such a facile interpretation.

This would seem to have been the error of Dauzat in  
1.  
the following analysis:-

C'est au XVIIe. siècle que le prétérit donne les premiers signes de fléchissement. Dans la langue littéraire, il commence à prendre une valeur solennelle, indice d'une tendance à l'archaïsme. L'opposition est très nette dans les *Précieuses Ridicules* (sc.X) où Mascarille, après avoir parlé avec Jodelet dans le langage familier ("nous nous sommes vus tous deux dans l'occasion"; "notre connaissance s'est faite à l'armée") -- la règle du passé reculé n'était plus observée dans la langue parlée<sup>2</sup> -- se met à raconter ses exploits sur un ton emphatique: "Te souvient-il, vicomte, de cette demi-lune que nous emportâmes"... "j'y fus blessé"... "un coup de mousquet que je reçus."

The comic element in these examples is then, according to Dauzat, due to the archaic tendencies of the Past Definite. The conclusion is natural enough, particularly as the actual forms, nous emportâmes, j'y fus blessé, je reçus ... possess to the modern ear an immediate archaic quality, since they never pass our lips in conversation. Unfortunately the reactions of a modern ear have nothing to do with the precise nature of their incongruity at the time of their production on the French stage.

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1. loc. cit. (Etudes.)

2. Italics ours.

The analysis of Dauzat is so plausible that one is tempted to accept it and pass on; our method, however, is such that we must linger. And lingering, one is struck by one unsubstantiated statement in the above and one serious omission.

The rule of the remote past was no longer observed in familiar language, says Dauzat. Is this correct? He adduces no proof and the opposite happens to be true, assuming that the characters of Molière -- and the assumption is safe -- speak in an idiom close to the familiar.

We have already shown how in the dénouement of L'Avare the Past Definite deals with the remote events affecting the plot. Opening L'Étourdi, his first work, we come across the story of Trufaldin (IV, ii) which shows the same characteristic; in the following scene we have corroboration in ordinary conversation:

Trufaldin: Où vous a-t-il dit qu'il reçut la clarté?  
and again:-

Trufaldin: Où l'envoyai-je jeune ...?

In Le Dépit Amoureux (11, i.) Ascagne refers to the house

où passa mon bas âge ...

Indeed, if the Past Definite has not the connotation of remoteness in familiar conversation we are at a loss to account for the general tense pattern of Molière which is almost the same as that of Corneille as regards exposition and dénouement. In Molière there are no flagrant crimes committed by ordinary characters against the syntactical rules observed in Racine and Corneille. His usage is freer, his language closer to popular idiom, tenses may occasionally use a little more liberty, but all the time the accepted shape of classical syntax is still there. Could one have, for example, a clearer exposition of the twenty-four hour rule than the following:-

Alcmène: Dès hier en ces lieux vous vîntes sur le soir.

Amphitryon: Moi, je vins hier..

Alcmène: Sans doute; et dès devant l'aurore,

Vous vous en êtes retourné.

(Amphitryon, 11, ii.)

To say, in the face of such examples and of hosts of others that can be easily found, that the 'rule

'rule of the remote past was no longer observed in familiar language', is plainly absurd.

We feel that this statement was made to clear away a possible alternative explanation of the Past Definites, the first of which, unquoted by Dauzat -- and in familiar conversation -- might have suggested that the others followed as natural events in a story dealing with remote time. Here is the full relevant text:-

Notre connaissance s'est faite à l'armée: la première fois que nous nous vîmes, il commandait un régiment de cavalerie sur les galères de Malte.  
(Sc.xi.)

In other words, the expression 'la première fois', if we wish, is a full and sufficient reason for the Past Definites that follow, the common rule of contemporary usage with regard to remote time and the specific mention of a time word or its equivalent being taken into account.

It would be possible, therefore, to argue that the Past Definites in the mouth of Mascarille and Jodelet are without humour at all. Before arguing one thing or another let us consider again

again all the examples of the tense occurring in the play. They are:-

- 1) ..il faut que je vous die un impromptu que je fis hier chez
- 2) une duchesse de mes amis que je fus visiter.
- 3) la première fois que nous nous vîmes....
- 4) Te souvient-il, Vicomte, de cette demi-lune que nous emportâmes...
- 5) j'y fus blessé à la jambe...
- 6) .. c'est un coup de mousquet que je reçus...
- 7) Voici un autre coup qui me perça de part en part

The first two are evidently used without any humorous intent since the mention of 'hier' rules out any other tense. Since there is no possibility of a choice, there is no possible stylistic value in them. The remaining five tenses are those in which the Past Indefinite might have been employed. Unfortunately, even for them the choice would naturally incline towards the Past Definite, since they are preceded and introduced by 'la première fois' which specifically suggests remoteness and could account for the consistent Past Definites following. Among these, by the way, reference is made to the siege of Arras, an even more specific time expression which would incline the speakers

speakers towards the Past Definite.

We can deduce from this that if comedy exists in these Past Definites it is not broad obvious comedy such as we find when the Past Subjunctive is used, since whatever archaic tendencies the Past Definite may have had, the Past Subjunctive seems to have had in the 17th century to a much more marked degree. Dauzat is much more convincing on the latter tense:-<sup>1</sup>.

... dans la fameuse scène du sonnet, quand le prétentieux Oronte prend avec véhémence la défense de ses vers, il ne manque pas, pour impressionner son critique, de lui asséner un imparfait du subjonctif, du type le plus lourd et le plus pédant, en lui lançant son défi:

Je voudrais bien, pour voir, que, de votre manière,  
Vous en composassiez sur la même manière.

(Misanthrope, I, ii.)

We have a most interesting example of the Past Subjunctive in a humorous context in the *Précieuses Ridicules* too. It is such that one feels -- in spite of all caution -- that the tense contributes greatly to the humorous content:-

Voudriez-vous, faquins, que j'exposasse  
l'embonpoint de mes plumes aux inclémences de la  
saison pluvieuse, et que j'allasse imprimer mes  
souliers en boue?

(Sc. vii.)

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1. Ibid., p. 73.

That certain forms of the Past Subjunctive were amusing in themselves and were becoming comparatively rare in conversation, or at least difficult for ordinary folks to handle seems evident from two examples in the mouth of Thibaut, a porter, in Dancourt's one act play, 'Maison de Campagne'. Thibaut always speaks above his real intellectual or educational level. He says 'philosomies' for 'physionomies', 'haïssont' for 'haïssent' and, of course, 'biau' for 'beau'. He also says:-

Vous m'avez baillé ordre que je ne laisserie entrer personne dans la maison.....

and

Il ne voulait pas non plus qu'en l'aimât  
(Sc.iv.)

These two examples of the possible comic use of the Past Subjunctive are relevant to our examination of the possible comic content of the Past Definite. A distinction must be made between the two tenses: the Past Subjunctive from its very sound, its cumbrousness and its rarity was liable to comic misuse.

Does the Past Definite also possess this quality? Only in so far as its endings present difficulty to the untutored mind, as for example, in the well known passage from Molière:-

Un petit enfant de douze ans se laissait choir du haut d'un clocher, de quoi il eut la tête, les jambes et les bras cassés; et vous, avec je ne sais quel onguent, vous fîtes qu'aussitôt il se relevit sur ses pieds et s'en fut jouer à la fossette.  
(Le Médecin malgré lui, I, v.)

On this plane, the difficulty of conjugation, the Past Definite and the Past Subjunctive meet:-  
J'ai-s-eu peur, franchement, que ça l'envoyât à pâtres.  
says Thibaut in the same play later on, maintaining the same comic element as we see in the Past Definites: the rough inadequacy of the peasant mind in the face of high syntax and grammar.

But the Past Definite lacks the rich syllabification of the Past Subjunctive and is of infinitely greater occurrence, being associated with accomplished fact. It may be humorous when its conjugation confuses the peasant, but do its ordinary forms, in the 17th century, particularly in the first and second person, evoke even the slightest ripple of amusement?

The point is worth looking into. Was there any trace of desuetude, at that time, in certain specific endings of the tense?

Stephen Ullmann has dealt with this question at some length. While seeming to accept that some of the forms of the Past Definite are 'heavily undermined' he goes on to show that all forms and all persons of the tense are common throughout Racine, who seems to use them without any reluctance whatsoever. He mentions 'prîtes naissance', 'reçûtes le jour', 'portâtes', 'fûtes', 'sûtes', 'jurâmes', etc., and concludes:-<sup>1</sup>.

As the above examples indicate, no stylistic connotation attaches to these forms, although the twentieth century reader finds it hard not to project some into them. In most cases there was, indeed, no alternative form Racine could have used, short of infringing the rules or altering the whole discourse.....

In this relation one thinks naturally of the much quoted example from *Candide*:-

Je vous dirai tout cela, répliqua la dame;  
mais il faut auparavant que vous m'appreniez tout  
ce qui vous est arrivé depuis le baiser innocent  
que vous me donnâtes, et les coups de pied que vous  
reçûtes.

(Voltaire, *Candide*, Ch.VII)

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1. Article of Origin, pp. 45-46.

and of the examples offered by Stephen Ullmann from Maurice Donnay's 'Un Homme Léger':

'Tout y est là-dedans?' -- 'Cinq cents bouquets'. --  
'Vous les comptâtes?'

That the passage from *Candide* has as strong a comic effect as the 'comptâtes' in the modern play is very doubtful, the latter obviously exploiting the fact that no one now says 'comptâtes', whereas in Voltaire's time, under certain circumstances, spoken language would still demand it.

Considering the passage from *Candide* again, one is inclined to think that any humour created by the change to the Past Definite may belong rather to the general atmosphere of the book than to the specific isolated tenses. Not least among the attractions of that remarkable emanation of the French satiric mind is the recurrent 'flash-backs' in which the various victims of this best of all worlds recount the disasters which overtook them when they were absent from each other. The reversion to the Past Definite in the middle of a conversation in which the Past Indefinite predominates is like a signal heralding another amusing retracing of

X

of catastrophic event, the comedy of which is emphasised as we remember previous similar 'flash-backs', and reinforced by the familiar seriousness of the tense itself, the tense of history, of objective incontrovertible fact.

That is, the humour of the passage quoted from *Candide* is not the same as that obtained from the 'comptâtes' of Maurice Donnay. It does not consist in the howling incongruity of the spoken '-âtes'.<sup>1</sup> It is our task to determine<sup>if</sup> the contrast between the dignity of the Past Definite and the 'coups de pied' is so very obvious even at the time of Voltaire. For Cunégonde, telling her story in the following chapter, states a series of events in the Past Definite, among which an Anterior, which may now seem humorous,

Quand vous eûtes été fessé

scarcely seems to stand out as specially comic.

The conclusion we must come to as regards the potential incongruity of the Past Tense, apart from its use in the mouth of the peasant with its set of

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1. A casual glance into *Gil Blas* gives the example:-

'celui que vous chassâtes hier'. (Book III, Ch. III)

of false standardised endings, is that the actual form of the tense however much it may be tending towards gradual spoken desuetude is not yet so much of an oddity as to arouse amusement in ordinary conversation.

A cursory examination of forms used by Molière corroborates this:-

Puisque ce n'est que d'hier que vous n'en fîtes part.  
(L'Ecole des Maris, 11, vii.)

Vous me grondâtes l'autre jour, de lui avoir dit que vous y étiez.  
(La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes, Sc.iv)

Et ne craignez-vous rien, Monsieur, de la mort de ce commandeur que vous tuâtes il y a six mois?  
(Dom Juan, 1, ii.)

..c'est le tombeau que le Commandeur faisait faire lorsque vous le tuâtes.  
(Ibid., 111, v.)

Il y a trois semaines que vous m'envoyâtes.....  
(Les Fourberies de Scapin, 11, iii)

These examples are taken from casual remarks of subsidiary characters, not telling a story, but carrying on a conversation.

The most we dare say then, as regards the possible oddity of the Past Definite, is that, where it is used in a sustained fashion with its more unusual endings in a context whose basis is incongruity, the effect may be humorous; this effect does not, however, depend on the

the forms, so much as on the fact that the less usual forms tend to emphasise the presence of the tense and reinforce its atmosphere; but it is essentially the atmosphere of the Past Definite, its connection with the factual, the serious, the heroic and the epic that by sudden juxtaposition with the terre à terre produces that fundamental incongruity which is the essence of humour.

The most concise example we can offer is from Molière's Monsieur de Pourceaugnac in an ironical exchange of compliments between Nérine and Sbrigani:-

Nérine: Madame, voilà un illustre; votre affaire ne pouvait être mise en de meilleures mains, et c'est le héros de notre siècle pour les exploits dont il s'agit: un homme qui, vingt fois en sa vie, pour servir ses amis, a généreusement affronté les galères, qui, au péril de ses bras, et de ses épaules, sait mettre noblement à fin les aventures les plus difficiles; et qui, tel que vous le voyez, est exilé de son pays pour je ne sais combien d'actions honorables qu'il a généreusement entreprises.

(1, ii.)

The time of Nérine's words - they represent the complément of a femme d'intrigue to an homme d'intrigue but have a cutting edge to them - calls for a riposte. Sbrigani plays the Past Definite as a trump card that both strengthens his irony and outdoes - according to true French politeness - the compliment he has received:-

Sbrigani: Je suis confus des louanges dont vous m'honorez, et je pourrais vous en donner, avec plus de justice, sur les merveilles de votre vie; et principalement sur la gloire que vous acquîtes, lorsque, avec tant d'honnêteté, vous pipâtes au jeu, pour douze mille écus, ce jeune seigneur étranger que l'on mena chez vous; lorsque vous fîtes galamment ce faux contrat qui ruina toute une famille; lorsque, avec tant de grandeur d'âme, vous sûtes suer le dépôt qu'on vous avait confié; et que si généreusement on vous vit prêter votre témoignage à faire pendre ces deux personnages qui ne l'avaient pas mérité.

There is no intrinsic humour in such verbal forms as pipâtes and sûtes. But the verb 'piper' used in the Past Definite makes with 'jeu' a fundamental contrast to the ambitious and serious sound of the opening words and to the normal serious associations of the tense. The comic incongruity extends over the whole speech and exists in the realm of sustained tone.

Indeed, the comic value of the tense depends on its associations, not on its so-called archaism. The masquerading valets in the *Précieuses Ridicules*, at the moment of using the Past Definites, are speaking in the character of seasoned military men. It is probable that the more pompous, perhaps the normal well-born warrior, would use the same tense -- the tense, incidentally of written war report -- in speaking of their exploits. To what do the

the military reminiscences of Mascarille and Jodelet contribute? Not so much, surely, to preciosity as to convincing the 'précieuses' of their credentials as marquis and vicomte.

Specifically then, Dauzat may be correct in his conclusions as regards the growing tendency of the tense towards solemnity and dignity. But as it does not possess these qualities in ordinary casual speech, we must consider these qualities as being natural attributes of the tense in certain definite contexts. Here, in the *Précieuses Ridicules*, the context is that of military affairs. The humour and incongruity of the tenses in the mouths of the valets consists in the contrast between the airs they give themselves and the rascals we know them to be, plus the gullibility of the young ladies who accept them at their face value.

Stephen Ullmann, whose main work has been concerned with tragedy, observed a remarkable note of caution when dealing with *Les Plaideurs*. Some of the points he raises must be quoted in full:-

.. careful analysis of the few examples found in the play hardly bears out the assumption of a nuance of pedantry, with the attendant stylistic possibili-

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1. Article of Origin, pp. 45-46.

possibilities. True, two of these are uttered by the judge (quitta, rapporta; l, iv.), and three by Chicaneau with a distinctly pedantic connotation in wording and construction:

Au travers d'un mien pré certain ânon passa,  
S'y vautra, non sans faire un notable dommage,  
Dont je formai ma plainte au juge du village. (l, iii)

L'Intimé uses a particularly significant form when pleading on behalf of the puppies in the mock trial:

rendez-nous notre père;  
Notre père par qui nous fumes engendrés (lll, iii.)

To a modern reader, this is an obvious case of what Bally has termed 'effet d'évocation d'un milieu'; and it would be difficult to claim that such an intention, or at least such a connotation was totally alien to the linguistic consciousness of Racine and his generation. It would certainly be in line with the general tone of L'Intimé's speech, with its Latinisms, archaisms ('icelai Citron'), and involved phraseology.

On the other hand, we see Léandre, a non-comic character, using a Past Definite without any stylistic purpose, in a highly colloquial aside:

Que de fous! Je ne fus jamais à telle fête (ll. xii)

And even Petit-Jean, the porter, employs prit and fit in his most informal soliloquy in the first scene of the play. These considerations cast some doubt on the note of pedantry attributable to this tense in contexts otherwise pedantic and where they would evidently carry that connotation in contemporary comedy. On the whole, the evidence is too scanty to draw any conclusions regarding comic usage. A thorough analysis of Molière's practice would no doubt throw more light on the problem.

Now that we have carried out this analysis the above becomes invaluable. Another observer obviously was

was faced by the same difficulty as we experienced: to assume that the Past Definite was automatically pedantic discounted its frequent and casual usage in ordinary speech. His reference to Bally's phrase 'effet d'évocation d'un milieu' is extremely helpful, for there seems little doubt that the essential humour of the Past Definites in *Les Plaideurs* is concerned with its mock-legal atmosphere, the serious tone of the law court invoked in relation to trivialities. Once again it is a question of the Past Definite's associations rather than its own intrinsic quality. The tense's long association with the law, the language of lawyers etc., is seen to-day in newspapers which do still sometimes report factual evidence as regards the past of accused and witnesses in the Past Definite.

But, if we are to come to anything like a sound conclusion on this subject, we must swiftly analyse the contexts which indicate some tendency to humorous tone, even though this may take considerable space and time.

In Rotrou's voluminous theatre we find only one passage in which one can glimpse a slightly comic nuance. It occurs in '*La Bague de l'Oubli*' in the

the mouth of Fabrice the one really comic character in this so-called comedy. Fabrice, wishing to profit financially by the evident madness of the king who is under the spell of the magic ring, indulges him when questioned on his genealogy:-

J'aurai bien de la peine à répondre à ce point.  
Pour mon père, déjà je ne le connais point;  
Et d'un autre côté, ma mère est si connue,  
Que tous les crocheteurs la montrent par la rue.  
Mais c'est trop différer, faisons ce qui lui plaît:  
Que ne croira-t-il point, insensé comme il est?  
Sire, tous les auteurs parlent de ces Fabrices  
De qui Rome a tiré de si nobles services:  
Un seul de mes aïeux, sans peine et sans rival,  
Conquit toute l'Espagne, et défit Annibal.  
Son fils, pour des exploits que ne fit jamais homme,  
Parut si glorieux dans un marché de Rome,  
Qu'il se vit, au milieu de mille bataillons,  
Élevé de quatorze ou de quinze échelons:  
Ah! qu'un de ses enfants s'est acquis de mémoire,  
Et combien de Césars ont envié sa gloire!  
Lui seul en son bas âge, a défait plus de rois  
Que ni Roland sans peur, ni qu'Oger le Danois:  
Que mon père, son fils, a fait de belles choses,  
Et qu'il en reste parlé dans les métamorphoses!  
En ses moindres efforts, son bras plus que divin  
Répandit plus de sang que je ne bois de vin.

(1V, iv.)

Now, while at first glance the Past Definites in the above are not numerous and are open to various interpretations we have this advantage that we know the passage to be comically intended. As in the *Précieuses Ridicules*, they are preceded by the Past Indefinite; they occur, with the exception of the

the last one, in fairly consistent pattern, as if with deliberate intent.

There are two possible explanations:-

- 1) There is nothing added to the humour of the passage by them. They merely occur in relation to the remotest ancestors on the family tree. In this case the last Past Definite is a mere lapse or, in the careless style of Rotrou, represents a word fitting more easily into the syllabic pattern of the alexandrine.
- 2) The most illustrious of his ancestors require a more emphatic -- not to say bombastic -- verbal vehicle. In which case the contrast between his ancestor's ability to shed blood and his own capacity for wine-bibbing can be similarly explained.

Once again the difficulty in analysing the precise qualities and function of the Past Definite in a humorous context is caused by the fact that the 20th century reader cannot be sure that he has rid himself of his preconceived ideas on the obsolescence of the tense. One must, as a safeguard take particular note -- and this is more typical of

of Rotrou than of any other of our dramatists -- of the comparative ease with which he changes from the Indefinite to Definite and back again. (It is remarkable that most historians of language see the complete equivalence of the two tenses as a final stage, whereas it is more likely, as in Rotrou, to be an intermediate stage during which the particular and separate virtue of neither has been fully clarified.)

Before final conclusions are reached it would be wiser to pass on taking each humorous reference as it appears, to discover if, with the changing years, any inherent incongruity of the Past Definite becomes more apparent. Before leaving our one example from Rotrou, since we have raised the question of bombastic use, it behoves us to mention that two of his plays in which the matamore type appears <sup>1</sup>. show no inclination to exploit the spoken Past Definite in the service of bombastic utterance.

The very scarcity of Past Definites in humorous context that we note in Rotrou is in itself eloquent. If the tense was destined to be an ally of humour it has not yet declared itself openly.

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1. Rosaran in Agésilan de Colchos and Émile in Amélie.

The first example we find in Corneille of a passage in which the Past Definite may be allied to humour is in L'Illusion and, appropriately enough, in the mouth of Matamore. It concerns a conceit, bombastic in tone, in which he tells of his success being such with the ladies that even the sun fell in love with him. Undoubtedly the humorous content is weak and the conceit is written for the sake of an impossible pun:-

... Au milieu de ma chambre à m'offrir ses beautés.  
Elle y perdit son temps, elle y perdit ses larmes,  
Mon coeur fut insensible à ses plus puissants charmes;  
Et tout ce qu'elle obtint pour son frivole amour  
Fut un ordre précis d'aller rendre le jour.  
(ll, ii.)

That this type of conceit is meant humorously and matches the character of Matamore is obvious, that the Past Definites it contains do not present, in isolation, any comic quality is equally so. The reason for the use of the tense here seems again to be that Matamore's imagination has entered one of the realms of Past Definite usage, in this case the poetic.

The association between poetry and the Past Definite is obvious. Apart from its long service in the epic genre in particular, poetry, like

like mythology, is another and higher plane of experience. Further, as we have stated already, the smaller bulk, the concentration of the tense, its ability to fit comfortably in the hemistiche of the alexandrine, and its suitability for contrast within the line, are obvious.

In the above words of Matamore, then, we have the same phenomenon as in our previous references, a few Past Definites, used consistently in a certain atmosphere which affords obvious incongruity with reality around it.

Perhaps this appears most clearly in Molière's *Princesse d'Élide* in the second Intermède in a brief poetic flight by Moron, a comic court character:-

Philis est l'objet charmant  
Qui tient mon coeur à l'attache;  
Et je devins son amant  
La voyant traire une vache.  
(Act 11)

The fact that the intermèdes are mostly in prose silhouettes this piece of humorous verse the keynote of which is parody and sheer burlesque. Once more, the essence of the comic content of these lines lies

lies not in the fact that the Past Definite is archaic, but in the incongruous interlocking of two opposing planes of expression -- the poetic and the terre à terre. As one would expect, the comic note in Molière is much clearer and stronger than any example we have yet quoted. Thinking back to the passage in *Candide*, about which we have so far maintained an extreme caution, we should now be inclined to see in it an obvious humorous content: the contrast of a Past Definite the verbal vehicle of the serious story and a sordid detail of daily life.

We are still loath, however, to accept this usage as absolutely clear in the 17th century. Since the possibility of a comic use is still restricted to certain categories of thought and vocabulary we see it as an emerging phenomenon, met with seldom, indicative that the association of the Past Definite with the nobler plane of human experience, is becoming more evident as it is withdrawn from the recent and middle past -- which are mainly spoken pasts -- and clings to the remote which is more often written and more often in contact with fact and higher significance.

To return to Moron, who is really a skilful version of the Matamore type, more credible and real, we find in his mouth a further clear indication of

of how the Past Definite could serve the writer of comedy. The passage expresses the self-justification of Moron who has just got the better of a wild boar by running away from it:-

Je suis votre valet et j'aime mieux qu'on dise:  
"C'est ici qu'en fuyant, sans se faire prier,  
Moron sauva ses jours du fureur d'un sanglier",  
Que si l'on disait: "Voilà l'illustre place  
Où le brave Moron, d'une héroïque audace,  
Affrontant d'un sanglier l'impérieux effort,  
Par un coup de ses dents vit terminer son sort."  
(1, ii.)

Now here we can be in no doubt whatsoever that, since the events referred to occurred but a few moments ago, Moron's Past Definites evoke comically the idea of the monumental plaque on which the Past Definite -- de rigueur because the plaque is raised over the dead -- and the apt poetic epitaph traditionally figured. The humour of his words has nothing to do with the fact that he is speaking Past Definites instead of Past Indefinites; it lies in the fact that he is speaking a certain type of Past Definite, removing it from its solemn written or carved environment, and putting it in close spoken proximity to his own poltroonery. The

The humour and incongruity are all of tone and inflexion of voice, behind which lingers the image of the monumental plaque and the hero's tomb.

But we must concern ourselves again with Corneille's Matamore to assess in how far the Past Definite has in Corneille's time associated itself with bombast. The scene in which Clindor draws out Matamore on his deeds in love and war offers the clearest guide to this question. At first glance there seems some plausibility in the assumption that the Past Definite contributes to the bombastic, ambitious tone of Matamore. He ventures into the Past Definite when mentioning two of his conquests in love:-

De passion pour moi deux sultanes troublèrent;  
Deux autres, pour me voir, du sérail s'échappèrent:  
J'en fus mal quelque temps avec le Grand Seigneur.  
(11, ii.)

But there is no heavy and impressive concentration of the tense. Six further examples in some thirty lines precede the conceit we have mentioned above. After the conceit he continues with his experiences using a Past Definite here and there consistently. His recital draws to a close and what do we find? Rather a remarkable phenomenon. He returns to the Past

Past Indefinite which deals with his last two great exploits. Here are the lines:-

...Mais chez les Africains,  
Partout où j'ai trouvé des rois un peu trop vains,  
J'ai détruit les pays pour punir leurs monarques,  
Et leurs vastes déserts en sont de bonnes marques:  
Ces grands sables qu'à peine on passe sans horreur,  
Sont d'assez beaux effets de ma juste fureur.

It has been suggested by Dauzat, as we have seen, that the use of the tense with a remote connotation had passed out of ordinary conversation in the 17th century. How can we explain these last two Past  
Definites unless as proving that the stories of  
Matamore, dealing with his past, remote and recent, as they draw to an end, that is, as they approach present time, the time of the stage drama, require the help of the Past Indefinite as a bridge between them and it? It seems obvious that the remoteness of the tense, its existence on a different plane, looms larger than any bombastic quality it possesses. Its quality of separateness from the present is self-evident. Corneille could have written: je trouvais, je détruisis, with only one minor syllabic adjustment to the alexandrine. But the play is waiting in the next words of Clindor:

im-2/h

Revenons à l'amour; voici votre maîtresse.

To leave two Past Definites in immediate proximity to such a line would create something of a hiatus in the flow of time.

An important detail in relation to the bombastic is that the braggart type, the matamore, is the type that tells stories. The stories told here by Corneille's Matamore, told by any other character, would still be in the Past Definite and would change, towards their completion and integration in present time, into the Past Indefinite.

The role of Matamore in the Illusion Comique does not supply us with conclusive evidence. True it is a bombastic role and is associated with story-telling, with the Past Definite, that is, since the stories of braggarts are always too remote in time to be easily checked. Frequent repetition of such stories in such roles could possibly increase the bombastic associations of the tense. So far we have not found the vein of the comic extensively exploited. Indeed, the role of Matamore seems to have palled quickly on the French theatre-goer. Molière abandons him completely as a type and disperses his qualities more thinly through a series of more human and natural comic characters.

Our last reference to humorous usage in Corneille duplicates the humour of Moron on the occasion of his cowardly flight from the wild boar: the humour of the monumental plaque or the oraison funèbre. It occurs in the Suite du Menteur and refers to the original and inimitable liar:-

C'était en menterie un auteur très-célèbre,  
Qui sut y raffiner de si digne façon,  
Qu'aux maîtres du métier il en eût fait leçon;  
Et qui tant qu'il vécut, sans craindre aucune risqué,  
Aux plus forts d'après lui put donner quinze et bisque.  
(1, vi.)

The humorous intent is evident in these lines; it depends, as in Moron's imagined epitaph, on anti-climax, the 'quinze et bisque' supplying the sudden fall of tone from the ambitious to the laughable. Again, it is largely a question of the tone of the passage, rather than on the potent and patent nobility of the three Past Definites.

Incidentally, Le Menteur and its Suite corroborate what we have said about Matamore. Corneille's comical liar is like him a story-teller essentially. The total number of Past Definites in these two plays is rather high because of the number of anecdotes involved. Le Menteur, in spite of the number of Past Definites in his mouth is scarcely a bombastic

bombastic character, for the bombastic character, of the Matamore species or the valets in the *Précieuses Ridicules*, lacks his savoir faire and finesse.

It is so easy to see bombast in the Past Definite if one looks at its use in the 17th century with the eyes of the 20th. One pauses at once at the words of *La Rapière*, the typical spadassin, in *Le Dépit Amoureux* of Molière:-

Vous avez su le tour que lui fit la justice;  
Il mourut en César, et lui cassant les os,  
Le bourreau ne lui put faire lâcher deux mots.  
(V, iii)

*La Rapière*, offering the service of his sword to *Valère*, is speaking of a former comrade. His tone is bombastic and the brief reference demands a Past Definite or two. But again, the bombastic quality is in the whole reference and not in the isolated tense. It is the 'en César' etc., which makes the bombastic note clear.

With reference to Moron, Cliton in *La Suite du Menteur* and these words of *La Rapière*, there is a point that must be made:- we have shown how in tragedy, nine times out of ten, reference, even within the

the twenty-four hour limit, to someone dead demands the Past Definite. There is, therefore, a sound syntactical reason for the Past Definites used in relation to death.

This is not to say that the Past Definites are entirely devoid of humorous connotation. For it is true to say that deaths worth talking about do not appear in comedy. They are, however the stuff of tragedy, particularly of classical tragedy in which the heroes die off-stage. It is just possible that in this matter we see one of the most common resources of stage comedy: the mimicking of stage-tragedy.<sup>1</sup> To express it better, the adoption of the tragic tone. To assess accurately in how far this depended on the Past Definites involved one would have to recreate the passages we have discussed on some time-machine and hear the actual inflexion of voice of the 17th century actor. That there is, however, in them a comic 'emphase' is fairly obvious. That they contain consistent Past Definites is a fact. That another tense, the Past Indefinite, could have taken their place is highly doubtful.

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1. One thinks of the line which concludes the second act of L'École des Femmes:-

Arnophe:-

C'est assez,

Je suis maître, je parle: allez, obéissez.

It was taken from Sertorius performed the same year in the Théâtre du Marais and was, no doubt, a mischievous mingling of tragic and comic tone.

This may seem rather a negative verdict; but the humorous passages in which the Past Definite figures are so scarce, the tense itself is so frequently employed on the lips of the humble and the great throughout our dramatists for ordinary and extraordinary circumstance unconnected with the comic that negativity seems preferable to that positivity which is often mere wish-fulfilment.

Comic passages do occur in which it is obvious that the Past Definite has nothing to do with the amusement of audience, as for example in the mouth of Maître Jacques in Molière's L'Avare:-

.....Celui-là conte qu'une fois vous fîtes assigner le chat d'un de vos voisins, pour vous avoir mangé un reste d'un gigot de mouton. Celui-ci, que l'on vous surprit une nuit, en venant dérober vous-même l'avoine de vos chevaux; et que votre cocher, qui était celui d'avant moi, vous donna dans l'obscurité je ne sais combien de coups de bâton, dont vous ne voulûtes rien dire.

(111, 1)

The operative words in Maître Jacques' story are: conte, une fois and his reference to the coachman, his predecessor. No other tense was possible according to accepted usage.

There is only one further comic example that we can think of in Molière. Sganarelle is telling Dom

Dom Juan a story:-

Il y avait un homme qui, depuis six jours, était à l'agonie; on ne savait plus que lui ordonner, et tous les remèdes ne faisant rien, on s'avisa à la fin de lui donner de l'émétique.

Dom Juan: Il réchappa, n'est-ce pas?

Sganarelle: Il mourut.

(111, i)

The Past Definites are justified by the time words 'il n'y a pas trois semaines' which precede the story. The comic effect depends on anti-climax, laconic objectivity and condensation.

Reviewing all these examples, and we can find no more in our dramatists, in which there is some suggestion of the comic, it is pardonable if one is tempted to assume an attitude of diffidence. In the less sober light of to-day the family photograph of thirty years ago often evokes a smile, mild, sometimes uncontrollable, laughter. At the time of its taking it was a solemn genealogical record made for posterity. So it is with the Past Definite. The person who speaks Past Definites to-day resembles the princess in the fairy-tale out of whose mouth popped a frog every time she opened it.

But in the 17th Century the tense was still spoken, still alive, still in contact with reality ideal or sordid.

It is vital then in a final assessment of the comic possibilities of this tense at the time of our four dramatists to maintain strict objectivity.

We can say that there would appear to be in certain contexts -- we have quoted the military, the legal and the poetic -- a specific association of the Past Definite with a higher plane of thought. This association makes possible, by a sudden fall into the ridiculous or the prosaic, an incongruous contrast which will provoke amusement. The comic element involved is essentially one of tone and has nothing to do with the archaism of the verbal forms.

In this relation it would be honest to say that the emerging connotation of solemnity observed by Dauzat may well be a fact; but it is our opinion that this connotation is only evident in certain restricted contexts. We have seen how Dauzat in order to account for this has said that the connotation of remoteness had disappeared from ordinary conversation.

The reverse, as we have said, seems to us to be the truth. The Past Definite was driven from the very recent and middle past by the Perfect.

Its association with remoteness was thus emphasised. Association with the remote, the historic, the immutable and memorable event was bound in the long run, though perhaps not so soon or so obviously as he imagines, to conjure up dignity and solemnity as by-products.

There are several points which strike us in the examples we have examined. Firstly, they are by no means numerous. Secondly, where humour is obvious, they do not involve more than two or three Past Definites. It is probable that the truly serious connotation of the tense was such that a higher concentration would have defeated any comic intention on the author's part and raised the passage to the level of a serious developed story or have appeared overdone.

It may seem strange to say that, having examined the Past Definite for signs of the comic, we come away impressed with its fundamental connection with objectivity, truth and high seriousness.

It appears even stranger when it is realised that Rotrou's Fabrice, Corneille's Menteur and Matamore, and Molière's marquis and vicomte are all liars.

Fabrice could have retraced his family tree as he began it, in the Past Indefinite. Menteur and Matamore could have recounted their deeds in the Past Indefinite since they belonged to the middle past. The valets could have spoken in the same tense of the siege of Arras without infringing any rule. But the liar borrows the language of objective authenticity, as he borrows the mannerisms of the honest man, looking you straight in the eye.

In this fundamental fact lies perhaps the gist of the matter. If there appears in their words a certain 'emphase' it is the borrowed emphasis of truth which in their mouths, is out of place, incongruous -- and comic in tone.

But only in tone, as with the judge in *Les Plaideurs* and Molière's *Moron*.

## Chapter IV.

### The Role and Function of the Past Indefinite.

#### I) A Dramatic Past.

(Numerical superiority over the Past Definite -- immediate relevance of Past Indefinite to stage plot -- lack of emphasis and enchainement -- spontaneity -- the dramatist's past -- the death of Pyrrhus -- the tense of casual statement -- even scatter and distribution -- contrast with that of Past Definite -- the memories of Andromaque -- vibration in the present -- dramatic positivity of the Past Indefinite.)

#### II) Limitations of the Past Indefinite.

(Failure in sustained narration -- its role in peripeteia -- weakness in the alexandrine line -- summary report -- the fait accompli: Oreste and L'Etranger -- la Peste -- failure to outgrow its ideal origins.)

#### III) The Past Indefinite and Le Rêve d'Athalie.

(Contrast with the récit du Cid -- the requirements of dramatic structure -- the analysis of Stephen Ullmann -- extension and completion of his opinions -- dramatic dialogue not language in suspension -- authority of our own analysis, linguistically and aesthetically.)

(1)

A Dramatic Past

It is not a simple task to assess briefly and exactly the usage which governs the appearance of the Past Indefinite in classical drama. The Past Definite, from its very form which is associated with the comparatively rare Past Subjunctive, is seen almost in silhouette. It is often found in concentration when a series of remoter events has to be evoked and in connection with certain emotive backgrounds, since it possesses, as we have seen, distinct contextual associations.

The Past Indefinite is spread evenly throughout the dramatic text and occurs more often. A quick count of four plays gives us the following table of comparison:-

	Past Definites	Past Indefinites
Rodogune(Corneille,1644)	..... 91	..... 140
Saint Genest(Rotrou,1646)	..... 56	..... 182
Andromaque(Racine, 1667)	..... 66	..... 214
Amphitryon(Molière,1668)	..... 52	..... 133

It will be seen at once that the tenses share the past event almost on a fixed ratio which favours the Past Indefinite.

There are two mechanical reasons for this. The Past Indefinite is part of a whole analytical system which combines the Past Participle with the various tenses of avoir and être. More significantly, as regards drama, the twenty-four hour rule of grammar combines with that affecting the theatre to give the Past Indefinite a monopoly of all past events happening on- and off-stage.

A third, more fundamental, reason is simply this that, since the Past Indefinite reports events in the light of their association with present time, it is in essence more dramatic than the Past Definite.

All these factors have no doubt contributed to Vossler's impression that it was through drama that the tense penetrated into literature.

The Past Definite then may deal with past remote truth, the Past Indefinite, on the other hand records the past as the immediate source of further events about to happen.

Corneille's *Rodogune* provides a suitable example of what is meant. The long laborious exposition in Act 1 is placed in Scenes 1 and 4 in the mouths of Laonice and Timagène. The distant complicated springs of the play's action are dealt with in long speeches in which Past Definites accumulate. So long is this exposition

exposition that Corneille skilfully inserts two scenes in its middle to keep the play alive. Scene 4 must complete it and merge it with the plot of the play.

In the latter scene the story is taken up again by five Past Definites, followed by a score of Historic Presents. Finally the Past Indefinite summarises the outcome of all the events recounted, summarises, that is, the immediate plot of the play:-

La Reine de l'Egypte a rappelé nos princes  
Pour remettre à l'aîné son trône et ses provinces.  
Rodogune a paru, sortant de sa prison,  
Comme un soleil levant dessus notre horizon.  
Le Parthe a décampé, pressé par d'autres guerres  
Contre l'Arménien qui ravage ses terres;  
D'un ennemi cruel il s'est fait notre appui:  
La paix finit la haine, et pour comble aujourd'hui,  
Dois-je dire de bonne ou de mauvaise fortune?  
Nos deux princes tous deux adorent Rodogune.

Six lines more conclude the scene and the drama proper opens with the entrance of Rodogune. When we say that the Past Indefinite is a dramatic tense and the Past Definite by implication undramatic we do not mean that the tense produces suspense and climax in a general sense, but that the tense is devoted to all that has immediate dramatic relevance in the stage play. Could there be a more succinct statement of the essential plot of Rodogune than is contained in

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in the above ten lines? In contrast, the numerous Past  
Definites which precede these lines have served to  
conjure up an atmosphere - the atmosphere consequent  
upon the entanglement of conflicting wills in the remoter  
past - of which the details ( and their very number  
determines this) put too great a strain on the memory  
to remain in the forefront of the spectator's conscious-  
ness. With the four Past Indefinites quoted the  
spectator awakens and the play begins.

And yet in a rappelé, a paru, a décampé, s'est fait,  
there is a lack of emphase. They have the quality of  
disjointed, almost casual statement. They record  
events as they have happened, in their first freshness,  
unclassified by a critical mind. None of the events  
they register is seen as an immediate consequence of the  
event preceding. There is a complete absence of  
logical <sup>^</sup>enchaînement.

Each event becomes in this way a potential surprise  
with immediate consequences for the present. A story  
told in Past Indefinite lacks therefore the texture and

and arrangement of the story skilfully graded towards climax in the past.

Is it not therefore fitting to refer to the Past Indefinite as the dramatist's past? For it is implicit in the nature of drama that though a story lies behind the plot it must not bear the direct imprint of the author's hand, but must unfold itself according to an interplay of wills and emotions which, however haphazard in appearance -- like life itself --, moves towards climax and assumes dramatic pattern.

In the famous scene of the last act of Andromaque in which Oreste tells of the death of Pyrrhus there are close on thirty Past Indefinites. The tense is here de rigueur since the events narrated have happened a moment before. Now in essence this scene tells the story of the death of Pyrrhus. One might anticipate a gradation of event culminating in a death worthy the ~~son~~ of Achilles. But the opposite result has to be achieved. There is to be no heroic climax. The details of the assassination roll from the mouth of Oreste precisely as

as his disordered mind remembers them to have happened. Each one is recounted with that loquacity and absence of tact that accompany an uneasy conscience. In effect the story is badly told -- even as Cléone's previous account of the wedding procession -- because the object at this point in the play is not to tell the story well, but to tell it in such a way that Hermione will be driven over the brink of sanity and morally disintegrate.

And when she gasps in horror:-

Qu'ont-ils fait?

Does Oreste recoil, realising the gulf that he has created between the princess and himself? No, he presses on to further sordid details!

The climax of the story of the death of Pyrrhus does not lie in the past but in the present. Its details are not to be presented with clarity and objectivity. They bear the haphazard mark of the recent and crowded day; but as a whole they create a new situation and a last dynamic climax outwith themselves.....

What of the tense in its lesser moments? The very qualities we have outlined make it the tense of every casual and recent event, of every event which is more significant in its reverberation than in itself.

Therein lies the explanation of the fact that the Past Indefinite shows a comparatively even 'spread' throughout the plays we have examined. In the four plays in which we made a quick approximate count the following is the distribution of Past Indefinites in each act:-

	<u>Act 1</u>	<u>Act 11</u>	<u>Act 111</u>	<u>Act 1V</u>	<u>Act V</u>
Rodogune	25	26	15	36	38
Saint Genest	30	26	48	47	31
Andromaque	43	42	33	35	61
Amphitryon	36	72	25		

Leaving out Amphitryon which has for us the disadvantage of having three acts instead of five the following figures are available for the Past Definite:-

	<u>Act 1</u>	<u>Act 11</u>	<u>Act 111</u>	<u>Act 1V</u>	<u>Act V</u>
Rodogune	33	48	6	1	3
Saint Genest	18	12	22	4	0
Andromaque	39	2	12	11	2

An important fact at once emerges -- and this is borne out by the exhaustive counts of frequency to be presented later -- the first act of any classical play is likely to contain a large number of Past Definites, the last act few. Although only three five-act plays have been examined with a view to checking the corresponding frequency of the Past Indefinite the figures obtained confirm an impression already fixed in our mind:- there is no obvious sign of the Past Indefinite performing a specific role at any particular point in the presentation of drama. Its usage does not sag or soar. It is as strong in the last act as in the first.

It is certainly more necessary to classical drama than the Past Definite, if numbers have any significance. Those who are tempted, however, to award it complete equivalence with the Past Definite should ask themselves why the distribution of the two tenses is so different. It seems evident that the impact of events outwith the twenty-four hour limit will be greater on the first act than on any other and therefore demand a high number of Past Definites at the opening of any play. But it is equally evident that the connotation of remoteness possessed by the Past Definite has most to do with this phenomenon, for it is in the first act that the remote springs of the play's action are likely to be tapped.

In drama, however, -- as in life -- the manner in which the Past Definite presents the remote event has a serious disability. An event recorded in the older tense exists on a plane of time parallel to that of the present and therefore intersecting the latter at no point. Under these circumstances the Past Indefinite is obliged to reach back into the past and establish where necessary its dramatic vibration in the present.

That is, the Past Indefinite has an important function in relation to remote, as well as recent, time.

To appreciate what is meant by the term 'dramatic vibration' one has only to consider an obvious characteristic of the technique of exposition in classical drama: the long speeches in which Past Definites follow hard and fast on each other are most often found in scenes in which the confidant takes up considerable stage room. Such scenes may be dramatic, but most often are not.

A fair example is the long account in which Oreste describes his wanderings and the background details of his ambassadorial mission. In the poorer play such scenes creak. In the bad play it is the author and not the character who is making the speeches. There is in other words at all times an absence of direct drama.

How different the effect when the Past Indefinite links present with past tragedy as in Andromaque's impassioned appeal to Hermione (111, iv.):-

Je ne viens pas ici, par de jalouses larmes,  
Vous envier un coeur qui se rend à vos charmes.  
Par une main cruelle, hélas! j'ai vu percer  
Le seul où mes regards prétendaient s'adresser.  
Ma flamme par Hector fut jadis allumée;  
Avec qui dans la tombe elle s'est enfermée.  
Mais il me reste un fils. Vous saurez quelque jour,  
Madame, pour un fils jusqu'où va notre amour;  
Mais vous ne saurez pas, au moins je le souhaite,  
En quel trouble mortel son intérêt nous jette.  
Lorsque, de tant de biens qui pouvaient nous flatter,  
C'est le seul qui nous reste, et qu'on veut nous l'ôter.  
Hélas! Lorsque, lassés de dix ans de misère,  
Les Troyens en courroux menaçaient votre mère,  
J'ai su de mon Hector lui procurer l'appui.  
Vous pouvez sur Pyrrhus ce que j'ai pu sur lui.....

In this scene two women and two worlds clash. It is the first and last time that the audience sees Andromaque and Hermione together and in it the whole outcome of the tragedy is decided. Andromaque, coldly spurned by Hermione, must make her peace with Pyrrhus and, that peace made, Hermione must take revenge. Andromaque has grasped vainly at a straw, the hope that Hermione in the light of the past service rendered to Helen, her mother, will consent to remould the present in favour of Astyanax.

We see then that the Past Indefinite transforms the remote event and endows it with immediate dramatic

dramatic potentiality and that the essential difference between the Past Indefinite and the Past Definite does not ~~consist~~ of the ability of the one to reach further or less far into the past than the other. What the Past Indefinite does and the Past Definite cannot do is to cancel the gap between past and present. The connotation of remoteness assumed temporarily by the Past Definite during the classical period stems naturally from the fact that the gulf between it and the present is absolute.

In contrast to Andromaque's appeal to Hermione one must consider the moving interview between her and Céphise which occurs shortly afterwards (lll, viii). In it Andromaque again refers to the fall of Troy, but on this occasion ~~uses~~ the Past Definite. There is, first of all, the conjuring up of the actual scene:-

....Songe, songe, Céphise, à cette nuit cruelle  
Qui fut pour tout un peuple une nuit éternelle.  
Figure-toi Pyrrhus, les yeux étincelants,  
Entrant à la lueur de nos palais brûlants  
Sur tous mes frères morts se faisant un passage,  
Et de sang tout couvert échauffant le carnage.  
Songe aux cris des vainqueurs, songe aux cris des mourants,  
Dans la flamme étouffés, sous le fer expirants.  
Peins-toi dans ces horreurs Andromaque éperdue:  
Voilà comme Pyrrhus vint s'offrir à ma vue;  
Voilà par quels exploits il sut se couronner;  
Enfin voilà l'époux que tu me veux donner.....

There follows the recalling of her last meeting with Hector:-

Ah! De quel souvenir viens-tu frapper mon <sup>^</sup>ame!

Ah! De quel souvenir viens-tu frapper mon âme!  
Quoi? Céphise, j'irais voir expirer encor  
Ce fils, ma seule joie, et l'image d'Hector:  
Ce fils, que de sa flamme il me laissa pour gage!  
Hélas! Je m'en souviens; le jour que son courage  
Lui fit chercher Achille, ou plutôt le trépas,  
Il demanda son fils et le prit dans ses bras:  
"Chère épouse, dit-il, en essuyant mes larmes.....

What is the fundamental reason for the change of tense? Why, with Hermione, must the Past Indefinite cover the events at Troy and why, with Céphise, ~~the~~ Past Definite?

It would seem that if this question can be answered we are near illumination.

We have already stressed the stylistic possibilities which the existence of the two past tenses offered the 17th century author and the fact that the developed récit naturally favours the Definite form. But in both these passages quoted the element of the 'story' is not paramount since the Past Definites are few in number and the approaching climax of the play precludes the telling of any story for the story's sake.

It is, indeed, an understanding of their placing in the play that best explains these two brief flashbacks. They occur at a moment of détente and before a moment of decision. A few moments before Andromaque has made her appeals to Hermione and Pyrrhus; she is now faced with the alternative of losing her little son or marrying Pyrrhus. Céphise, her confidante, as confidantes will, has given her worldly-wise advice.... to marry Pyrrhus and save her son.

The scene between Andromaque and Céphise is fraught with subdued emotion, subdued because, though Andromaque now finds herself torn once again by the memories of Troy, she is faced with making an ultimate decision and is weighing the past against the present. There is, in other words, beneath her emotion a lucid evaluation of the contrast between the THEN of Troy and the NOW of Epirus. There is, in other words, an element of objectivity, however faint. She does not call upon the past to remould the present. She calls upon it as a static witness of the present condition to which she is reduced.

What reinforces the impression of objectivity is the presence of Céphise who knows these two stories by heart already. The speeches are made to her but at Destiny and the audience. Indeed, the quality of the scene is not so much dramatic as poetic, epic in the description of Troy's fall, lyrical in the memory of Hector's last farewell.

All this helps to explain the choice of Past Definite rather than Past Indefinite but is only ancillary to the basic compelling reason. The two brief narratives have this in common; they serve to mark the poignant contrast between THEN and NOW. That contrast depends for its virtue on the irreconcilability of the past and the present.... This Pyrrhus, whom I first saw striding sword in hand over my dead brothers, is to be my husband? This child, the pledge of Hector's love, I am to sacrifice?

Again it is the yawning gulf that separates past and present that is the true operative reason. The Past Definite, sealed off from present time, accomplishes

accomplishes the effect of contrast: the tragic past Troy cannot link up with a happy present in Epirus.

To return, however, to the Past Indefinites used in Andromaque's appeal to Hermione the essence of the Past Indefinite's role now becomes clearer still. Andromaque conjures up before Hermione events of the past -- and one in particular, her intervention on behalf of Helen -- between which and her present situation she wishes to cancel the gulf. Because this was done by me for Helen, you now should intervene to save Astyanax.....

In terms of present time which is the stuff of daily life, as of drama, the Past Indefinite is dramatically positive and the Past Definite dramatically negative.

That is the broad reason for the greater frequency of the former throughout classical drama and accounts for the ratio in which the two tenses share the past. No doubt daily speech echoed in some measure this natural division of labour which made the eventual obsolescence of the older tense probable, if not certain. For a

For a past which does not vibrate in the present may have its charm for those who live in the past, the historian and the story-teller. For the normal average citizen it is dead or dying.

And yet a word of caution is in this connection necessary. Of the Past Indefinites in Andromaque only one seventh can be related to remote events. It is a tense that thrives in the recent past and dwells close to the present.

The fixed ratio of occurrence which governs both tenses indicates that the older tense has retained or acquired a virtue that is postponing its complete eclipse.

Are there, indeed, limitations to the scope of the Past Indefinite? Is it possible for a past tense to have one foot in the present without curtailing its efficiency in the past? Recalling our analysis of Oreste's account of the death of Pyrrhus we feel that the answer to this question is perhaps already before us.

In the meantime it is important to seize as a first preliminary to complete understanding that -- though all

all past time in drama must be stowed rather as ballast than cargo -- the Past Indefinite is a vital necessity in the presentation of the dramatic plot./ It is, indeed, a dramatic past.

{11}

Limitations of the Past Indefinite.

A brief word should be said on the most serious limitation of the Past Indefinite which was evident in Oreste's account of how Pyrrhus was murdered:- however real it makes the past event by connecting it with the present of reader or spectator, it cannot, in the truest sense of the term, narrate.

It can deal with the isolated event, the brief interlude, the perepeteia of drama, but its frequent repetition in longer complete stories is uncommon. It is a tense which lacks the condensation and the harmonic value of its older rival, depending as it does on small disjointed, colourless parts; its frequent repetition means vocalic monotony and the probability of unavoidable hiatus. No doubt these defects make it less suitable for use in the alexandrine line.

It is a fact that the steady diminution of the Past Definite in Molière keeps pace with his gradual abandonment of verse in favour of prose.

Once again, however, too much weight should not be placed on mechanical and external factors.<sup>1.</sup> To-day, when the mechanical victory of the Past Indefinite has been thoroughly won and established there are many authorities who maintain that in the loss of the Past Definite spoken French has suffered serious damage and that its successor is not fit for some of the tasks it has assumed.<sup>2.</sup>

The main weakness they descry is connected with what has been observed in classical drama, the lack of large numbers of Past Definites dedicated to the telling of a long story moving towards narrative climax, the unsuitability of the tense for frequent repetition.

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1. Though the manipulative convenience of the new tense guaranteed its entry and spread into the language, it is reasonable to assume, for example, that the confusing perfect-preterite-imperfect function of the Past Definite in Old French called for drastic alteration.
  2. In relation to the supposed deficiencies of the Past Indefinite and subsequent remarks thereon c.f. MM. Damourette - Pichon, op. cit., p.335, MM. Le Bidois, Vol 1., op. cit., pp.435, 441, 443 and Ch. Bally, Linguistique Générale et Linguistique Française, footnote p.353.

Undoubtedly the inherited associations of its parts has much to do with this. A story told in the Past Indefinite has the quality of a summary report; its participial ingredient registers states of things existing almost in isolation. The spread of the Past Indefinite has increased the static tendency in modern French.

Long after that change of usage which expels the Past Definite from spoken French the story-teller still employs the Past Definite, the Imperfect and the Past Indefinite in much the same ratio as they appear in Phèdre's narration of her fatal love to Oenone in which out of thirty-eight past tenses fifteen are Past Definite, seventeen Imperfect and only six Past Indefinite. 0

MM. Le Bidois point out that though in modern French the Past Definite and Indefinite forms may be found side by side in narration the latter must be used most judiciously. Vigny's La Mort du Loup, for example, which has fourteen Past Indefinites in the space of eighty lines, has a peculiar effect on the reader to whom the story of the wolf's death assumes the quality of a "rapport". While the Past Indefinite has the advantage of making events more real to us by

by drawing them nearer to the present, it is above all associated with the recent event. The true preterite is the Past Definite.

..., Whether erroneously or not, we tend to subscribe to this view and discern in classical French qualities separating the two tenses which determine the lingering difference between them in the language of to-day.

Even if the modern novelist Camus uses the Past Indefinite in l'Etranger as the vehicle of his narrative, can it be said that the tense has acquired full equivalence at last with the Past Definite? Let us glance at a brief excerpt:-<sup>1.</sup>

Je n'ai pas eu le temps de réfléchir. On m'a emmené, fait monter dans la voiture cellulaire et conduit à la prison où j'ai mangé. Au bout de très peu de temps, juste assez pour me rendre compte que j'étais fatigué, on est revenu me chercher.....

Place alongside this passage a snatch of Oreste's story to Hermione:-

A ces mots, qui du peuple attiraient le suffrage,  
Nos Grecs n'ont répondu que par un cri de rage;  
L'infidèle s'est vu partout envelopper,  
Et je n'ai pu trouver de place pour frapper:  
Chacun se disputait la gloire de l'abattre.  
Je l'ai vu dans leurs mains quelque temps se débattre,  
Tout sanglant à leurs coups vouloir se dérober;  
Mais enfin à l'autel il est allé tomber.  
Du peuple épouvanté j'ai traversé la presse  
Pour venir en ces lieux enlever ma princesse,  
Et regagner le port, où bientôt nos amis  
Viendront couverts du sang que je vous ai promis.

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1. Deuxième Partie, Ch. 111.

Both passages attempt to tell a story in the Past Indefinite and both possess an indefinable identity of tone. On the one hand the Outsider, who cannot get to grips with modern life is recounting the events which led up to his sentence of death. He presents them as a series of states - faits accomplis - over which he has no control. He is in the toils of forces greater than himself which he makes no attempt to overcome. There is no conflict in his soul, only bewilderment tinged with cynicism. He does not react violently to events except on one occasion when he kills a man. This callous murder he can only explain by saying that the weather was hot and stifling, the various circumstances of the particular day drove him to murder. The Outsider accepts what comes his way and drifts in an alien world, acting as a cog in his environment which supplies the motivation of his actions. He is, in other words, a fitting existentialist 'hero'.

But is his nearest ancestor not Oreste? Is not Oreste the bewildered creature of outside forces which he does not understand, but to which he gives ear. The Outsider's crime is no more his than the assassination of Pyrrhus is the work of Oreste. And all this is expressed in the Past Indefinites which tell the story. Events that are willed and carried through have the logic of their original conception in the mind that willed them.

them. In Oreste, in L'Etranger there is no willing of the event. The tacit claim behind the stories of their crimes is that the event is not theirs, they neither belong to **it** nor it to them. They are not responsible.

In addition to this static quality in narration the Past Indefinite has a lack of selectivity. To it all events are equally significant. Thus the Outsider is taken off to prison in the Black Maria and --- fed! And thus Pyrrhus dies bloodily as a detail in Oreste's plan of elopement.

In other words, the Past Indefinite has the defects that are the natural corollary of its virtues. It is easily handled by the most untutored mind, it is the ideal tense for recording recent events, significant and insignificant, as the narrator saw them happen. The events thus recorded are unsifted and unassessed.

The event, when it is expressed by the Past Indefinite, contains, therefore, an element of possible surprise, for the narrator has not yet had time to think about its full implications and, what is more, occurring according to the haphazard daily pattern of existence, it does not follow logically on the event before it.

Now the essence of story-telling is the omission of the extraneous, the co-ordination of the actions and states

states of being that make the story an ordered development of language that has a beginning, a middle and an end. The story which is art presupposes the presence behind it of a mind which has weighed and arranged the events it deals with and is master of them.

In how far are Oreste and L'Etranger masters of the events they narrate?

The virtues and defects of the Past Indefinite stem from its ingredients. If its participial element implies static immersion in the event, its auxiliary, which by extension prolongs the vibration of the event into present time, prevents it existing as a complete entity in the past.

Oreste and his existentialist inheritor, L'Etranger, employ the correct tense artistically and grammatically. The importance of Oreste's account of how Pyrrhus died lies not in the story but in the reward he expects; it lies, unknown to Oreste, on the change its events will effect in the life of Hermione and the plot of the drama. L'Etranger likewise sees his own story in terms of the threat of execution hanging over him.

As regards the choice of the Past Indefinite by the modern author one must avoid assuming that now in the 20th century the Past Indefinite is accepted as exactly equivalent to the Past Definite. We have tried to show how the tense

tense used by Oreste and L'Etranger fits the character who uses it, contributes to the impression of weakness and bewilderment that surrounds them both, to our appreciation of the fact that neither can will himself out of the situation in which he finds himself.

If further corroboration of this is required we find it in the peculiar fact that Camus in La Peste, his later novel, reverts to the narrative vehicle of the Past Definite.

In the latter work we have the picture of a civilised community under the threat of plague to which many fall victim but against which the main characters of the story pit their physical and moral strength.

There is a slackness and aimlessness about the Past Indefinite when used in longer narratives. These qualities may fulfil a dramatic purpose and, indeed, frequently do.

When a story exists in drama as a complete entity it exists usually apart from the main plot and in the remoter past. It may be said that such stories do not really belong to drama and should be avoided. Modern drama tends at any rate to avoid them.

The fact that the Past Indefinite is not a true

true narrative tense accounts not only for its evenness of distribution, but also for the peak of Past Definite usage in exposition. It also bears out the fundamental differences that separate the two tenses in the classical period and ever since.

For the least part of our endeavours in this attempt to clarify certain messages in classical Greek we have been obliged to consider the tenses where they involve an exact statement of fact. The functions of our two tenses are in fact of a more extensive to us, especially the perfect, which is more extensive than the purely grammatical.

As we have seen, the perfect is a past tense which occurs to the speaker as a past tense. The perfect is a past tense which occurs to the speaker as a past tense. The perfect is a past tense which occurs to the speaker as a past tense.

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(111)

The Past Indefinite and le rê<sup>^</sup>ve d'Athalie

It is not the least part of our endeavours in this work to attempt to clarify certain passages in classical drama which have puzzled critics and aroused controversy. Such passages where they involve an exact evaluation of the role and function of our two tenses are in return of immense assistance to us since often the stylistic factor is more decisive than the purely grammatical.

In relation to the role of the Past Indefinite it immediately occurs to the enquiring mind that the discussion surrounding Athalie's dream is supremely relevant. Like the récit du Cid the dream that haunted Athalie is placed in that marginal field of time which lies between the previous night and the morning succeeding it.

If night separates the reality of yesterday from that of to-day, it would seem that the events of the night belong to the day following them for it is the Past

Past Indefinite that is used in the 17th century for their narration. Stephen Ullmann<sup>1</sup> in his discussion of the time factor in relation to the dream of Athalie states this admirably:-

Theoretically, there may be some doubt about the tenses to be used for relating events which had taken place during the preceding night. Logically it should be the Past Indefinite, as no night could have intervened since these happenings occurred. And it is, in fact, the Past Indefinite that we encounter in Néron's account of Junie's kidnapping the night before (Britannicus, 11, ii.) and in Hydaspes's report to Aman about king Assuerus's strange action following his dream (Esther, 11, i.)<sup>2</sup>.

Here is the analysis which follows:-

This last example may suggest the right kind of approach to the locus classicus adduced by Vossler and Dauzat in support of their respective theories: Athalie's dream. Dreams and visions have their own peculiar syntax just as they have their own peculiar logic. Their most usual verbal vehicle is the Imperfect, the descriptive and suggestive form par excellence. But they can also be reported more factually either in the Past Definite<sup>3</sup> or the Indefinite. It is once again the choice between the two alternatives that concerns us here. Various explanations have been put forward. Dauzat (Etudes, p.65) seems to imply that the Past Definite would be the correct form to use since the dream 'se situe dans le passé reculé'; and the fact that it is the Indefinite

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1. Article of Origin, pp. 49-51.

2. Throughout our dramatists the events of the preceding night are almost invariably expressed by the Past Indefinite. Usage is perhaps freer in Rotrou c.f. the dream in Cléagénor et Doristée (pp. 180-181.)

3. This must be seriously questioned. Corneille, Racine and Moliere consistently use the Past Indefinite for events of the preceding night, dreams included.

Indefinite Racine employs is another instance of his alleged preference for that tense. But there is an obvious objection to this view: true, the events relived in the dream took place in the remote past, but the dream itself, the reliving of these events, is a recent experience. The only Past Definite used in the narrative ('Dont elle eut soin de peindre et d'orner son visage') underlines this difference between dream and reality; it refers to a state of affairs belonging to the past but not directly revived in the dream -- if the whole string of phenomena were conceived as belonging to the remote past, the slight time-lag between the make-up, and the death of Jezebel would surely have been overshadowed by the gap separating both from the present day.

Lerch (op. cit. p.204) is of the opinion that dreams factually reported mostly use the Past Indefinite if told in the first person singular. It is, however, difficult to see why events seen in a dream should automatically require the 'subjective' past if revelations of one's innermost secrets do not. No more convincing is an alternative explanation advanced by Vossler (Frankreichs Kultur, p.281, n.) according to which, in addition to Racine's increasing predilection for the Past Indefinite, apocalyptic reminiscences may have played some part in the process.....

.....I think one can explain Racine's choice of the Indefinite quite simply, without resorting to ingenious hypotheses difficult to substantiate. Two avenues of approach present themselves. We may regard the events related in the dream either as perfect or as preterite. There are solid grounds for treating them as perfect, since they have obvious repercussions on the present; not only do they linger on as unpleasant after-effects of a nightmare, but they are construed by Athalie as a warning and become one of the mainsprings of her strange behaviour. On this reading, the Past Indefinite is pre-eminently suitable.....

If, however, we choose to consider them as pure past, then the rule of twenty-four hours comes into operation. We have seen in Britannicus and Esther that the preceding night is included within the time limit. There is every reason to believe that the dream visited Athalie once again for the third time -- during the night before the action. Though at first she speaks vaguely of 'depuis quelques jours', she adds 'partout il me poursuit', which suggests a nightmare recurring every night. Later on

on she becomes more explicit:

'Mais de ce souvenir mon âme possédée

A deux fois en dormant revu la même idée';

and in Act III, Sc. III, we learn from Nathan: 'Depuis deux jours je ne la connais plus'. It is thus fairly clear that the queen has had the same nightmare for three nights running, the last of which was the night immediately preceding the day of the action. Had she been spared during that night, she would never have chosen that particular day to disclose it and to act upon it.

While this analysis of Athalie's dream is remarkable for its exactness and finesse and takes us much further than the impressionistic verdicts of Vossler and Dauzat there is still something to be done if we are to appreciate fully the meaning and function of the Past Indefinite. We must still examine the precise place of the dream in the play, its vital importance to the plot. The use of the Perfect tense Racine could hardly avoid, quite apart from considerations as to when exactly the dream occurred.... One must, indeed, note that if the dream took place for the first time some nights ago there is justification -- on a pure time basis -- for using the Past Definite. Again, if it happened repeatedly there is good argument for the Imperfect being preferred. The choice of tense -- narrative tense -- is made for other reasons. The dream is, indeed, the mainspring of the play's action. In this relation, let us remember how the

the récit du Cid dealt with action of a different character and how the Past Defines at its beginning and end lace it off from the subsequent entrance of Chimène. Here, in the dream of Athalie, the opposite effect must be achieved; out of the dream the whole action of the play must blossom. Its evocation of past events reverberates in the present, is closely connected with the whole main action and makes the historical material at Racine's disposal dramatic material. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the dream is the play. It possesses the same role as the appearance of Hamlet's ghost on the walls at Elsinore. It unleashes the tragedy and is interwoven with its development.

Racine's only modification of his historic material is the interpolation of the dream. It is the dream that leavens that material, transforming a ruthless woman, by exploiting the very nature of woman, into an irresolute being whose very irresolution is the source of the play's dramatic suspense.

The historical material offered a bare framework, with only the merest elements of a plot. To transform this bare story into drama a major operation was necessary. The basic plot, the hiding of a rival to the reigning queen in the temple until such time as the priests and levites were strong enough to strike, fails of dramatic appeal if the threatened queen learns

learns the exact details of the conspiracy. If she does, she will strike at once, remove the rival and suppress the conspiracy, as she has so efficiently done before. Athalie must not be certain of her danger until it is too late. Her suspicions must be aroused, but not in the cold world of reality for in that world a trifling police-action will solve her problem. Something must happen to make her suspect the existence and survival of David's heir, without giving her tangible proof. She must, thereafter, like all tragic figures, succumb to forces inevitable, greater than herself, in this case to Jehovah -- and the dream is Jehovah's instrument. The dream is destiny descending to earth, is drama.

It is thus prepared for and hinted at from the very first:

Abner: Enfin depuis deux jours la superbe Athalie  
Dans un sombre chagrin paraît ensevelie.  
Je l'observais hier, et je voyais ses yeux  
Lancer sur le lieu saint des regards furieux,  
Comme si dans le fond de ce vaste édifice  
Dieu cachait un vengeur armé pour son supplice.

(1, i.)

Joad echoes the thought:

Celui qui met un frein à la fureur des flots  
Sait aussi des méchants arrêter les complots....

(1, i.)

Racine is aware of what he has to avoid:-

Josabet: Doutez-vous qu'Athalie, au premier bruit semé  
Qu'un fils d'Okosias est ici renfermé,  
De ses fiers étrangers rassemblant les cohortes,  
N'environne le temple, et n'en brise les portes?  
(1, ii.)

And he is aware too of the necessary counterpoise:

Joad: Et comptez-vous pour rien Dieu qui combat pour nous,  
.....?  
(1, ii.)

He is systematically preparing the ground for the unleashing of the drama which reaches its central height in the delayed appearance of Athalie, shortly after which she will recount her dream from which will radiate the play's entire subsequent action.

Immediately the operative time-word is remarkable for its haziness.....

C'était pendant l'horreur d'une profonde nuit.

Not the time, but the oppressive lingering over of the dream dictates the subsequent narrative Past Indefinites:

Ma mère Jézabel devant moi s'est montrée,  
Comme au jour de sa mort pompeusement parée.  
Ses malheurs n'avaient point abattu sa fierté;  
Même elle avait encore cet éclat emprunté  
Dont elle eut soin de peindre et d'orner son visage  
Pour réparer des ans l'irréparable outrage.

The isolated 'eut' is, of course outwith the dream

dream and has the effect of corroborating the fact that the apparition was indeed Jezebel.

Tremble, m'a-t-elle dit, fille digne de moi.  
Le cruel Dieu des Juifs l'emporte aussi sur toi.  
Je te plains de tomber dans ses mains redoutables,  
Ma fille". En achevant ces mots épouvantables,  
Son ombre vers mon lit a paru se baisser;  
Et moi je lui tendais les mains pour l'embrasser.  
Mais je n'ai plus trouvé qu'un horrible mélange  
D'os et de chair meurtrie, et trainés dans la fange,  
Des lambeaux pleins de sang, et des membres affreux  
Que des chiens dévorants se disputaient entre eux.

To anyone who has read his classical theatre carefully the substitution of se montra, parut, je ne trouvai plus for the three Past Indefinites would damage the whole sense and potency of the account, giving the story an air of lucid remembered detail which the teller can recount with sangfroid or, at least, controlled horror... In the Past Indefinites, particularly in the 'je n'ai plus trouvé' at which the actress looks with horror at her hands on which she still sees the unspeakable marks the dream overflows into Athalie's present and dwarfs everything else into insignificance. The Past Definite used here would have imposed a barrier between the events to follow and the dream preceding, would have dammed it up as a source of action or reduced the dramatic flow from it to a trickle.

How skilfully prepared is the plot! The invention of the dream, the delayed entrance of Athalie, the sudden

sudden crescendo of drama, personal drama in what up till then had been in essence a political intrigue! The vibrations of the dream pervade the remainder of the play's action till the very climax in which the dream appears as Jehovah's instrument:-

Impitoyable Dieu, toi seul as tout conduit.

(V, vii.)

Even as the dream was the instrument of Jehovah so also was it the instrument by which the dramatist converted the thinnest of plots into pulsating drama.

If we have called the Past Indefinite a dramatic tense, here in Athalie's dream there is supreme justification. One thinks also of Oreste and his inability to deal with the events that crowd upon him, of an immediate past that shapes the present in spite of the stage characters, a past whose vibrations make the play.

One is tempted to refer again to the 'ingenious hypotheses' that have sprung up like mushrooms around this masterpiece. Such hypotheses spring from the fatal desire to examine language apart from its context, to forget that here the spectator is not listening to a cross-sectional excerpt from 17th century French, but to an example of that medium manipulated by genius in the cause of drama.

The supreme virtue of the Past Indefinite is its continuing vibrations in the present. That of the Past Definite is its hermetic sealing from the present. The essential difference between the two tenses lies undoubtedly in the realm of aspect.

Drama presents present reality as it emerges from the past and moves into the future-- "das ewige Werden"-- and defines what is past in terms of relevance or irrelevance to that reality. Its structure-- and its success as a spectacle-- depends on the economy and skill with which the dramatist presents the past event.

The text of drama may provide valuable evidence of trends in contemporary usage when quoted and considered in suspension, apart from the art-form and its requirements.

Our analysis of le récit du Cid and Athalie's dream, depending as it does on what is immutable in the art-form itself, makes that evidence decisive in so far as it controls and corroborates it.

In this conception lies the novelty of our approach to the essentially complex problem before us. From this conception stems the conviction that the basic distinction we have made between the Past Definite and the Past Indefinite tenses is correct.

## Chapter V.

### Evidence of Obsolescence.

#### 1) Defection in the Middle Past.

(Obsolescence specific in the middle past -- counts in five plays -- a method of qualitative analysis -- figures for remote and middle past occurrence -- strength of the Past Definite in the remote past -- trend of progressive obsolescence in the middle past -- contrasting graph -- division of labour between Past Definite and Indefinite.)

#### 11) The Sophonisbe theme, Amphytryon and Venceslas. (Qualitative analysis applied to different versions of the same theme -- obsolescence in the middle past confirmed.)

#### 111) Les Fâcheux and the twenty four hour Rule.

(Temporary nature of the rule -- its lack of reality and awkwardness -- analysis of stories in Les Fâcheux -- applied types of expression, their convenience and resulting 'gêne' -- artificiality of the grammarian's rule.)

#### IV) The Variants of Corneille.

(Positive value of variants as linguistic evidence -- the danger of superficial approach -- Vossler -- accepted impressions on omission of Past Definites in later editions based on error -- reasons affecting changes of this nature -- the various categories -- variants classified -- Le Cid -- alterations in Past Definite and peculiar stubborn retention -- the 'secret' of Estienne? -- the principle of differentiation between Definite and Indefinite -- examples of the Past Definite reintroduced in later editions -- the case of Rodogune -- severance from the present a constant value -- figures available for changes of Past Definite -- the spoken obsolescence of the tense foreshadowed -- Historic Present replacing Past Definite -- variants in récit du Cid -- weakness in the middle past -- separate identity in contexts of remoteness and severance -- no facile interchange with the Indefinite.)

1.

Defection in the Middle Past.

Hitherto the general conception of the process of obsolescence affecting the Past Definite has been that once its rival tense, the Past Indefinite, duplicated the function of the older tense in the past-- and might therefore be termed a preterite-- the two tenses were fully equivalent. There<sup>^</sup>after, by implication, the Past Definite has no proper reason for persisting in the language.

Foulet, showing how in the XVIth century the Past Indefinite penetrated widely into literature, quotes<sup>1.</sup> the letters of Rabelais to the bishop of Maillezais. Having shown how frequently the Past Indefinite is used where formerly the Past Definite would have been necessary, he goes on to enlarge on the fact that the two tenses are now equivalent and more, that now the tide has turned decisively against the older form.

All this may be correct, but in the letters quoted an important fact emerges:- the Past Indefinite replaces

1. Romania, XLVI, pp. 289, 290.

possible Past Definites in the recent and middle past, the past normally dealt with in correspondence.

If we have spoken of the Past Definite possessing a connotation of remoteness in the classical period this fact is complementary to another, that the penetration of the Past Indefinite was made from the direction of the present. In the seventeenth century it affected the recent and middle past <sup>re</sup> whenever possible. It is only in these two spheres-- and that only when a specific time adverb is absent-- that one can diagnose obsolescence in the Past Definite.

An examination of the middle past in drama is awkward to undertake and can best be carried out by attempting to assess in several plays the exact or approximate time-value of each Past Definite used. That is to say, since each play has a certain period of past time to cover which can be qualified as remote past, middle past and recent past, a number of comparative counts and analyses can be made.

For this purpose the following five plays have been chosen:-

Sophonisbe:	Mairet :	1634 :	62	Past Definites.		
Polyeucte :	Corneille:	1640 :	52	"	"	.
Venceslas :	Rotrou :	1647 :	48	"	"	.
L'Avare :	Molière :	1668 :	39	"	"	.
Phèdre :	Racine :	1677 :	52	"	"	.

It will be seen that these plays are of approximately the same length and do not differ greatly in Past Definite totals. All are in verse except the sole comedy, L'Avare.

Do the Past Definites in these plays show any qualitative difference over the half-century which these plays cover?

To answer this question several categories were laid down and appropriate symbols found<sup>1.</sup> for them:-

RP, remote past.  
MP, middle past.  
IP, immediate past.  
TP, total past.  
Pr, pregnant use.

The prefixing of Q to any of the above signifies that the example is accompanied by an expression of time. Our interest naturally centred in those Past Definites which were without this qualification, because in these one might suppose an element of choice existing between the two tenses.

IP, the immediate past, referred to Past Definites denoting some event within the twenty four hour period. TP, the sign for the total past, referred to those covering the entire scope of past time, from immediately recent to remote.

Now, allowing always for the fact that not every Past Definite is clear-cut, not everyone denotes its

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I. For the full analysis of these plays see appendix, pp. 381-400.

its exact compartment in past time, and that much depends on marginal cases, the following results accruing from an examination of the five plays were interesting:-

Remote and Middle Past Occurrence.

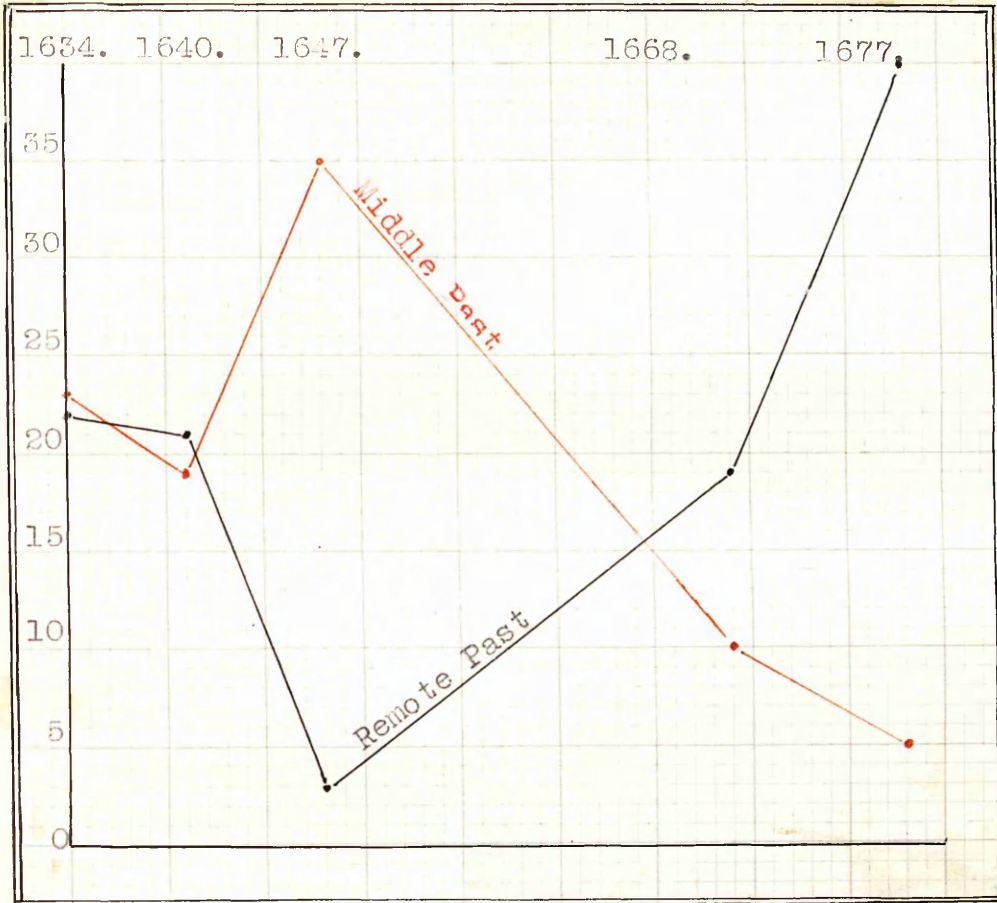
Sophonisbe: RP, 22--MP, 23.  
Polyeucte : RP, 21--MP, 19.  
Venceslas : RP, 3--MP, 35.  
L'Avare : RP, 19--MP, 10.  
Phèdre : RP, 40--MP, 5.

The superficial meaning of these figures is this, that as the century advanced the ratio of middle to remote past usage expressed in the Past Definite declined.

Expressed in graph form the trend appears  
1.  
spectacular. Only one play, Venceslas, uses the Past Definite much more often in the middle past than in the remote. The reason is that the main action of the play is born out of events of the night before. The association of the Past Definite with yesterday has much to do with the number of Past Definites found in its middle past. But accepting this play as evidence of usage, as we must, the contrast it affords with the last two plays, written some twenty and thirty years later does seem significant.

1. See overleaf, p. 263.

Graph of Remote and Middle Past Usage as expressed by the Past Definite in Sophonisbe, Polyeucte, Venceslas, L'Avare, Phèdre.



No. 1.

Even allowing for differences of plot it seems likely that in Phèdre and L'Avare (as in contemporary usage) the middle past has gone over to the Past Indefinite whenever possible, whereas in plays written in the first half of the century the Past Definite still holds it within its grasp.

Another point, as regards the five plays examined, seems more certain. After 1660 the vast

vast majority of the Past Definites appearing in drama are associated with remote events.

The comedy, L'Avare, is particularly important in so far as it bears out the pattern seen in Phèdre, the most tragic of tragedies.

On the basis of the examination carried out in these few plays one is then inclined to give particular attention to past tense usage in the middle past as it appears in the context of classical drama. There is reason to suspect that there is no sign of general obsolescence in the Past Definite, that whatever it is losing in the recent and middle past it is-- in consequence and by corollary-- gaining in the remote.

The full table of analysis for our five plays encourages one in this conclusion:-

Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Past Definites in <sup>t</sup>Sophonisbe, Polyeucte, Venceslas, L'Avare, Phèdre.

	<u>Sophonisbe</u>	<u>--Polyeucte--</u>	<u>Venceslas--</u>	<u>L'Avare--</u>	<u>Phèdre</u>
	<u>1634</u>	<u>1640</u>	<u>1647</u>	<u>1668</u>	<u>1677</u>
RP	22.....	21.....	3.....	29.....	40
MP	23.....	19.....	35.....	19.....	5
QRP	3.....	3.....	0.....	0.....	0
QMP	4.....	5.....	6.....	9.....	0
PrTP	4.....	0.....	0.....	0.....	0
QTP	10.....	4.....	4.....	1.....	6
IP	2.....	0.....	0.....	0.....	0
PrIP	0.....	0.....	0.....	0.....	1
	<u>68</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>52</u>

In five plays then there are 108 remote and 89 middle pasts. A glance at the figures for each play is even more informative. Except in Venceslas the Past Definite deals more with the remote event than with that of the recent or middle past, a tendency most pronounced in the last two plays.

Remote pasts plus a time-word (QRP) are fewer than middle pasts plus a time-word (QMP). This reflects the fact that in the middle past the tense needs the presence of a time-expression to support it whereas in the remote past it depends only on itself. That is, the Past Definite has per se a connotation of remoteness in the past.

The symbol QTP refers most often to the presence of the qualifying 'ne jamais' or 'toujours'. There is no evidence that the Past Definite occurs less often with them at the end of the century than at the beginning.

The four examples in Sophonisbe of a kind of pregnant use of the total past (PrTP), occurring as they do in one play, and that the earliest, are to be noted. They are so consistent as to seem modelled on some strong prototype in daily speech. They/

They are worth close scrutiny:-

Comme nous eûmes part à vos prospérités,  
Il faut bien nous sentir de vos adversités.

(Corisbe, 11, 111)

Il est mort ce barbare et lâche Usurpateur,  
Qui de tant de combats fut l'objet et l'auteur.

(Massinisse, 111, i.)

Par les sceptres que j'eus, par ceux que vous avez...  
(Sophonisbe, 111, iv.)

De tant de bien<sup>s</sup> que j'eus, c'est le seul qui me  
reste,...

(Lettre à Massinisse, V, v.)

Each of them is associated with the thought of death. Each is demad<sup>n</sup>ed by the fact that the verb implies a totality of time now brought to a final conclusion. The proximity of the tense to the Present Indicative is apparently of no importance. Here we see the Past Definite lingering in one little inlet where additional expressiveness resists the pull of its ebbing tide.

Two cases of the Past Definite occurring within the forbidden twenty four hour limit are also to be found in Mairret's Sophonisbe. Without wishing to go into detail excessively we must mention the fact for it fits again with the general conclusion one expects from this brief qualitative survey.

Past Definite usage seems looser and more fluid at the beginning of the century. Our later plays

plays give evidence of clarification and suggest,  
not the equivalence of the Past Definite and Indefinite,  
but a division of labour between them.

11.

The Sophonisbe theme, Amphitryon and Venceslas.

That the Past Definite in the period covered by our dramatists lost virtue in the middle past and gained it in the remote-- that all, indeed, was not loss in the process of change affecting it-- explains and reconciles many contradictions. Stephen Ullmann mentions and proves the vitality of the Past Definite in Racine whose plays stand latest in the century, a finding that is something of a surprise when viewed in relation to the accepted fact that the seventeenth century decided the fate of the tense and the preconceived idea of so many historians that its obsolescence was general. And again, the continuing vitality of the tense not only in nineteenth century novel but in modern literature cannot be said to accord with the theory that already in the classical period the Past Indefinite has invaded all the functions of the older tense.

Is it not accepted that the Past Definite did, indeed, resist the incursions of the analytical

analytical form by attempting to simplify its conjugations and the complexity of its verb-endings? Is it not plausible to assume that some resistance was also offered on the ideal plane in which the new tense was more vulnerable?

The specific weakening of the Past Definite in the middle reaches of the past, fitting in, as it does, with the connotation of remoteness already found in so many Past Definites cannot be overestimated if it can be proved.

Therefore, since it may be objected that the five plays, Sophonisbe, Polyeucte, Venceslas, L'Avare and Phèdre, differ too much in plot to permit objective comparison, it would be wise to proceed to a quantitative and qualitative analysis of several plays by different authors but having a common theme or source.

Such an analysis has this to recommend it that it will provide evidence of Past Definite usage as applied to the same dramatic time-scheme, that is, to the same main events of one plot as treated by different dramatists in different historical generations.

A quantitative survey of Rotrou's Les Sosies and Molière's Amphitryon reveals, for example, that Molière, using the text of Rotrou and Rotrou's own main source, Plautus, requires fewer Past Definites-- 52 as against Rotrou's 69. The same trend is shown pronouncedly in Marmontel's emended version of Rotrou's Venceslas. Here the time separating the two versions is greater, the original appearing in 1647 and Marmontel's in 1759. The drop in Past Definite usage corresponds. Marmontel requires 29 Past Definites as against Rotrou's 48.

There is, then, every indication that the tense is being used less often in drama. If we wish to clarify the exact nature of this diminishment there seems no better method than to scrutinise three versions of the Sophonisbe theme so popular with classical dramatists: that of Mairet, first performed<sup>1.</sup> in 1634, that of Corneille dated 1663 and the version accredited to Voltaire which appeared almost a hundred years later (probably between 1764 and 1774.).<sup>2.</sup>

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1. M. Regnier suggests 1629 (*Oeuvres de Corneille*, Notice to *Sophonisbe*, p. 449.)
  2. See *La Sophonisbe*, Introduction, p.xv., 1945 ed., Paris, Lib. Droz.

The similarity of plot and structure-- Voltaire's version is virtually a transcription of Mairet's-- would suggest that there is reason to hope that differences in Past Definite usage in the three plays will provide fair evidence of the trend of of any obsolescence affecting the tense over the century and a half of time elapsing between the first and the last.

A first count tells us only that the gross total of Past Definites is much less in Voltaire's work. The relevant figures are:-

Mairet: 68 Past Definites.  
Corneille: 75 " " "  
Voltaire: 44 " " "

A qualitative analysis<sup>1</sup> of the three plays, however,<sup>1</sup> gives the following table of comparison:-

	<u>Mairet</u>	<u>Corneille</u>	<u>Voltaire</u>
RP:	22.....	67.....	23
MP:	23.....	0.....	5
QRP:	3.....	0.....	2
QMP:	4.....	0.....	0
Pr TP :	4.....	5.....	8
QTP:	10.....	2.....	2
IP :	1.....	1.....	5
PrIP:	1.....	0.....	0
	<u>68</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>44</u>

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1. See appendix pp. 381, 393 and 403.

There seems no doubt that here again there is proof that the Past Definite remains strong as a remote past, but yields in the middle past. Even if one has to remember that Corneille's conception of the plot is somewhat different from that of Mairet, the fact that the version accredited to Voltaire is closely based on the play presented to the public by Mairet in 1634 and shows a radical diminution of Past Definites used in the middle past is positive corroboration of the trend of obsolescence already noted.

Apart from this difference in the Voltaire play the resemblance in usage found in the earliest and latest of the three plays is striking. Both offend against the twenty four hour rule blatantly. It may be deduced that the differentiation between the Past Definite and Indefinite was severer in the second half of the seventeenth century than before or after.

But our main concern was to indicate that the obsolescence of the Past Definite affects it during the classical period in the sphere of the middle past specifically and this we have done.

111.

Les Fâcheux and the twenty four hour Rule.

It is astonishing, to say the least, that we find in the dramatic text of our four authors, Rotrou, Corneille, Racine and Molière, only one contravention<sup>1</sup> of the twenty four hour rule. The strictness of this rule which demands that 'hier', 'hier soir', 'ces jours derniers' and all such expressions explicitly situating the event outwith twenty four hours of its telling cannot be ignored by anyone attempting to assess all the implications of the Past Definite in seventeenth century usage. It is, as its name indicates, a defined past tense, endowed with a clarity and concision lacking in the Past Indefinite.

That the twenty four hour rule represents a truce certain to be broken is obvious. Eventually, as we know, the Past Definite will be expelled from the neighbourhood of the Present Indicative and from speech.

There is <sup>in</sup> one play, Molière's Les Fâcheux, considerable evidence of the awkwardness of this

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1. P. 112. n

rule when in daily speech the question of narrating at any length arises.

As regards the particular value of the text of Les Fâcheux one may weigh against its literary form the fact that this form is welded to the description of contemporary types and that its success as a play had little to do with its main character and almost non-existent plot, but arose from the interest of the spectators in the subsidiary characters as types. This reversal of Moliéresque structure makes the play read like La Bruyère in dramatic form. Its success had little to do with what usually makes for the success of a comedy, but was due to court gossip, <sup>and</sup> the attempts of the audience to identify the original models of such characters as the card-player and the huntsman. The latter, indeed, was rumoured to be a later inclusion made at the request of Louis XIV. who may have indicated M. de Soyecourt as the obvious prototype.<sup>1.</sup>

The speeches of these two characters are, we can

1. See Oeuvres, Notice p. 11.

can assume, as close to reality as verse allows and of particular interest because of the narratives they contain. For that section of the audience which cannot identify the card-player and hunstman with certain individuals of its acquaintance-- by far the larger-- must find its enjoyment in the authenticity with which these two 'hit off' the contemporary manners and mannerisms of their types.

The story told by Alcippe,<sup>1.</sup> the card-player, opens with the specific mention of 'hier' which should in theory demand<sup>d</sup> thereafter the consistent use of the Past Definite:-

Console-moi, marquis, d'une étrange partie  
Qu'au piquet je perdis hier contre un Saint-Bouvin...

Of course, the Historic Present can intervene as it does:-

Je donne, il en prend six, et demande à refaire.

The Past Definite reappears:-

Moi, me voyant de tout, je n'en voulus rien faire...

But the Historic Present intervenes again:-

Je porte l'as de trèfle.....

The Past Definite reappears much later:-

Je sortis hors d'effroi

---

1. Act 11, Scene 11.

But, as the end of the story approaches, the Past Indefinite takes over:-

Et jetant le dernier m'as mis dans l'embarras.  
J'ai jeté l'as de coeur.....  
..... je me suis vu capot.

Looking back over this brief narrative as we have described it we see that the persistence of the Past Definite in the company of 'hier' raises a problem for the narrator. First of all, once the grammatical rule has initially been satisfied, he naturally finds the present, with its graphic quality and simpler form, more natural and more convenient. Reversion to the Past Definite is made, but only in token fashion, to preserve the time-placing of the story clearly. And in the end, since the story must be integrated with ordinary conversation in the ordinary Present Indicative-- between which and the Past Definite there exists a gulf-- the Past Indefinite must complete its final details.

Now, if the card-player's story is a fair sample of the rules of spoken narration in the seventeenth century it is at once visible that they are too complex and must eventually be simplified.

The striking phenomenon in Alcippe's story is this, that, however justified by the presence of 'hier', the gulf that exists between the Present Indicative and the Past Definite is so categorical as to constitute a species of 'gêne' and to necessitate a formula of transition between the two tenses which is almost mannered. In fact, the pattern of tenses in this story is exactly that found in the careful expositional sequences of Corneille. In consequence the twenty four hour rule appears completely artificial. It seems to have produced innumerable applied types of expressions or rather to have been based on them at a time when the Past Definite was less heretically sealed from the present. It would appear that as the Past Indefinite invaded the recent and middle past the gulf between the Past Definite and present reality was so widened as to undermine the value of the time adverb. In other words, transition from yesterday to to-day should be easy and logical. Already during the second half of the seventeenth century the connotation of the Past Definite has made it difficult. The tense in these circumstances has become an awkward barrier to

ease and fluency of expression. As such the spoken language cannot long tolerate it. That the tongue naturally turns away from it and prefers the Past Indefinite-- even with 'hier' dominating the situation--<sup>1.</sup> is seen in the story of Dorante, the huntsman.

Dorante begins by setting the scene for the story of yesterday's stag-hunt and obeys every rule of verbal usage until the first Past Indefinite escapes him:-

Parbleu, chemin faisant, je te le veux conter,  
Nous étions une troupe assez bien assortie,  
Qui pour courir un cerf avions hier fait partie;  
Et nous fûmes coucher sur le pays exprès,  
.....  
Je voulus, pour bien faire, aller au bois moi-même;  
Et nous conclûmes tous d'attacher nos efforts  
Sur un cerf qu'un chacun disait cerf dix-cors;  
Mais moi, mon jugement, sans qu'aux marques j'arrête,  
Fut qu'il n'était que cerf à sa seconde tête.  
Nous avions, comme il faut, séparé nos relais,  
Et déjeunions en hâte avec quelques oeufs frais,  
Lorsqu'un franc campagnard, avec longue rapière,  
Montant superbement sa jument poulinière,  
Qu'il honorait du nom de sa bonne jument,  
S'en est venu nous faire un mauvais compliment,...

This Past Indefinite, viewed against the normal rules of classical usage is something of an explosion. In the light cast by the next details of the story it is not an accident:-

Il s'est dit grand chasseur et nous a priés tous ...  
.....  
Nous avons été tous frappés à nos brisées,....

1. Act II, Scene VI.



J'y pousse, et j'en revois dans le chemin encore;  
Mais à terre, mon cher, je n'eus pas jeté l'oeil,  
Que je connus le change et sentis un grand deuil.

Back to the present again. The dogs are brought to the right scent at last. The ignorant countryman shoots down the stag with a pistol.

And again, as in Alcippe's story, the Past Indefinite to finish with:-

... Pour moi, venant dessus le lieu,  
J'ai trouvé l'action tellement hors d'usage,  
Que j'ai donné des deux à mon cheval de rage,  
Et m'en suis revenu chez moi toujours courant  
Sans vouloir dire un mot à ce sot ignorant.

To understand the Past Indefinites which appear in this story of Dorante, the huntsman, it is not enough to regard them externally. One can, from an external point of view, characterise them as mistakes or say that Dorante is seeking variety of expression.

First of all, let us dismiss the Past Indefinites which conclude the tale as perfectly in order. Had they been Past Definites Dorante-- and Alcippe, whose story finished in like manner-- would cease to be bores and become characters capable of viewing their recent experience objectively and preventing it from invading the present reality of all around them.

them. Their stories would be sealed off from the continuing action of the play after the manner of the récit du Cid. This would, of course, make little sense since the plot of Les Fâcheux concerns the endeavours of various typical bores to merge their life with that of the main character, their attempt-- unwitting though it may be-- to swamp the plot in which he is involved under the ~~irrelevancies~~ <sup>irrelevancies</sup> of their own petty lives.

To understand the psychological attitude behind the changes of tense in the two stories in question, but particularly in that of Dorante, one must reflect on the character of the bore throughout the ages. If he is to be defined, he is surely a person whose subjective reality, whose personal selfish interests, so preoccupy him that he has no desire to enter into the reality of his neighbour: the bore wishes to talk about himself. He wishes to magnify the trivialities of his own life into some sort of absorbing significance. It is the tragedy of the bore that he makes every attempt to interest his audience

audience because he suffers from audiences which, on the least excuse, evaporate.

Dorante's reason for telling his story is his horror at the franc campagnard and the latter's behaviour in pursuit of the stag. The Past Indefinite enters the story with the country boor and silhouettes the still reverberating anguish of Dorante. The events thus interpolated in what might otherwise be the report of normal behaviour are meant to seize the imagination. It is the entrance of the ignorant interloper that makes the story a story. The linguistic conscience of Dorante told him that the Past Definite was ~~inadequate to deal with him~~. The memory of the country bumpkin was not over and done with. It would remain with him for a long time, would people his future nightmares.....

Without wishing to embroider further the significance of these few Past Indefinites one can say that they-- in conjunction with the laborious tense-pattern the presence of the Past Definite demands in these two stories-- reveal the artificiality of the twenty four hour rule.

Les Facheux has only eleven Past Definites in all. It can be assumed that these represent spoken usage very closely. Most of them occur in the stories we have quoted and emphasise the growing connotation of remoteness and severance from present time that affects the tense that was once perfect and preterite together. The time adverb that demands a Past Definite is already powerless to halt the consciousness growing in the language that the Past Definite, and the Present Indicative, like oil and water, do not mix.

The twenty four hour rule is an unnatural constraint put upon the language. Behind its apparently rigid observance discomfort lurks and obsolescence is already implicit.

IV.

The Variants of Corneille.

As positive evidence on the role and function of the Past Definite during the classical period the variants which Corneille introduced in his later editions are unique. Since his final edition dates from 1682 it can be assumed that his variants take cognisance of trends in current usage over a period of almost fifty years. Much more has been claimed for them:<sup>1.</sup>-

Pour l'histoire de la langue, les variantes sont plus utiles encore. Elles nous font connaître l'instant précis de la disparition des termes surannés des constructions tombées en désuétude, et nous montrent, contre toute attente, le grand Corneille, superstitieux observateur des règles de Vaugelas, s'appliquant sans cesse à modifier ses oeuvres ce qui n'est pas conforme aux lois nouvelles introduites dans le langage.

But to anyone systematically reading through the many variants of his later editions it is not so much Corneille's desire to follow new rules that is apparent, but rather his ripe and mature feeling for contemporary usage, his striving after purer style, greater exactness and clarity.

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1. Oeuvres, Avertissement, Vol. 1., p. ~~lx~~

The danger of superficial impressions with regard to these variants is so great that one suspects that Vossler erred in his interpretation of the fact that the 1660 edition replaces many Past Definites by Past Indefinites; from these changes stems in part his suggestion that it was via the theatre that the Past Indefinite penetrated into literature.<sup>1.</sup>

And, indeed, such a deduction is natural. Unfortunately it ignores the highly important fact that almost as many Past Definites are introduced in later editions as are dropped from the old! There are examples, not many it is true, of a Past Definite replacing a Past Indefinite.

Only a systematic and deliberate scrutiny of changes involving these two tenses can hope to claim soundness and objectivity.

The very first variant which we find involving the Past Definite illustrates the danger of quick conclusions. It concerns the opening lines of *Mélite* which were omitted in editions later than 1637:-

Jamais un pauvre amant ne fut si mal traité,  
Et jamais un amant n'eut tant de fermeté;

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1. Frankreichs Kultur u. Sprache, ed. 1929, p. 281.

Such an omission could be interpreted as proof of Corneille's desire to rid his text of a clumsy and obsolescent tense.

But later in the play (11,1) we read in the final edition:-

Sitot qu'il l'aborda, je lus sur son visage...  
whereas editions up to 1657 gave:-

Même dès leur abord, je lus....

In other words a diminution or increase of Past Definites may be caused by variations of style. Fortunately this phenomenon is fairly recognisable and can be passed over without any attempt being made to turn it to account as linguistic evidence.

In *Mélite* (11, vii) we come at last upon a variant of a different nature which serves as a prototype for many others obviously mirroring a trend of language:-

1682: Eraste, arrête un peu.  
Tirois.  
Eraste.

Que me veux-tu?

Tirois.

Ce sonnet que pour toi j'ai promis <sup>Te rendre</sup> d'entreprendre.

1633: Ce sonnet que pour toi je promis.....

What prompted Corneille to make this change?

change? The exact time values are explained by Corneille in his Examen. We can say with authority that the promise to write the sonnet, made in the first scene of Act 1, is now mentioned in these lines a week or a fortnight later-- that is, was made, according to our terminology, in the middle past. The change made in later editions to the Past Indefinite once again confirms the fact that it is in this realm that the Past Definite is weakening. The following variants emphasise how consistent this trend:-

La Veuve, ll. 1.

- 1682: Ainsi pour cette veuve, il a su m'enflammer.  
1633-60: Ainsi pour cette veuve il voulut m'enflammer.  
Ibid., V, vi.  
1682: Je n'ai point eu de part en cet enlèvement.  
1634-37: Je ne trempai jamais en cet enlèvement.

La Galerie du Palais, ll. viii.

- 1682: Vous de qui le serment m'a reçu pour époux?  
1637-57: Votre serment jadis me reçut pour époux.  
Ibid., lll, v.  
1682: Nous parlions du dessein d'éprouver ton amant;  
Tu l'as vu réussir à ton contentement?  
1637-57: Nous parlions du conseil que je t'avais donné;  
Lysandre, je m'assure, en fut bien étonné?  
Ibid. V, viii.  
1682: Pardonnez donc à ceux qui, gagnés par Florice,  
Lorsque je vous aimais, m'ont fait quelque service.  
1637-57: Lorsque je vous aimais, me firent du service

Such variants as the above are, of course,  
only to be found in the earlier plays because the  
l.Oeuvres, pp. 140, 141.

time-scheme of these plays is much looser, the action covering days and weeks. From le Cid onwards they are naturally rare. The important point about them is, however, that after the middle of the century Corneille decides that in the particular context in question the Past Indefinite is the better and fitter tense. It can therefore be said that the obsolescence of the Past Definite after the middle of the seventeenth century-- but only in the middle past when no adverb of time demands its presence-- is corroborated.

Another category of variant is worthy of attention, the variant which is a correction made in accordance with the twenty four hour rule so esteemed by contemporary grammarians. The first prototype occurs in *Clitandre*(IV,i.):--

1682: Prince, qui m'honoriez d'une amitié si tendre,  
Et dont l'éloignement fait mon plus grand malheur.  
1632-57: Et dont l'éloignement fut.....

*Clitandre* conforms, however artificially, with the twenty four hour rule concerning the unity of time. In the early editions the éloignement meant 'banishment', an act of banishment taking place within the play. The last version of the line changes the tense and transforms 'banishment' to 'absence'.

By far the greatest number of such corrections are to be found in Le Cid. The reason is not far to seek; Corneille's feeling for tense and time is sharpened as he moves into tragedy and, because of his success, encounters heavy fire from critics and grammarians. The line to which the Academy took exception serves as a model for others:-  
(11,1.)

- 1682: Je l'avoue entre nous, mon sang un peu trop chaud  
S'est trop ému d'un mot et l'a porté trop haut;  
1637-56:..... quand je lui fis l'affront,  
J'eus le sang un peu chaud et le bras un peu prompt.  
Ibid., 11, viii.  
1682: J'ai couru sur le lieu, sans force et sans couleur:  
Je l'ai trouvé sans vie. Excusez ma douleur.  
1637-56: J'arrivai sur le lieu sans force et sans couleur:  
Je le trouvai sans vie. Excusez ma douleur.  
.....  
1682: Je vous l'ai déjà dit, je l'ai trouvé sans vie:  
Son flanc était ouvert et pour mieux m'émouvoir...  
1637-60: J'arrivai donc sans force et le trouvai sans vie:  
1637-56: Il ne me parla point, mais pour mieux m'émouvoir...

We have then in Corneille's recognition of tense error confirmation of the theoretical strictness of the twenty four hour rule.

But there is also evidence that the mysterious secret behind the Past Definite at which Estienne hinted continued to confound the grammarian and puzzle the creative author. For, in spite of his critical attitude

attitude in the above examples, there are others similar that Corneille has left uncorrected!

In Le Cid itself:-

(111. v.)

1682: Viens baiser cette joue, et reconnais la place  
Où fut empreint l'affront que ton courage efface.  
1637: OÙ fut jadis, and also...  
Où fut l'indigne affront....

This example seems of particular interest. The jadis is properly dropped since the affront occurred but a few hours before. But why retain so stubbornly the fut? The retention of it is contrary to the grammatical rule which Corneille was at pains to recognise.

There can be no other explanation than this, that the Past Definite persisted here because of another value than that of pure time. One may justifiably see in it Don Diègue's expression of the weight lifted from his heart by the death of the Count at his sons' hands. The reparation made is complete, satisfactory and final.

This is, indeed, the case and further, the fut dismisses the soufflet, up till that moment the mainspring of the play's action; ~~confronted~~ from now on it is the death of the Count that becomes

Count that becomes the motive power of the play.

Two other examples in which the grammatical rule seems forgotten by Corneille, or set aside in favour of some other factor, occur to us.

First of all in Clitandre(V,v.):—

Et si peu que j'avais pres de vous de crédit,  
Je l'employai dès lors contre votre colère.

The Past Definite here refers to events that have already happened during the course of the play, that is, within twenty four hours of their narration.

Again, in Pompée, when Cornélie asks Philippe for the painful details of the finding and burying of her husband's last remains, these are her words ( V,i. ) :-

Toi qui l'as honoré sur cette infâme rive  
D'une flamme pieuse autant que chétive,  
Dis-moi, quel bon démon a mis en ton pouvoir  
De rendre à ce héros ce funèbre devoir?

Now in Philippe's first reply to this question he says:-

1644-56: Tout couvert de son sang et plus mort que  
lui-même,  
Après avoir cent fois maudit le diadème,  
Madame, je portai mes pas et mes sanglots  
Du côté.....

Corneille changes this last tense to j'ai porté in his last edition. But--- Philippe still uses the Past Definite for the further funeral details:-

details.\_

Je lui dresse un bûcher à la hâte et sans art,  
Tel que je pus sur l'heure, et qu'il plut au hasard.

These three occasions in Le Cid, Clitandre  
and Pompée where one might have expected that the  
the Past Definite would have been discarded in  
favour of the Past Indefinite in obedience to  
the twenty four hour rule must surely be of some  
significance!

If one compares them they do represent that  
constantly recurring phenomenon, the Past Definite  
in close proximity to present reality, but sharply  
divided from it, the Past Definite which signifies  
'the end of a chapter'. They confirm our impression  
that the so-called secret, the mystery surrounding  
the tense is nothing other than a lingering value  
of aspect-- the aspect of completion--which the  
grammarian, thinking in terms of pure time,  
cannot assess and appreciate. The fact that Corneille  
instinctively reverts at times to this particular usage  
is evidence that in the spoken language there  
existed a basic justification for it.

So far then the variants exam<sup>m</sup>ined have shown

shown a consistent and definite effort at differentiation between the Past Definite and Indefinite forms.

External proof of this-- a form of proof so conclusive and simple that it has hitherto been completely ignored by most grammarians-- is the reluctance with which they mingle together or even find themselves in each other's proximity.

When addressed in the Past Indefinite it was, it appears, incorrect to answer in the Past Definite. In Polyeucte (11,11.) Sévère asks of Pauline:-

O trop aimable objet, qui m'avez trop charmé,  
Est-ce là comme on aime, et m'avez-vous aimé?

Editions up to 1656 give the following reply:-

Je vous aimai, Sévère;

Various explanations of this being changed in later editions to Je vous l'ai trop fait voir. Seigneur. are possible. One cannot but suppose that the juxtaposition of the two tenses was likely to endow one of them with a certain emphase. The aimai, for example, as in the mouth of Racine's Hermione, might have had its 'end of a chapter' meaning which must be avoided since the action of the play demands that the possibility of love between Pauline and

and Sévère be kept open.

In any case, as in the reply of Philippe to Cornélie, the variant avoids a mixture of the two tenses which, taken with the laborious pattern of transition already observed between them in narrative, reinforces the reader's impression that they are fundamentally different.

A simple variant in Héraclius (IV,iii.) bears this out:-

1682: Il passa pour son fils, je passai pour le vôtre;

Et je ne jugeais pas ce chemin criminel..

1647-56: Et je n'ai pas jugé .....

Of course, the Past Definite and Indefinite can be found side by side, but, unless obvious carelessness or a lack of feeling for tense is the reason-- a phenomenon rarely met with in classical drama-- such cases of juxtaposition have a specific purpose. The following rather long speech from L'Illusion (V,iii.) illustrates this usage and gives also a model of the narrative pattern as it affects the two tenses:-

Qu'as-tu fait de ton coeur? qu'as-tu fait de ta foi?  
Lorsque je la reçus, ingrat, qu'il te souvienne  
De combien différaient ta fortune et la mienne,  
De combien de rivaux je dédaignai les vœux;  
Ce qu'un simple soldat pouvait être auprès d'eux;  
Quel tendre amitié je recevais d'un père!

Je le quittai pourtant pour suivre ta misère;  
Et je tendis les bras à mon enlèvement,  
Pour soustraire ma main à son commandement.  
En quelle extrémité depuis ne m'ont réduite  
Les hasards dont le sort a traversé ma fuite....

The series of Past Definites which here follow the two Past Indefinites conjure up in immediate contrast to present reality-- the unfaithfulness of a lover---the distant and reproachful past. This context, not infrequent in drama(Hermione-Pyrrhus, Médée-Jason), most often produces somewhere this tense-pattern. A final pendant to this particular quotation from L'Illusion and one which corroborates the deliberate distinctiveness of the two tenses in question is to be found in the fact that where the later editions have je <sup>le</sup> quittai that of 1639 shows Je l'ai quitté.

It is obvious that in our discussion of all these alterations in the Cornelian text we are drifting further and further from the complacent theory that the Past Definite, like the proverbial 'old soldier' is simply fading away.

There is, indeed, evidence of the opposite. For while we have found signs of obsolescence in

in the middle past the tense has been found flouting the grammarian within the twenty four hour limit and at all times maintaining a separate identity and function in the language. So vital does it remain that in the following instances Corneille's later variants introduce it!

Médée, 11,ii.

1682: Ce fut en sa faveur que sa savante audace  
Immola son tyran....

1639-57: C'est à son intérêt.....

L'Illusion, 1,ii.

1682: Rennes ainsi qu'à moi lui donna la naissance..

1639: Rennes ainsi qu'à moi lui donne.....

Ibid., 11,ii.

1682: Le jour jusqu'à midi se passa sans lumière.

1639: Le jour jusqu'à midi se passait.....

Ibid., 11,iii.

1682: Et quand je me rendis à des regards si doux,  
Je ne vous donnai rien qui ne fût tout à vous,  
Rien que l'ordre du ciel n'eût déjà fait tout vôtre.  
1639-: Et les premiers regards dont m'aient frappé vos yeux  
1657. N'ont fait qu'exécuter l'ordonnance des cieux,  
Que vous saisir d'un bien qu'ils avaient fait tout  
vôtre.

Apart from the last example this substitution of the Past Definite for another tense does not affect the Past Indefinite. Nevertheless, it runs counter to the conception that already in the classical period the tense show signs of archaism.

A most valuable and remarkable instance of it

it occurs in the exposition of Rodogune. The involved events out of which the Rodogune plot is born demand, immediately the play opens, the rapid imparting of information on them. In Corneille's earlier editions (1647-60) we find the usual pattern of narration, the Past Definite ~~beginning~~ beginning the recital of past events, but soon merging into the Historic Present:-

(1.1.)

Sachez donc qu'en trois ans gagnant quatre batailles,  
Tryphon nous réduisit à ces seules murailles,  
Les assiège, les bat; et pour dernier effroi,  
Il s'y coule un faux bruit touchant la mort du roi.

But later editions read differently:-

Sachez donc que Tryphon, après quatre batailles,  
Ayant su nous réduire à ces seules murailles,  
En forma tôt le siège; et pour comble d'effroi,  
Un faux bruit s'y coula touchant la mort du Roi.

Thereafter Corneille changes nigh on twenty Historic Presents into the Past Definite and deliberately concludes the telling of a series of remote events in that tense. Instead of <sup>a</sup> number of transitional tenses standing between the play's immediate action and the past history of the players we find instead two lines establishing a quick cut:-

Je vous achèverai le reste une autre fois,  
Un des princes survient.....

Three scenes later (1,iv.) he skilfully takes up where he left off, beginning sharply with the Past Definite again.

The importance of these variants in Rodogune is twofold. First of all, they demonstrate that in the second half of the seventeenth century the tense is not in itself archaic or obsolescent. Secondly, they emphasise-- after the manner of the Past Definites retained at the beginning and end of the récit du Cid-- that particular quality of the tense which is resisting archaism and obsolescence.

In earlier editions Corneille's expositional pattern, Past Definite to Historic Present to Present Indicative, was intended to relieve the spectator of the extreme weight of past events bearing indirectly on the plot. But Corneille, possibly remembering the actual effect of this pattern of narration on the audience, but certainly as a more experienced dramatist, realised later that, in avoiding one pitfall he had fallen into another. For a series of Historic Presents followed by the Present Indicative is liable to lead to confusion and mystification, the overlapping and mingling of events belonging to very different periods of time. In his final edition he has reverted to the Past Definite

Definite in order to preserve clarity of understanding. The two expositional scenes in which the Past Definite must be used are perhaps heavy, but they are carefully marshalled by that tense away from the immediate plot which alone is truly dramatic.

This particular quality of the tense we have already met with-- but notice here the specific proof of its persistence throughout the century! It is a tense which, irrespective of its particular time value, is under constant control. It looks backward to the past. It cannot merge with the present.....

With these Past Definites added in such number to one play not only do we continue to drift away from the general impression that Corneille tends to avoid the tense in his later editions, but we arrive at a point where we must ask ourselves if the reverse is not true.

A quick count resolves this question. Later editions show approximately 40 Past Definites dropped as against 30 introduced.

On balance there are signs then that the Past De

Past Definite suffers a slight recession as the century advances, but a very slight one.

This recession, it can now be discerned, is due to one dominating factor which emerges more and more clearly in classical drama and which explains, not only the natural restrictions laid upon the tense by drama, but also why it could not long remain in spoken usage: relaxing its hold on the middle past and thereby gaining in remoteness -- particularly when in a position of contrast with the Past Indefinite-- it maintained at the same time-- as the logical compensation for the loss of its perfect function-- an aspect-value of completion and divorce from present reality.

The tense is therefore, if valuable in exposition, in recreation of dramatic background details, of what the cinema terms the 'flashback', capable of being an awkward element in dialogue.

A number of variants made for the sake of smoothness of expression are really based on <sup>this</sup> fact.

In Mélite, for example, the following casual change:-

(111.iii)

1682: Mélite me chérit, elle me l'a juré:  
Son oracle reçu, je m'en tiens assuré.  
1633: Son oracle reçu, je m'en tins assuré.

Notice also in the above variant that the change to the present tense avoids the mixing of Definite with Indefinite form.

Such changes do not always mean a substitution of the Present Indicative or Historic Present for the Past Definite. Sometimes the variant may simply omit the lines containing the Past Definite:-

Médée (111, i.)

1639-57: Celle qui de son fils saoula le roi de Thrace  
Eut bien moins que Médée et de rage et d'audace.

On one occasion it introduces the Imperfect tense:-

Horace (1, ii.)

1682: Il vous souvient qu'à peine on voyait de sa soeur  
Par un heureux hymen mon ~~frère~~ possesseur...

1641-56: Quelques cinq ou six mois après que de sa ~~Soeur~~  
L'hymenée eut rendu mon frère possesseur....

Sometimes it is neatly avoided by using a Past Participle:-

L'Illusion (1, ii.)

1682: Là son fils, pareil d'âge et de condition,  
S'unissant avec moi d'étroite affection...

1639-57: Là de son fils et moi naquit l'affection<sup>1</sup>

Horace (1, i)

1682: Une soudaine joie éclatant sur son front...  
1641-56: Une soudaine joie éclata.....

Finally-- and this is the ultimate correction to the preconceived ideas of those who visualise the Past Indefinite benefiting directly from

from every omission of the Past Definite-- the tense which benefits most is, of course, the Historic Present. The latter is the only tense remaining on a basis of free exchange with it, the only tense which can take over where it leaves off, the only tense which throughout our dramatists conceals the actual preterite event. Time is not available to permit a count of Historic Presents in classical drama; our impression is, however, that the Historic Present may often-- in plays where the récit occurs frequently-- be found to outnumber the Past Definite.

This is understandable for the justification of the Historic Present has at all times been this, that it enables one to relive the events of the past by bringing them nearer to present reality. The Past Definite, a self-contained and independent past, requires the Historic Present as a natural ally.

It is again in the récit du Cid that we seek a suitable illustration... We have already shown how Corneille retained the Past Definites at the beginning and the end of Rodrigue's story. But notice how it is the Historic Present that benefits from the omission, in later editions, of those in the middle:-

Le Cid (1V,iii.)

- 1682: Enfin ~~le~~ flux nous fait voir trente voiles; *avec*  
L'onde s'enfle dessous, et d'un commun effort  
Les Mores et la mer montent jusques au port.
- 1637-60: Enfin avec le flux nous fit voir trente voiles;  
L'onde s'enflait dessous, et d'un commun effort  
Les Mores et la mer entrèrent dans le port.
- 1682: O combien d'actions, combien d'exploits célèbres  
Sont demeurés sans gloire au milieu des ténèbres...
- 1637-56: Furent ensevelies.....
- 1682: Et ne l'ai pu savoir jusques au point du jour.  
Mais enfin sa clarté montre notre avantage;  
Le More voit sa perte et perd soudain courage;  
Et voyant un renfort qui nous vient accourir,  
L'ardeur de vaincre cède à la peur de mourir.
- 1637-56: Et n'en pus rien savoir jusques au point du jour,  
Mais enfin sa clarté montra notre avantage:  
Le More vit sa perte et perdit le courage,  
Et voyant un renfort qui nous vint accourir,  
Changea l'ardeur de vaincre à la peur de mourir.

Out of nine changes seven make a substitution  
of the Historic Present for the Past Definite!

The final facts then on the variants of Corneille  
can be ~~reduced~~ to two statements:-

- 1) The Past Indefinite replaces the Past Definite  
on some fifteen occasions in the middle past.
- 2) The Historic present replaces the Past Definite  
on some seven occasions in the récit du Cid,  
but is replaced by the Past Definite in the  
exposition of Rodogune in twenty instances.

Who, in these circumstances, can point to the  
variants of Corneille as showing the obsolescence  
of the Past Definite?

The truth is that the Past Indefinite itself, as

a tense having one foot in the past and the other in the present, may occur more frequently in drama than the Past Definite, but even so is subject to constriction because the vehicle tense of stage drama is the Present Indicative.

And further, the relationship of the Past Definite and the Past Indefinite to stage reality (i.e. to present reality) is so different and so distinctive that facile interchange between them is, in the classical period, an impossibility.

The variants of Corneille confirm the partial obsolescence of the Past Definite in the middle past, but emphasise its increasing connotation of remoteness and severance from present time.

## Chapter VI.

### Counts of Past Definite Occurrence in the plays

#### of Rotrou, Corneille, Racine and Molière.

(Numerical method -- qualifying factors -- the margin of error -- general impressions -- plays and figures accruing -- control introduced -- figures for five-act plays -- paradox of figures for Racine and Molière- graphs of frequency for each author -- the question of genre indicated -- graphs of genre -- patterns now recognisable -- dissimilar graphs of tragedy and comedy -- possible explanations -- the danger of haste -- difference between tragedy and comedy in terms of past time -- distinctive graphs of Past Definite frequency in each of the five acts of tragedy and comedy -- the dip of comedy -- the peaks of tragedy-- combined graphs of this frequency for all our authors -- the contrasting graph resulting -- evidence conclusive that a first qualification of linguistic evidence available in classical drama is the genre in which it occurs -- the tragic patterns of Rotrou, Corneille and Racine -- their linguistic and aesthetic implications -- comic patterns of Rotrou, Corneille and Molière- -- significance of the diminishing graph of Molière -- verse and prose comedy -- the evolving time-structure of comedy -- this the potent factor and not daily usage and implied obsolescence -- correlation in tragedy between Past Definite totals and the merits of the play -- optimum and minimum Past Definite densities and their significance -- general obsolescence of the Past Definite not corroborated -- comedy, however, the key to the diminishment of Past Definite usage -- new connotation of the tense not only complex, but 'hostile' to present reality-- the Past Definite withdrawing from contact with the segment of time nearest to daily reality.)

The whole basis of this study is the numerical check of Past Definites occurring in the plays of Rotrou, Corneille, Racine and Molière. In the beginning it was the results obtained from this linguistic count and the close examination of every single Past Definite as it was counted that indicated the numerous factors which qualified and modified a mathematical approach.

Now that these qualifying factors have been set forth and the connotation of the tense established-- now, indeed, that what is being counted is clear-- it is time to assess the significance of the figures in our hands.

Only in a general, impressionistic sense does the gross total of Past Definites in any play bear directly on the question of the vitality or obsolescent nature of the tense. For, as we have seen, the measure of preterite events in each dramatic plot determines more imperatively than current trends of speech the sum of its incidence.

But the totals accruing from a large number of plays written over a considerable period of time

time should indicate broadly whether the Past Definite is a static or evolving verbal quantity. In relation to the art-form of drama they may tell us much more and, when the time-structure of drama has been taken into account, their precise position as linguistic evidence will be defined.

Every play of our four dramatists has been subjected to scrutiny and in grouping the results under each author's name and according to the chronological order of his works we have kept in mind the broad distinction that between the early plays of Rotrou and Corneille and the later plays of Molière and Racine there lies a considerable number of years. Our examination immediately concerns the fortunes of the Past Definite before and after the middle of the <sup>n</sup>seventeenth century.

Counting Past Definites involves a margin of error. Identical endings in the Past Definite and the Present Indicative, the often inserted dit-il -- and human frailty--preclude us from averring that every Past Definite is included in this final reckoning. The margin of error, present or absent, is unimportant since none of our conclusions depends-- or has any connection with-- such exactness as perfection

would demand.

One cannot carry out this kind of work without registering impressions almost as important as the various accumulating totals. Of all our authors Rotrou, particularly in his earlier works, seemed loosest in usage and with him fluctuations in frequency were more common. Corneille, as his tragic genius flowered conformed more and more with the narrow rules of the grammarians; yet, at the same time he gave, in terrain that they had not touched, good reason to doubt the fundamental soundness of these very rules. His presentation of the past-- as expressed by the Past Definite-- is careful and mannered. Indeed, the main problem of dramatic structure that worried this dramatist, so fond of historical fact and complication, so averse to the miraculous, seemed to be how to disentangle the intrinsic stage action from the necessary trammels of past time. From this malaise in Corneille to the smooth movement-in-the-past of the Racinian plot is a seven-league step not explicable in terms of any linguistic change. True, Racine and Molière

Molière live more comfortably within the dramatic unities that irked the more restive Corneille. Likewise they observe the rules of the grammarians, but more spontaneously. Our mathematical count completed, <sup>that</sup> we are left with the impression in the second half of the seventeenth century Past Definite usage has been stabilised and made as clear as circumstances permit.

1.

Count of Past Definites in the Plays of Rotrou.

L'Hypocondriaque ou le Mort Amoureux. (TC).....	61
La Bague de l'Oubli. (C).....	46
Cléagénor et Doristée. (TC).....	92
La Diane. (C).....	45
Les Occasions Perdues. (TC).....	41
L'Heureuse Constance. (TC).....	37
Les Ménechmes. (C).....	50
Hercule Mourant. (T).....	37
La Célimène. (C).....	26
L'Heureux Naufrage. (TC).....	113
La Céliane. (TC).....	60
La Belle Alphrède. (C).....	120
La Pèlerine Amoureuse. (TC).....	67
Le Filandre. (C).....	30
Agésilas de Colchos. (TC).....	56
L'Innocente Infidélité. (TC).....	87
Clorinde. (C).....	23
Amélie. (TC).....	34
Les Sosies. (C).....	69
Les Deux Pucelles. (TC).....	74
Laure Persécutée. (TC).....	64
Antigone. (T).....	69
Les Captifs ou Les Esclaves. (C).....	53

1. T= Tragedy, TC= tragi-comedy, C= Comedy.

(Count of Past Definites in the Plays of Rotrou, contd.)

Crisante. (T).....	52.
Iphigénie en Aulide. (TC).....	66
Clarice ou l'Amour Constant. (C).....	94
Bélisaire. (TC).....	67
Célie ou le Vice-Roi de Naples.....	103
La Soeur. (C).....	89
Saint Genest. (T).....	56
Don Bernard de Cabrère. (TC).....	46
Venceslas. (T).....	48
Cosroès. (T).....	34
Florimonde. (C).....	85
Don Lope de Cardone. (TC).....	39
L'Illustre Amazone. (T).....	19

As a first comment on these figures for Rotrou one can say that the Past Definite appears a necessary ingredient of seventeenth century drama. The counts lie between 19 and 120, the average around 60. Strangely enough, the highest counts stand opposite Comedy and Tragi-comedy. But obviously <sup>be</sup> the figures before us must <sup>be</sup> grouped and classified in some way more significant than mere chronological presentation.

The figures for Corneille leave us with the same impression:-

Count of Past Definites in the Plays of Corneille:-<sup>1.</sup>

Mélite. (C).....	38
Clitandre. (T).....	14
La Veuve. (C).....	43
La Galerie du Palais. (C).....	48
La Suivante. (C).....	19
La Place Royale. (C).....	32
Médée. (T).....	52
L'Illusion Comique. (C).....	93
Le Cid. (T).....	29
Horace. (T).....	37
Cinna. (T).....	54
Polyeucte. (T).....	52
Pompée. (T).....	58
Le menteur. (C).....	77
La Suite du menteur. (C).....	56
Rodogune. (T).....	91
Théodore. (T).....	13
Héraclius. (T).....	101
Andromède. (T).....	54
Don Sanche. (CH).....	44
Nicomède. (T).....	15
Pertharite. (T).....	48
Oedipe. (T).....	107
La Toison d'Or. (T).....	27
Sertorius. (T).....	32
Sophonisbe. (T).....	75
Othon. (T).....	54
Agésilas. (T).....	44
Attila. (T).....	22
Tite et Bérénice. (CH).....	87
Psyché (TB).....	12
Pulchérie. (CH).....	20
Suréna. (T).....	52

1. N.B. Comédie des Tuileries omitted, since only its third act is accredited to Corneille.

CH= Comédie Héroïque. TB= Tragédie-ballet.

If one were tempted to see a very slight reduction of Past Definite usage in Corneille as compared with Rotrou and to link this fact with the question of obsolescence the following figures for Racine, which show a higher average than those of Corneille and in no play-- except the ~~single~~ comedy, Les Plaideurs-- fall beneath 39, are sobering:--

Count of Past Definites in the Plays of Racine:--

La Thébaïde. (T).....	47
Alexandre le Grand. (T).....	39
Andromaque. (T).....	65
Les Plaideurs. (C).....	10
Britannicus. (T).....	79
Bérénice. (T).....	85
Bajazet. (T).....	75
Mithridate. (T),.....	88
Iphigénie. (T).....	82
Phèdre. (T).....	52
Esther. (T).....	106
Athalie. (T).....	88

It is only, indeed, when we come to the figures obtained for the comedies of Molière that we find ourselves in the presence of a difference so striking as to warrant more than ordinary emphasis and examination. For if his contemporary Racine seemed to find the Past Definite a vital implement of language, Molière's need of the ~~the~~ sense is much less evident.

Counts of Past Definites in the Comedies of Molière.

La Jalousie du Barbouillé.....	0	P (1A)
L'Etourdi.....	34	V (1A)
Le Dépit Amoureux.....	49	V (5A)
Les Précieuses Ridicules.....	7	P (1A)
Sganarelle(Le Cocu Imaginaire).....	5	V (1A)
Dom Garcie de Navarre.....	17	V (3A)
L'Ecole des Maris.....	48	V (2A)
Les Fâcheux.....	11	V (3A)
L'Ecole des Femmes.....	42	V (5A)
La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes.....	16	P (1A)
L'Impromptu de Versailles.....	1	P (1A)
Le Mariage Forcé.....	6	P (1A)
La Princesse d'Elide.....	18	P (5A)
Tartuffe.....	38	V (1A)
Dom Juan.....	12	P (5A)
L'Amour Médecin.....	8	P (3A)
Le Misanthrope.....	26	V (5A)
Le Médecin Malgré Lui .....	21	P (1A)
Mélicerte.....	7	V (1A)
Le Sicilien.....	6	P (1A)
Amphitryon.....	52	V (1A)
George Dandin.....	5	P (3A)
L'Avare.....	38	P (5A)
Monsieur de Pourceaugnac.....	14	P (5A)
Les Amants Magnifiques.....	0	P (5A)
Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme.....	13	P (1A)
Les Fourberies de Scapin.....	36	P (3A)
La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas.....	1	P (1A)
Les Femmes Savantes.....	11	V (5A)
Le Malade Imaginaire.....	13	P (5A)

In no play of Molière, even of five-act length, does the Past Definite ceiling rise as far as 50. Yet, in retrospect, we remember that the highest recorded total is in a comedy, Rotrou's La Belle Alphrède!

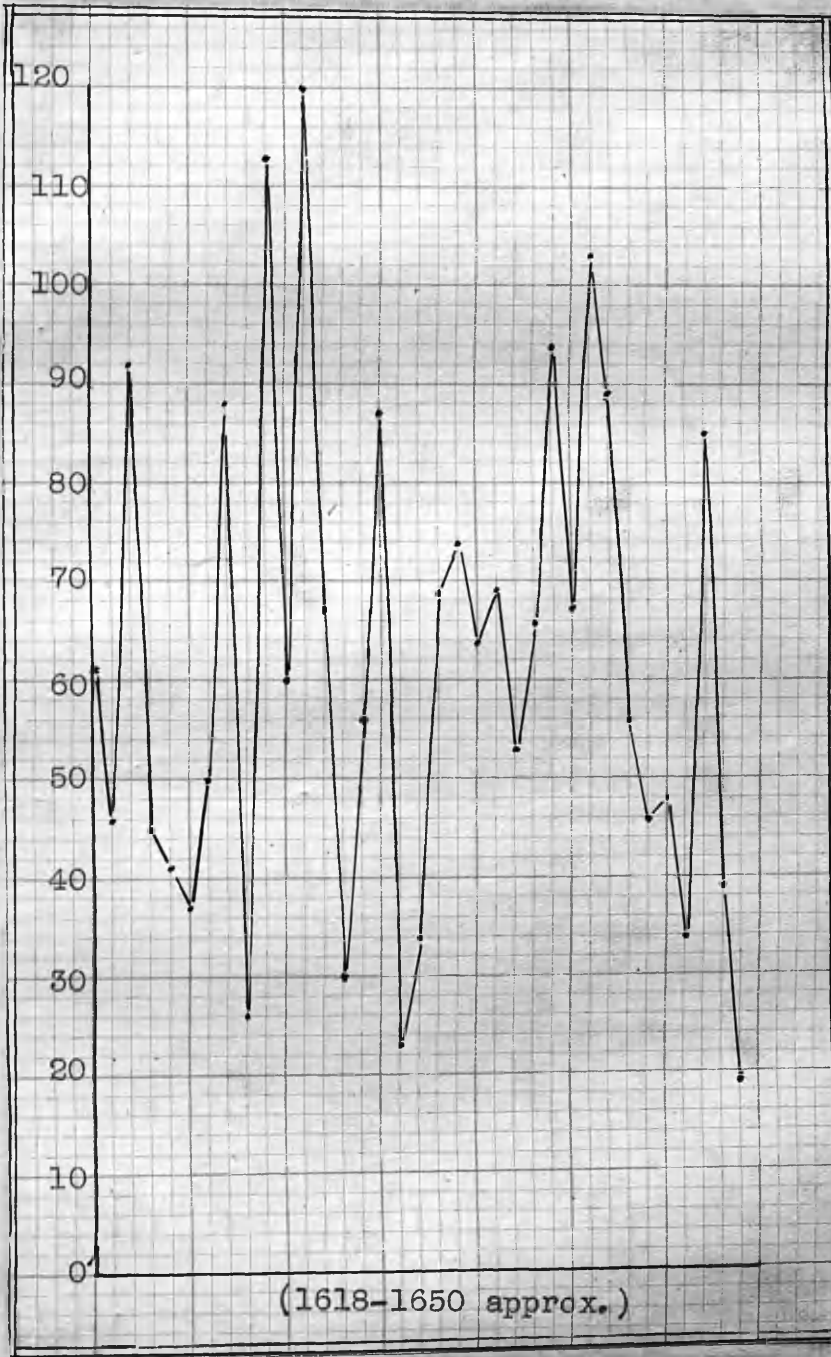
Introducing now a greater element of control into our scrutiny of the above counts-- since the length of any play is the first major factor affecting the number of Past Definites it uses-- let us confine our attention to the five-act plays of our four authors. The average number of Past Definites occurring in each author-- irrespective of genre-- is found to be:-

Rotrou....	61
Corneille..	49
Racine....	70
Molière...	25

It is now confirmed that Molière shows a remarkable decrease. But it is also clear that the explanation of this decrease is far from simple since the tragedies of Racine-- belonging to the same period-- constitute a much more remarkable phenomenon, in so much as they show an increase of Past Definite frequency which runs counter to the accepted theory that the obsolescence of the Past Definite ~~is~~ in the second half of the seventeenth century is self-evident.

1.  
Let us put the results obtained in graph form before seeking further conclusions.  
1. Each point in the following graphs represents the number of Past Definites in one play. Only five-act plays, in chronological order, are thus recorded.

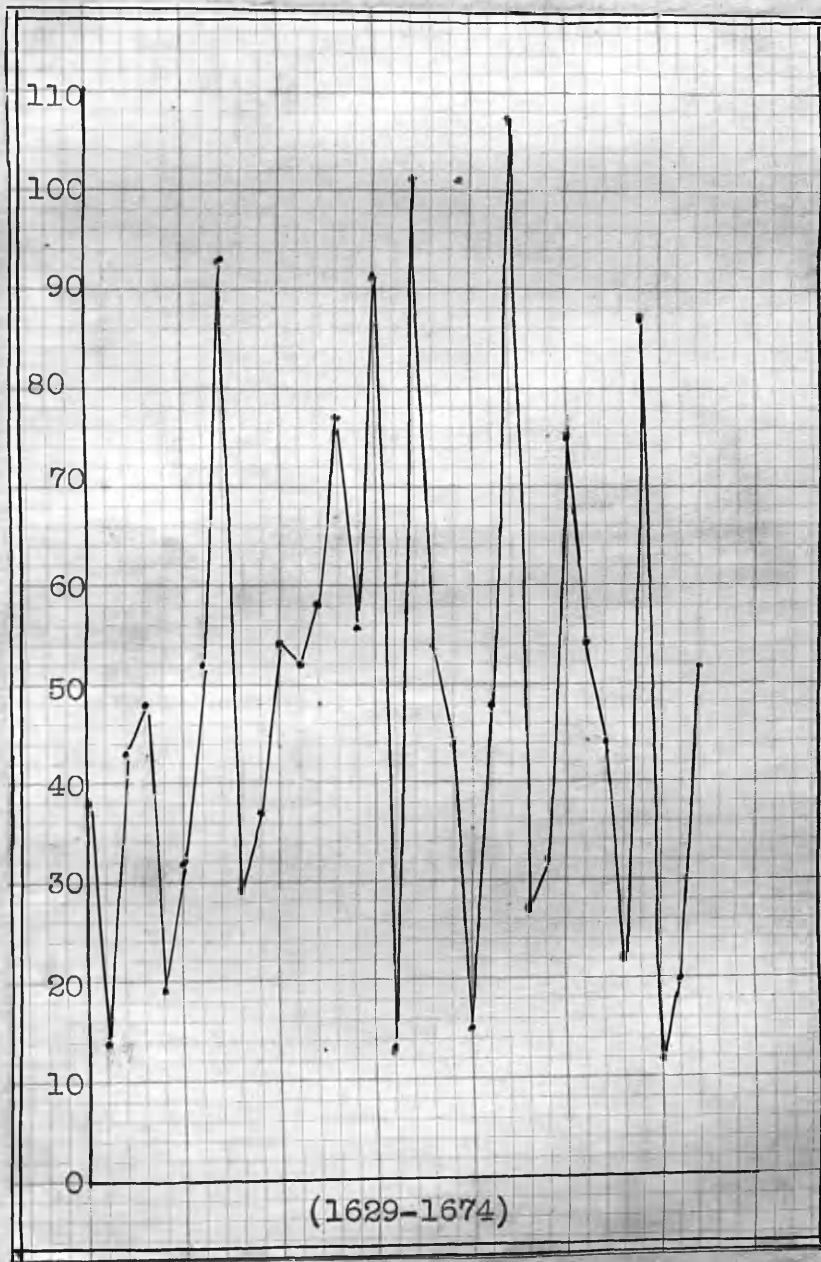
Graph of Past Definite Occurrence in the five-act  
1.  
plays of Rotrou.



No. 2.

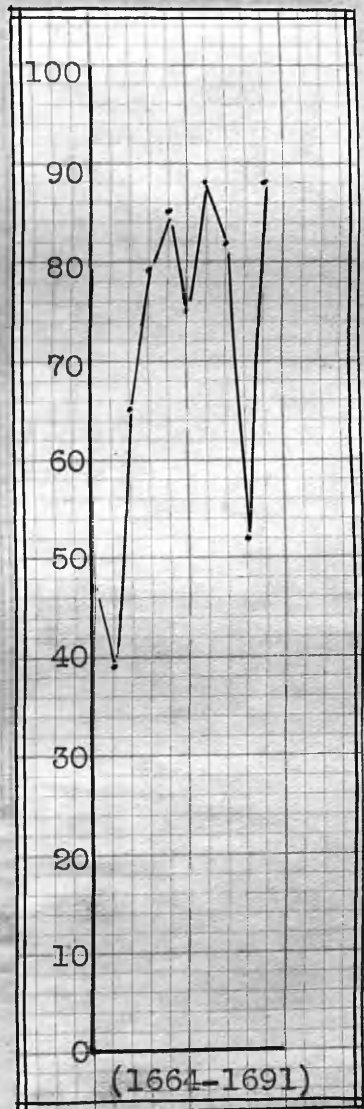
1. i.e. in all his plays with the exception of Crisante.

Graph of Past Definite Occurrence in the five-act  
Plays of Corneille.



No. 3.

Graph of Past Definite Occurrence in the five-act  
Plays of Racine.  
1.

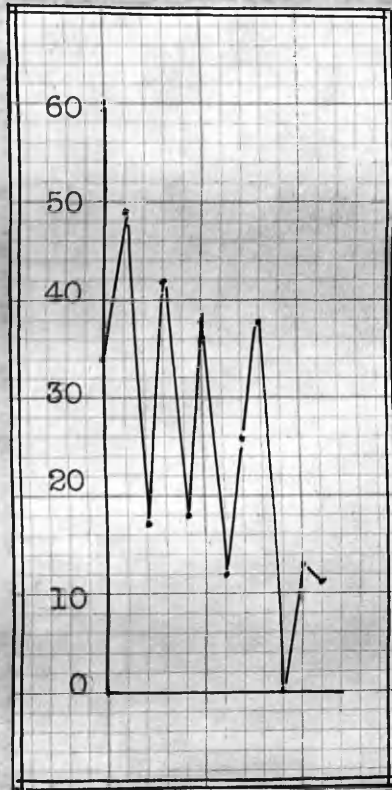


No. 4.

1. i.e. Les Plaiseurs and Esther omitted.

Graph of Past Definite Occurrence in the five-act

Plays of Molière.



No. 5.

1. These are:-

L'Etourdi.  
Le Dépit Amoureux  
Don Garcie de Navarre.  
L'Ecole des Femmes.  
La Princesse d'Elide.  
Tartuffe.  
Don Juan.  
Le Misanthrope.  
L'Avare.  
Les Amants Magnifiques.  
Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme.  
Les Femmes Savantes.

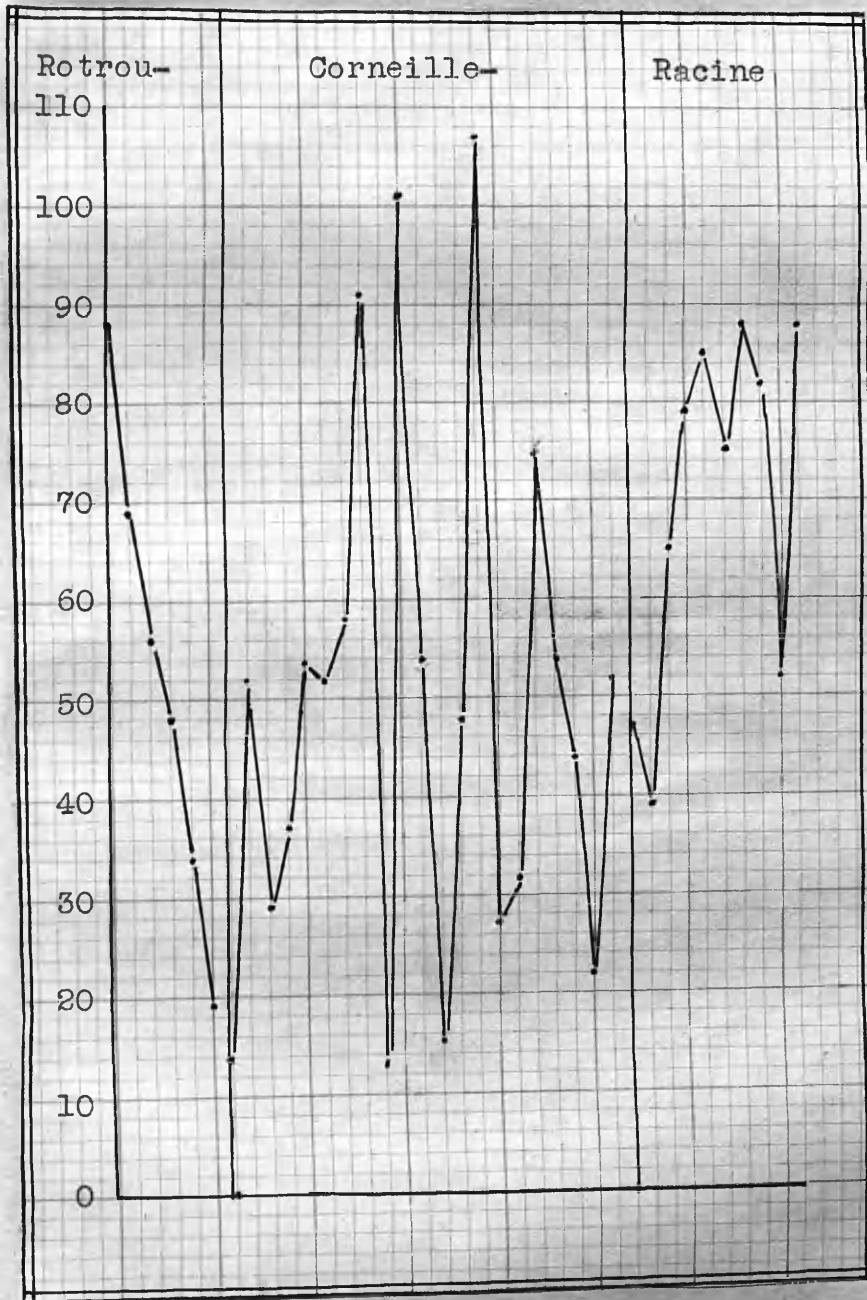
By means of the above graphs it is possible at a glance to seize the general position of the Past Definite in classical drama between the years<sup>1.</sup> 1618 and 1678.

As was previously supposed from the figures available, the Past Definite, though its frequency fluctuates from play to play, is a necessary ingredient of dramatic expression. Only in one play-- and this appears exceptional-- are there no Past Definites. The graphs representing Rotrou, Corneille and Racine resemble each other fairly closely. True, there is less fluctuation in Racine, but one has to remember the more homogeneous tragic nature of his works.

The question of genre begins to assume significance from this fact and from the fact that Molière's comedy shows a distinct and steady pattern of decreasing Past Definite usage, the more striking that it is Rotrou's comedy, La Belle Alphrède, that shows the highest Past Definite total of any play.

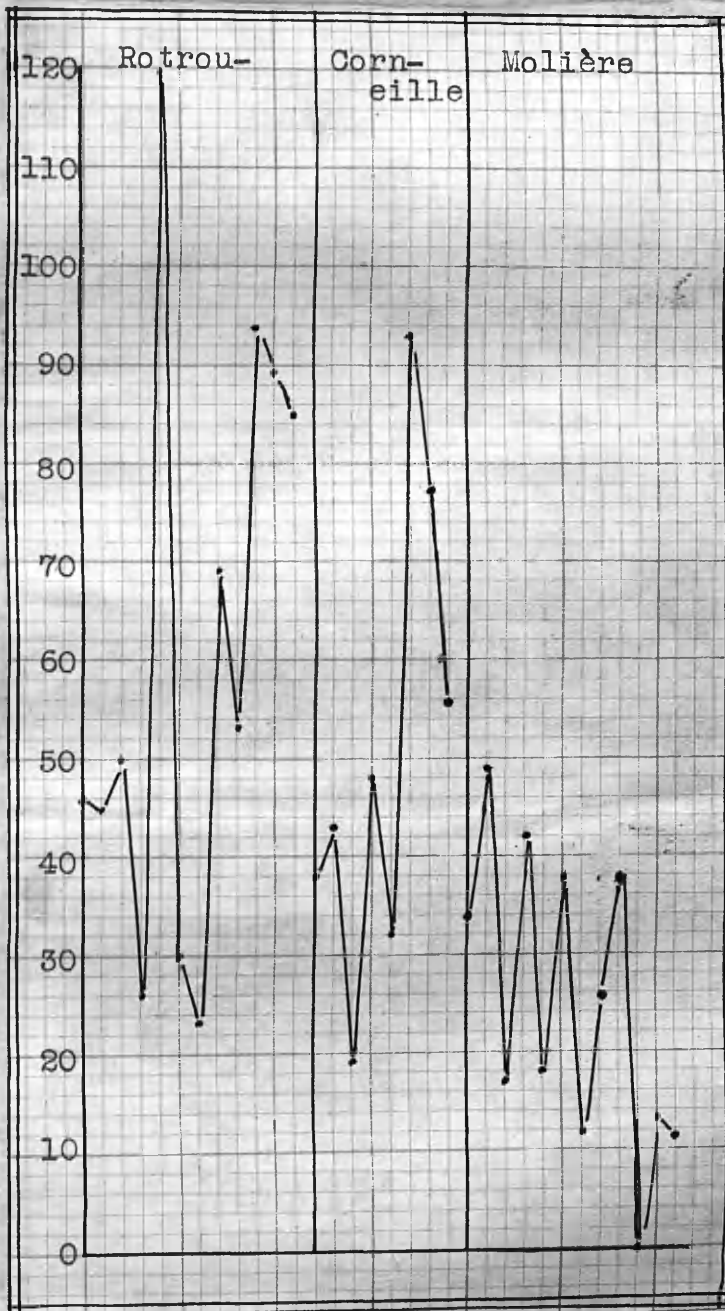
The following graphs of genre are illuminating:-  
1. Athalie, written almost twenty years later than any other play, lies outwith this period.

Graph of Past Definite Occurrence in the five-act  
Tragedies of Rotrou, Corneille and Racine.



No. 6.

Graph of Past Definite Occurrence in the five-act  
Comedies of Rotrou, Corneille and Molière.



No. 7.

The first conclusion to be drawn from these graphs of genre is that they present recognisable patterns. The two patterns, that of tragedy and that pertaining to comedy, are strikingly dissimilar.

In the first place, though Rotrou shows an amazingly consistent decrease of Past Definite usage as his tragic vein develops, in Corneille there is only fluctuation around a steady common norm and in Racine there is patent proof that he uses the Past Definite more steadily than either Rotrou and Corneille-- and more in his later works than in his juvenilia! Broadly speaking, tragedy, according to our graph, shows an increasing vitality in the Past Definite in the seventeenth century!

The average incidence of the Past Definite in each author corroborates this:-

Rotrou: 52.

Corneille: 49,

Racine: 70.

On the other hand a first glance at the graph of comedy indicates a gradual reduction

reduction from Rotrou to Corneille and a catastrophic fall in Molière!

We are then in the presence of an apparent paradox which is open to various interpretations. Those who believe that the Past Definite tense was subject to obsolescence in all its functions may hail the difference between tragedy and comedy, as proof<sup>of</sup> the learned quality being assumed by the tense during the classical period. The higher plane of tragedy can be conceived as borrowing dignity from this quality. Conversely, comedy can be conceived as abandoning the tense because it is becoming dissociated from the ordinary prosaic plane of living. Whatever germ of truth there may be in this interpretation it seems to us to be based on a conception of Past Definite usage belonging more to the twentieth century than the seventeenth. After all, at the time when our dramatists wrote the ordinary citizen of Paris still found occasion to speak the Past Definite-- and the humblest stage character in comedy could do so without appearing learned or unnatural. We have been at

at some pains to demonstrate in our discussion of the verifiable meaning and connotation of the tense that, whatever learned, whatever 'humorous' content it may later acquire, it still moves and has its being in the language of the seventeenth century-- spoken and written-- as a form strictly functional and necessary.

We are, however, faced with unmistakable evidence that the Past Definite thrives in classical tragedy, but 'dwines' in classical comedy. At this point the cartesian formula 'de deux choses l'une' is of little help. We cannot say that drama is either direct evidence of contemporary speech habits or it is not. But we can say that some quality in the Past Definite or in tragedy, or in both, is propitious to their association-- and conversely-- some factor connected with the Past Definite or the nature of comedy, or both, prevents a thriving partnership between them.

Since we have already considered the tense in all its contexts let us turn now to the art-form of drama. Are there factors in the time-basis of tragedy and comedy which may affect the incidence of

of the Past Definite? If, for example, the structure of tragedy in terms of time is basically different from that of comedy, is not this a fact of cardinal importance?

A method of determining this question is available. If the plays we have compared in our graphs of genre are taken as five-act compositions having a certain Past Definite incidence in each of their five divisions, it should be possible, by working out the mean figures of Past Definite occurrence in each act to determine if the weight of 'past-definite' time (time outwith the twenty four hours of stage presentation) is fixed a priori by the time-basis of the particular genre. Graphs based on such figures should reveal whether there is a time-pattern in comedy of the ~~the~~seventeenth century fundamentally different from that of contemporary tragedy. If there is, the apparent paradox evident in our previous graphs of genre may be clarified.

To those who may object that the division into acts is artificial it should be sufficient to

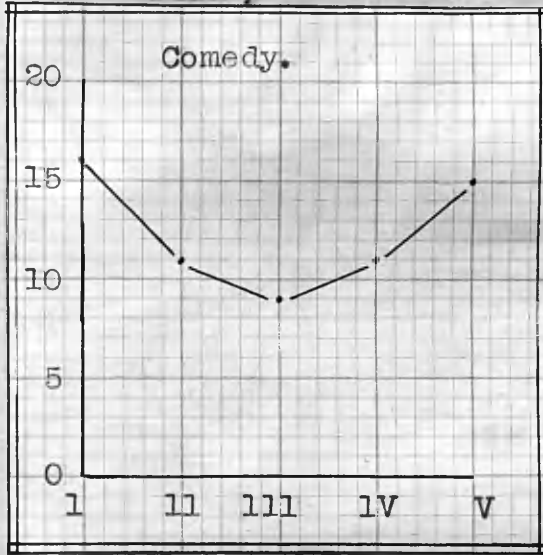
to point out that the acts of our authors' plays are surprisingly similar in length. For even as the length of any play is determined to some extent by how long it is comfortable for the spectator to sit or stand, the act measures its length according to some finer law which is equally strict and probably connected with the space of time during which a spectator can react to the vibrations of drama without exhaustion or revulsion. From this point of view the structure of drama is strictly 'symphonic'.

Our first graphs drawn up on the basis of Past Definite frequency in the five acts of each genre had the advantage of Rotrou's prolific pen<sup>1.</sup> behind them-- that is to say, the number of comedies, tragi-comedies and tragedies involved was impressive. And immediately the indications were that this approach might prove the most rewarding of all. For if the pattern for comedy and tragi-comedy was similar, there seemed an obvious difference in the pattern of tragedy. Where comedy and tragi-comedy appeared as a loop beginning and ending in the past, tragedy, on the other hand showed the weight of the past on the play's action as a peak in the fourth act.  
1. See next page.

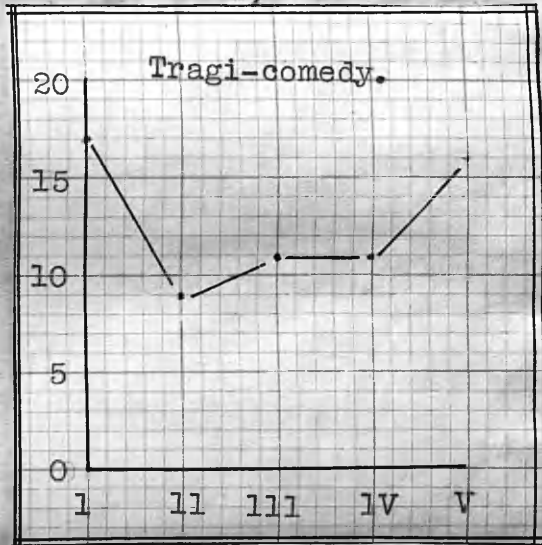
Graph of Past Definite Frequency in each Act of  
the five-act plays of Rotrou.

ROTROU

a)

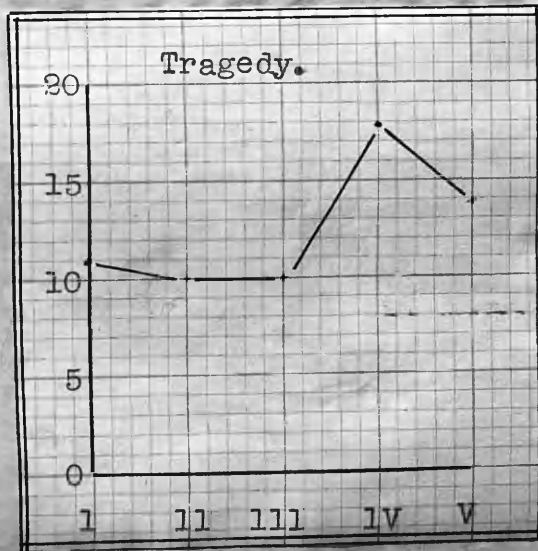


b)



No. 8.

c)

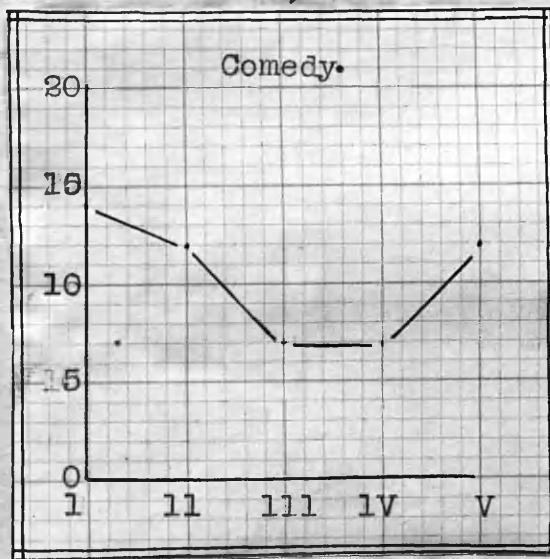


The corresponding graphs for Corneille showed the same 'loop' in comedy and again one high peak of incidence in tragedy, this time in the first act:-

Graph of Past Definite Frequency in each Act of the five-act plays of Corneille.

CORNEILLE.

a)



b)



No. 9.

The pattern for Racine's tragedies offered a synthesis of the divergent patterns of Rotrou and Corneille, since it showed two high peaks of incidence, one in the first act and the other in the fourth:-

- 529 -

Graph of Past Definite Frequency in each Act of  
the five-act tragedies of Racine.

RACINE.

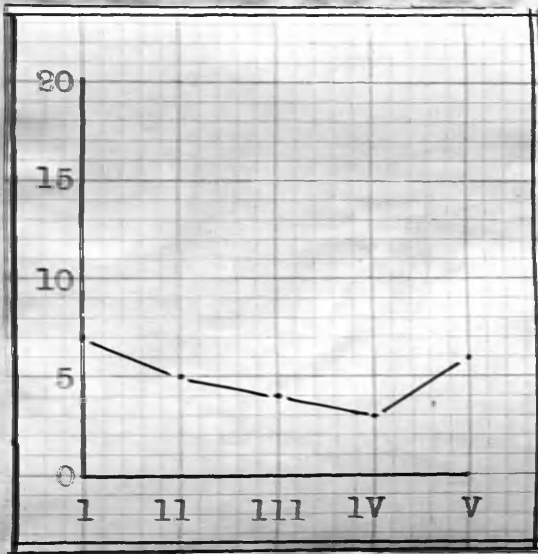


No 10.

It only remained to consult the pattern of Molière's comedy. In the latter, in spite of the great reduction of Past Definites already noted, there remained sufficient in each act of his plays to make the comic 'loop' again discernible:-

Graph of Past Definite Frequency in each Act of  
the five-act Comedies of Molière

MOLIERE.

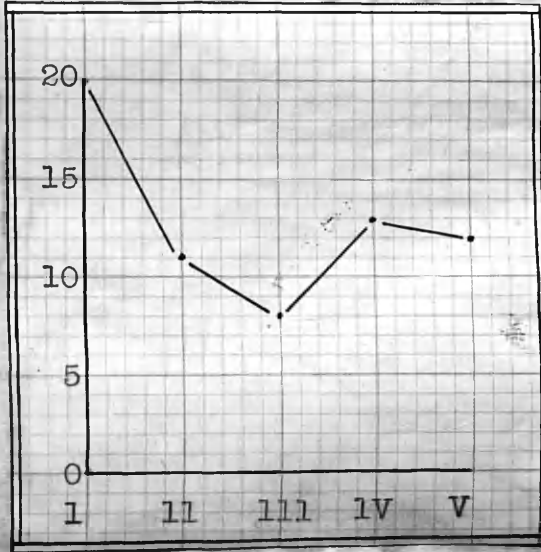


No. 11.

The conclusion we anticipated is inescapable: comedy calls for the modest use of the Past Definite at its beginning and end-- in the classical period. Tragedy of that period has one, possibly two moments, at which the tense appears in heavy concentration. But to clinch the matter, let us look at the average five-act pattern of tragedy: when the figures for our three tragic dramatists are taken together and expressed in graph form:-

Graph of Average Past Definite Frequency in each  
Act of the five-act Tragedies of Rotrou, Corneille  
and Racine.

TRAGEDY- ROTROU, CORNEILLE, RACINE.



No. 12.

A general formula that now becomes applicable to the tragedies of these three dramatists is that in exposition and immediately before dénouement tragedy looks backward to the past. If the use of the Past Definite in classical tragedy has any aesthetic significance it is then surely this, that in the first act it roots the stage plot deeply in the past and in the fourth it evokes remote causality and contrast.

But, let us look at the pattern of comedy:-

Graph of Average Past Definite Frequency in each  
Act of the five-act Comedies of Rotrou, Corneille  
and Molière.

COMEDY- ROTROU, CORNEILLE, MOLIERE.

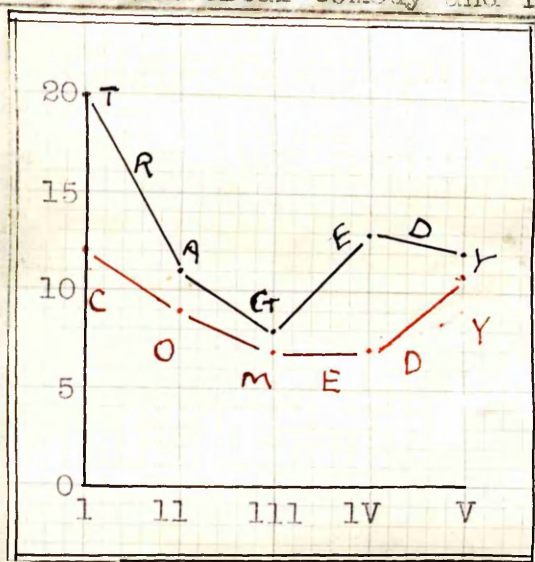


No. 13.

The general principle for classical comedy appears now to be this, that ~~its~~ roots in the past are relatively shallow. The Past Definite is of service to it at the beginning and at the end. But at no point does the past-- as represented by the Past Definite-- intrude for long upon the comic plot.

Superimposing these last two graphs one upon the other we finally confirm the differing time-basis of the two genres:-

Contrasting Pattern of Past Definite Frequency  
in each Act of Classical Comedy and Tragedy.



No. 14.

We can now say with fair authority that in classical tragedy past time has a different role to play from that demanded of it by classical comedy.

Re-Taking this truth in its widest sense and with its particular application to our subject we can state categorically that the time-pattern of tragedy and comedy in the classical period (and possibly at all times) is essentially different and must modify any linguistic findings based on a count of tense usage.

Not only so-- and now our study is seen in its full complexity-- if we accept the fact that classical tragedy has a basic and characteristic time-pattern differing from that of classical comedy this does not prevent our perceiving also that within these common patterns there are differences in the presentation of past time-- as between author and author-- which have their source in differing, individualistic conceptions of dramatic time.

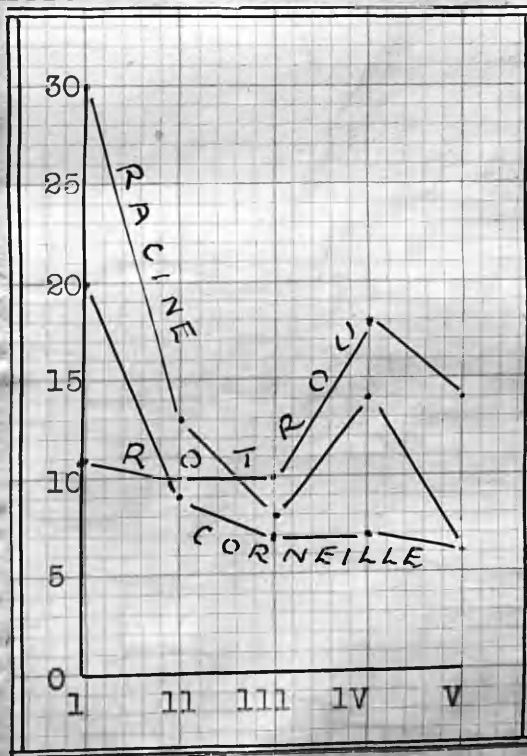
And this is not to be wondered at, for if every art-form which possesses a discernible structure has a basic conception of time which permits of variations, drama as an art-form has as the first condition of its creation that it must condense and telescope into a few hours scenic presentation an action lasting in fact much longer. It follows that a first distinction between one dramatic author and another will be his conception how this should be done within the time-pattern common to the genre.

Since stage drama is an illusion of present

present reality unfolding itself before spectators, the manner in which the dramatist presents past time becomes not only a test of his skill but a revelation of his philosophy.

Consider, for example, the tragic patterns of Rotrou, Corneille and Racine once more:-

Tragic Pattern as Shown by Past Definite Frequency in each Act of the five-act Tragedies of Rotrou, Corneille and Racine.



No. 15.

While one can say that the common pattern of classical tragedy shows the remoter past weighing heavily on the exposition of its plot-- and that past time in this pattern shows peaks of incidence-- the deviations between our three dramatists <sup>indicate</sup> the dynamic placing of the past in their individual conception of tragedy. Since the past is, in its barest definition, possible causality and bears on the problem of free will and predestination in terms of which human conduct has long been defined, these deviations in tragic pattern constitute invaluable evidence on the tragic conception of the individual dramatist.

The ~~pattern~~ of Past Definite incidence within the plays of Rotrou reminds us of the plot of his Venceslas in which the fatal rivalry of two brothers creates late in the play a tragic crisis in which the father, weighing the crime of the day before (the murder of one brother by the other) against human and political considerations must find a solution which may ~~alleviate~~ <sup>alleviate</sup>, but cannot heal, the pain that life inflicts on him. In

In Rotrou the remote past has almost no role to play except in so far as character and those ~~traits~~ which lead to the tragic event are pre-conditioned.

The tragic situation, though implicit from the beginning of the play, is a delayed revelation.

Corneille establishes the authenticity of a tragic situation in his exposition by an impressive and rapid accumulation of past events bearing on the immediate plot. Thereafter his tragic characters, attempting to reverse the verdict of the past (the conspirators in Cinna) or forgetting it too easily (the sons of Rodogune), are bent on moulding the future (Le Cid, Horace, Polyeucte). As the Cornelian plot develops the dynamic of the past consistently weakens.

How different the Racinian pattern! His tragic heroes<sup>e</sup> and heroines bear the past with them like the fetters of a causality which they cannot break. His expositions -- let us think of Andromaque-- are full of the reverberations of past tragedy; before the moment of final climax the past is conjured up again in all its irreconcilability with the

the present. The tragic and fatal atmosphere of the Racinian plot borrows enormously from this double recreation of past disaster. The essence of Racinian tragedy is an illusory weakening in the third act of the grip of the past upon the present. For a brief while a break with the past seems possible. But the past, in the fourth act, reasserts its iron hold and conditions the tragedy.

A final point should be said on these differences in Past Definite pattern which spring from the well of individual style. Since the Past Definite-- as we have interpreted its connotation during the classical period-- registers the immutable and authenticated past event considered at some distance and without immediate and direct relationship to the present its high peaks of incidence in the tragic pattern pin-point moments of meditative lucidity. Corneille, whose characters-- once the tragedy is launched from the slipway of the past-- are men of action hastening towards the event of the near future, shows no secondary peak.

Racine, whose characters bear their tragedy within themselves and in their very blood and turn it over and consider it from every angle, presents a blend of emotional blindness and meditative lucidity which is the essence of human suffering conceived on its highest plane. The secondary peak of Past Definite incidence in his penultimate act registers the reflective anguish of the human mind before the final moment of tragic decision.

In thus emphasising considerations of genre and individual style we have not wandered from the basic linguistic problem which we set out to deal with. For now we can say with some authority what exactly is the value of our various graphs and counts of Past Definite usage in the classical tragedies which we have scrutinised.

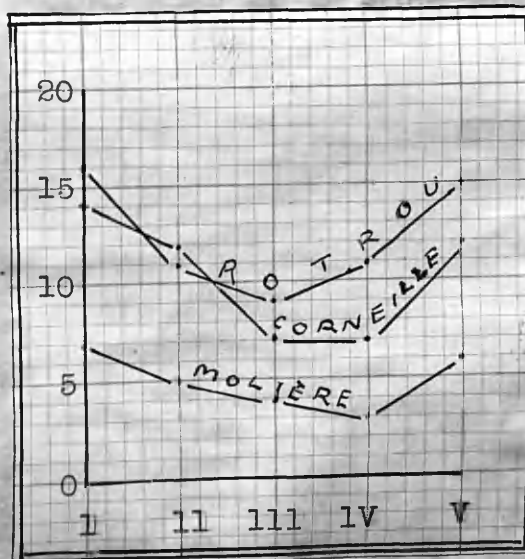
Their value--allowing for the fact that our authors all obey the same grammatical rules with a consistency that goes with a period of linguistic stabilisation-- is this: they show the Past Definite as a necessary and constant ingredient of an art-form closely in touch with the spoken word.

The apparent strengthening of the Past Definite in Racine, the latest of our tragic dramatists, does ~~not and cannot mean~~ that the tense itself is showing increasing vitality. It does suggest, however, that there is no sign of growing obsolescence.

But what of comedy whose graph showed consistent and rapid diminishment of Past Definite usage?

Let us look once more at the pattern of incidence within the five acts of our comic authors:-

Comic Pattern as Shown by Past Definite Frequency  
in each Act of the five-act Comedies of Rotrou,  
Corneille and Molière.



No. 16.

Comedy, if these patterns be taken at their face value, seems to have maintained the same relative distribution of past time throughout its five acts, but with a steady decrease of Past Definite usage as the century advanced.

In light of this, one may readily excuse the misconception that comedy, as it abandoned the realm of heroic romance for that of social satire, fell more and more under the influence of contemporary usage-- in other words, the misconception that the Past Definite occurs less often in Molière because daily speech is rapidly abandoning the tense.

A striking fact, unfortunately, lends dangerous probability to this theory. On counting the number of acts written in prose and verse by Molière and the Past Definite totals for each we have to face the following result:-

45 acts in prose give 197 Past Definites.

52 acts in verse give 315 Past Definites.

To state this in another way, Molière's verse plays show an average Past Definite total of 6 per act as against 4 in his prose plays.

plays. Remembering that Molière shows a gradual decrease of Past Definite usage as his comic vein develops and that he increasingly turns to prose-- remembering also that the alexandrine favours the Past Definite-- one is tempted to leave the matter at the positive conclusion envisaged by Vossler: that comedy during the classical period helped the Past Indefinite into literature by abandoning-- as daily life was <sup>a</sup>abandoning-- the spoken Past Definite.

But anyone who has looked closely at the Past Definites still remaining in comedy cannot accept this facile explanation. Past Definite usage is syntactically the same as that of tragedy. The same twenty four hour rule is rigidly observed.<sup>1</sup> The same connota<sup>t</sup>ion of remoteness keeps appearing. There is no sign anywhere that Past Definites have dropped out in favour of Past Indefinites. They may have-- in the middle past-- but no more than in tragedy.

What has happened to reduce the number of

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1. Unity of time, the 'dramatic' equivalent, keeps almost equal pace also, in comedy and tragedy.

of Past Definites is simply this:- from Rotrou onwards, through Corneille and throughout the evolving comedy of Molière classical comedy is undergoing a revolution in terms of time.

With Rotrou its time-structure is almost that of tragi-comedy. But, from the moment Corneille takes a comedy setting from his Parisian environment, from the moment he links comedy with a study of character, as in Le Menteur, classical comedy is on the move. Molière, in continuing to develop this first slender link between comedy and character, between comedy and social comment, ~~and~~ by blending and improving the various comic techniques he knew, that of high comedy, that of the Italian players, that of the old French farce and the Pont Neuf opérateur, revolutionised the comic genre in France and wrote its masterpieces. But this whole complex process can be thus briefly summarised:- with Molière -- and increasingly throughout his work -- comedy abandons its unnatural connection with the

the past and swims out into the waters of present incongruity where it belongs.

<sup>a</sup>  
Seen against this background the progressive reduction in Past Definite usage throughout classical comedy assumes an entirely different significance. We are not so much surprised to find so few Past Definites, but so many. If we bear in mind that the Past Definite is hermetically sealed off from present time its persistence in comedy appears as confirmation that it still remains in the second half of the seventeenth century a vital and unarchaic implement of the French language.

The differing totals for ~~tragedy~~ and comedy now make sense and take their place as reliable evidence of the state of contemporary language. They do not make us question the fact that the Past Indefinite has spread into literature and has further inroads still to make into the territory of its older rival; but they justify an assumption that the latter still remains separate and vital, and, though threatened, has temporarily consolidated its position.

Much more could be made of all the mathematical evidence that has been adduced in this chapter. The figures and the various graphs might serve as a sound basis for a full analysis of the work of each dramatist. The five-act Past Definite pattern for each play, for example, might lead to interesting and novel criticism. But if the course of our work has led us to trespass in the field of aesthetics at all times this trespass has been related to the essentially linguistic nature of our subject. It has been our aim in so doing to subject all mathematical evidence-- so easily and dangerously come by-- which may be termed external evidence, to qualifications springing from internal content.

In this relation there is one last observation to make. If we examine again the various Past Definite totals for tragedy our eye tends to linger on the plays with which we are most familiar. These plays are most familiar to us because most often read and recommended, though one play or another may achieve prominence in our consciousness for some personal individual reason.

The following plays and their totals thus receive mention:-

Rotrou:	Saint Genest.....	56
	Venceslas.....	48
Corneille:	Le Cid.....	29
	Horace.....	37
	Polyeucte.....	52
Racine:	Andromaque.....	65
	Britannicus.....	79
	Phèdre.....	52

Now the lowest count in any tragedy is 13 and the highest 107 (both figures applying to Corneille). Is it not astonishing to find that the above plays, which are amongst the greatest works<sup>1.</sup> of our authors, seem to avoid the two extremes of the Past Definite scale? They gravitate, so to speak, towards its middle which may be taken as 60. ( The converse, that all tragedies around this point are excellent, is, of course, far from true!) The average Past Definite count for all the/

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1. Casually asking colleagues which of our authors plays they preferred inevitably led to mention of the above plays or others in the same Past Definite range. On further information as to the Past Definite figures being given it was pointed out that Nicomède (15) and Rodogune (91) are exceptions. The important point is, however, that both these plays were afterthoughts and furthermore, that to produce six others like them-- i.e. in the same Past Definite range-- would prove impossible. The ~~exceptional~~ nature of these two plays does not invalidate our main argument.

the plays quoted is 52. The two plays of Rotrou have exactly this average which is also the average for all his tragedies. The plays of Corneille have an average of 39 as against his general average of 49, while the three plays of Racine average 65 Past Definites, a figure close to his general average of 70.

It is reasonable, therefore, to speak of an optimum density in relation to the appearance of the Past Definite in French classical drama. Linguistically this is sound enough since the various tools of language must share the task of expression according to certain ratios fixed by the human mind. From the point of view of drama the idea of an optimum density of Past Definite usage raises interesting possibilities. What it means in classical tragedy is, in effect, this, that the connotation of the Past Definite is such and the conception of classical tragedy so constituted that the superfluity or scarcity of the tense adversely affects the play. Or, to go much

much deeper-- the excellence or weakness of any classical tragedy depends greatly on how much of the past (the remote and parallel past such as the Past Definite expresses!) weighs upon its plot and whether it weighs too lightly or too heavily.

Without probing further let us emphasise that once again we are in the presence of a factor of literary style rigidly controlling the incidence of the Past Definite in drama. Not only in tragedy, is this so. For if we see tragedy as an art-form in which the past has a defined and necessary part to play, we have already noted the increasing tendency of classical comedy to turn its back upon the past completely.....

And now, with the counts of Past Definite frequency behind us we can say that they show no evidence of obsolescence in the Past Definite tense. Our impression has rather been of consolidation on its part accompanied by a rational division of labour with the Past Indefinite.

Our counts, in conclusion, focus our attention

on two more points:-

I.  
(1) We have shown in a previous chapter that the Past Indefinite is spread evenly throughout the play whereas the Past Definite shows peaks of incidence. These peaks exist because (in exposition and sometimes before dénouement) at specific points the Past Definite is narrating. The failure of the Past Indefinite as a narrative tense is patent, and the necessary survival of the Past Definite thus justified.

(2) We may be reproached for not seizing upon the dwindling graph of Past Definite incidence in comedy as direct proof of its spoken obsolescence. Such evidence would fit so well with the established conception-- a verbal form beginning to sound archaic, rejected drastically by ear and tongue, made fun of as a badge of snobbery..... But does not our honest interpretation of the dwindling in comedy offer us, if closely considered, the key to the enigma of Past Definite obsolescence?

The Past Definite ebbs from comedy as it ebbs from daily speech because it has-- from its developing connotation of completeness and remoteness-- less and less of relevance to comic (i.e. present) reality.. The process is an external and internal one, the persistence or disappearance of certain applied types of expression, accompanied by a new and ideal segmentation of the past-- a process so so complicated and gradual that it still continues to-day, so exasperatingly complicated that many historians of language would like to hasten it. The Past Definite in classical drama possesses distinctive functions outwith the scope of its competitor, functions for which the contemporary spoken language must have been rich in prototypes. Its reduced appearance in classical comedy forecasts its eventual ~~disappearance~~ from daily speech, but shows it still possessed of vital distinctive qualities that are slowing down the phase of change upon it-- distinctive qualities that will make its final eclipse not total, but partial.

## Chapter VII.

### Conclusion.

( Modification of accepted ideas -- the verb more than a mere applied type of expression -- finesse of the civilised language -- analytical forms and mechanical convenience of entry to the language -- later ideal complexities -- the impasse of the Past Indefinite -- compulsion of the ideal ~~secret~~ -- 'parti pris' of grammarians -- Estienne's 'hidden secret' -- the so-called errors of the poets -- the fallacy of defining the Past Definite in terms of time -- cardinal role of aspect -- connotation of remoteness a mistaken attempt to express the aspect of completion by distance in time -- crucial distinction between the Past Definite and Indefinite -- first step towards spoken obsolescence -- the law of compensation -- strengthening of the Past Definite -- its new role -- complexity and severance from the present -- its ebbing from the shores of present time and therefore from speech -- archaism, a false notion in seventeenth century -- enrichment of style and thought in literature -- arrested evolution of the Past Indefinite -- creation of two narrative systems -- exaggeration of external factors -- evolution of the civilised language -- Klassische Dämpfung -- the poet and the language -- repetition and summary of conclusions arising from linguistic counts and scrutiny of dramatic dialogue -- the Past Definite and the question of style -- our debt to the creative author.)

From the beginning of the irreversible evolution of the French language a process of change has affected the preterite tense which it inherited from vulgar latin. By the end of the seventeenth century-- the century during which the language , clarified and stabilised, achieved its modern shape--- an analytical form which had been spreading within the language for at least five hundred years had replaced the former preterite -- or was replacing it-- in the majority of its functions. The former preterite, termed the Past Definite, was disappearing from the spoken medium.

Two complementary opinions on the causes, nature and consequences of this spoken obsolescence have received wide acceptance. On the one hand, the mechanical advantages of the newer form, termed the Past Indefinite, are taken to be the major factor responsible for its dissemination. On the other hand, it has been assumed that the older tense suffered from a gradual withering away of

function, became archaic, but was preserved in literature because the written word is by its nature conservative and predisposedly favourable to the learned term. These opinions are in need, if not of correction, at least of serious modification.

The mechanical convenience of any new form of expression may be a first recommendation for its adoption by the language. Hosts of easy applied types of expression will thrive and multiply. But if these hosts seem initially adequate to express the surface phenomena of a deeply abstract idea-- such as Time-- they may, as they percolate upwards from the people to its literature, from the people to its creative artists and authors, be found inadequate to deal with the nuance and complication implicit in all abstract thought. The civilised language in its evolution seeks no doubt for ease of expression. It also seeks variety and finesse. And its first apparent characteristic is to mirror the society it

serves by a stratification not existing in its tribal beginnings. Mechanical convenience may induce the language towards a new highroad of expression, but later the language may become involved-- because of the direction it has taken-- in ideal complexities and obstructions. The result will be an impasse. There seems no fitter word to express the position reached by the Past Indefinite to-day. Perfect and preterite in function, according to most grammarians, it is still unfit for literary narrative. The creative mind tolerates it in speech, in the letter and in drama, but still resists it in the novel-- and rejects it.

Furthermore, in relation to this question of convenience and economy of effort which is emphasised as favouring the Past Indefinite, to presuppose that the dynamism of the linguistic change involved sprang therefrom is surely to mistake the symptoms for the disease. In other words, the creation of a new perfect-- however much in line

it may be with the analytical trend of French morphology -- sprang from an inner ideal need of the language. The manifold functions of the Past Definite in Old French-- perfect, preterite, imperfect-- called out for alteration in a language committed to becoming the expression of a great nation and its literature. The ideal need was the need of clarity and differentiation. That this need expressed itself in the most convenient embryonic form within its reach was natural and automatic. That the convenience of the new form imparted an élan to the process of change is probable. That it was its raison d'être is more than doubtful.

That a verbal tense under competition from a more favoured rival can wither away completely and disappear is a natural phenomenon such as may be found in all organic structures. The Past Definite appears then to many historians of language to have less justification for remaining in French literature than the vermiform appendix for persisting

persisting in the human body. Behind this assumption lies the accepted idea that whatever is condemned by spoken usage is doomed to eventual elimination from literature. There seems no reason to doubt the fundamental truth of this... But, even allowing for the fact that the literate quality of a modern civilisation slows down the evolution of the language it uses, that schoolmaster, radio and newspaper bring ever increasing numbers under the influence of the written word, does it not seem probable that the stubborn persistence of the Past Definite in modern French must stem from its possession of an innate distinctive value lacking in its competitor?

It was in order to answer this question that we embarked upon this exhaustive survey of Past Definite usage in classical drama. Now that this survey is completed it is our conviction -- in view of the constant differentiation between the Past Definite and the Past Indefinite in classical tragedy and comedy-- that the answer is in the affirmative, that during the classical period the process of general clarification which

which overtook the French language endowed each tense-- on the basis of their form and innate content-- with qualities and functions so distinct from each other that the older tense was certain to remain in literature on the basis of usefulness, not learnedness and the newer tense to reveal imperfections that must delay its ultimate development.

For to-day the Past Definite is not only the tense of an élite, not only 'une forme savante', it is also the tense of the barely literate, the tense, that is, of most novels, of some lawsuits, of many 'fait divers' and of innumerable reports of football matches. One feels sometimes among modern authorities on language a certain partipris, whether they are for or against the Past Definite-- as if they felt a little push one way or another might make all the difference in the question of its survival or extinction.

Our inspiration in this work came rather from the early grammarians who, writing at a time when the Past Definite was still spoken, when the balance between the two competitor tenses was still even, mirror this state of equilibrium in their own

impartiality. Henri Estienne goes so far as to say that the Past Indefinite is already more generally employed than the Past Definite, but shows no <sup>1.</sup> animus against the latter. Maupas, with some independence and thought -- against the rigid twenty four hour rule so dear to the Academy's critics of Le Cid, -- maintains (to be later contradicted by his own follower Oudin) that an event an hour old can be expressed by the passé simple if it has no longer <sup>2.</sup> any connection with the present. Maupas-- and naturally so, since he wrote at a later period than Estienne-- comes nearer a proper definition than his predecessor. But there is an engaging and revealing frankness and humanity about Estienne. One thinks almost with affection of his confession that there is some 'other secret hidden beneath this aorist' and his desperately naïve excuse for dropping the subject when he reached the thorny problem of when one should use one tense and when the others:-

1. Op. cit. p. 110. (ed. Delalain)
2. See F. Brunot-CH. Bruneau, Précis de Grammaire Historique, 1933 ed., p. 501, quoted in Article of Origin.

Car pour bien enfoncer ceste matière, il me faudrait entrer en une longue dispute, et par conséquent avoir meilleur loisir que ne me donne la presse <sup>1.</sup> où ceci s'imprime, laquelle me suit de trop près.

It was the puzzlement of Estienne and the <sup>2.</sup> partial contradiction in Maupas that first induced us to suspect that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries some stage or step, in this process of change affecting the expression of past time had been missed, not only by the first great grammarians, <sup>3.</sup> but by all subsequent authorities.

It was the so-called errors of our dramatic poets that brought enlightenment: the pregnant use, the death-associative, the Past Definite used in contrast with the Present Indicative, the Past Definite signifying the totality of all time past-- for these usages defied the contemporary twenty four hour rule which now has perished, while <sup>the</sup> so-called errors of the poets were based on the tense's distinctive qualities still alive in it to-day.

1. Ibid., p. 106.

2. It is obvious to anyone closely reading the relevant passages in his Grammaire et Syntaxe Française (pp. 272-276) that in spite of his dictum on events an hour old he associates the Past Definite with the remote event and the Past Indefinite with the recent.

Let us attempt to reconstruct the process of change affecting the Past Definite and driving it out of daily speech in the light of what we have learned from the text of classical drama.

By the seventeenth century the Past Definite had lost the imperfect function it had once usurped and had yielded its long exercised perfect function to the Past Indefinite. The loss of the imperfect function severed it from any extensive or imperfective value in recording events of the past. The loss of its function as a perfect drastically removed it from close proximity with the Present Indicative except in a few instances which puzzled grammarians. The tense was still used regularly with specific expressions of time in the recent and middle past and without them in the remote.

The language — and the grammarians— seeking for the principle behind these changes, tried to differentiate between the Past Indefinite and the Past Definite in terms of time. In the seventeenth century the Past Definite was credited with a value of remoteness from the present. On this basis the grammarian created a twenty four hour barrier between

it and the Present Indicative, prescribed the accompaniment of a time-expression in the recent and middle past to justify the use of the Past Definite and considered these rules right and logical.

The puzzlement of certain grammarians and the language itself-- and particularly the poets-- is expressed in the fact that these rules did not cover every eventuality. And for a very good reason. If remoteness from present time was the raison d'être of the Past Definite how had it come to pass that the Past Indefinite already in the seventeenth century could reach as far back into the past as the older preterite? It was no doubt this contradiction that suggested to Estienne the idea of some secret hidden behind all this, some mystic formula, and emboldened Maupas, still thinking in terms of time, to say that the Past Definite could record an event an hour old if that event were completely finished.

The same attitude, this thinking in terms of crude time, is responsible for later grammarians calling the Past Indefinite a preterite

preterite and crediting it with full equivalence with the Past Indefinite. On this premiss it follows as logical that the older, more difficult form, should quickly succumb to the newer more convenient one and obligingly wither and waste away.

True, a hundred years later it had passed from spoken usage and taken the twenty four hour rule with it. But two hundred years later it was still the vehicle of the greatest narrative genre, the novel. To-day it continues to defy those whose diagnosis of its archaism foresaw its early demise.

The imperfect rules of the seventeenth century grammarians presuppose an imperfect understanding of the problem which the Past Definite and the Past Indefinite set them.

The text of classical drama has shown us that the crucial difference between the two tenses lies in their relationship to the Present Indicative. The satellite tense, thrown off by the latter, that is, the Past Indefinite, became its intermediary

intermediary with past time. Past reality could only link with that of the present through its channel. A gap was created between the Present Indicative and the Past Definite, the first stage in its spoken obsolescence, since daily speech is concerned with present reality.

And now we come to what may be considered Estienne's secret, the missing link in the chain of linguistic evidence so far uncovered by historians. The loss of its usurped imperfect function, coupled with the loss of its perfect function and its increased distance from the present, endowed the Past Definite or recreated within it, by the natural law of compensation (for what does not die has acquired a new reason for living), an aspect of completeness and severance from the present. This development-- in addition to the artificial connotation of remoteness-- running counter to every tendency in the French verb, <sup>1.</sup> demand it in the spoken medium.

1. C.f. Maurice Leroy, Sur le Concept d'Evolution en Linguistique, Brussels, 1950, p. 30:-

Dans les anciennes langues indo-européennes, le procès exprimé par le verbe était envisagé sous différents aspects concrets et particuliers  
(contd.)

Proof of this is to be found in classical drama for if in tragedy and high comedy, but particularly in tragedy, we find the Past Definite used within the forbidden twenty four hours it is so used for its pregnant quality of completeness, of end-of-the-chapter totality. But the Past Definites met with in comedy or farce <sup>1.</sup> strictly obey the twenty four hour rule, are accompanied by a time-expression in the middle and recent past or have in themselves a connotation of remoteness. Ordinary spoken usage could not seize, appreciate or employ the aspect-value of the Past Definite.

There is evidence, however, that the intuitive mind of the creative poet on occasion felt a need to exploit the new finesse in verbal expression which had become available to him and there can be no doubt that temporarily, somewhere in the spoken language, there existed prototypes to guide him.

particuliers; on faisait la distinction entre une action qui dure, une action momentanée une action qui se répète, une action qui commence, une action accomplie, etc.; la catégorie du temps ne s'est introduite que postérieurement dans le système du verbe... la plupart des langues modernes... ont donné le pas au temps sur l'aspect au point que dans une langue comme le français, la catégorie de l'aspect passe inaperçue du sujet parlant comme des grammaires normatives parce qu'elle n'a plus d'expression morphologique.....

1. See Analysis of Champmeslé's La Rue St. Denis, appendix, pp. 408-410.

That the aspect-value of the Past Definite was the result of no chance or passing phase can be seen from the fact that in Voltaire's *Sophonisbe*, written in the second half of the eighteenth century one finds a glaring example of the twenty four hour rule broken in the close company of 'aujourd'hui'--an error never committed blatantly by any classical poet--but as many as four examples of the Past Definite used within the twenty four hour limit to express completeness and totality.<sup>1</sup> In other words the grammarian's rule perishes more quickly than the poet's.

But to return--the new potency of the Past Definite unfitted it for retention in speech since the ordinary Frenchman, whose conception of time radiates, like our own, from the Present Indicative (*Moi-ici-maintenant*), had in the Present Indicative, the Past Indefinite and the Imperfect sufficient implements for its rendering.

Under these circumstances the Past Definite ebbed away from contact with present reality and from daily speech. The word 'ebbed' is the most

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1. See appendix, pp. 403-407.

most apposite. It was a slow process lasting over several centuries, so gradual that it was scarcely noticed. At no point in classical drama is one aware of any archaic quality in the tense.

Whatever semi-humorous quality has been read into examples of its use in Les Précieuses Ridicules or Candide seems to have been wished upon it by minds subconsciously desiring to hasten the evolutionary progression of the language.

But, it may be objected, the so-called compensation of the Past Definite had proved the reverse of compensating since it hastened its passing from speech. That is true. But the selective and literary mind had already savoured and appreciated its potency. The new connotation had not damaged, but rather enhanced the advantages of the tense in prepared narrative. The Past Definite had lost any loose or extensive quality it had ever assumed. Retaining the value of finished completeness within the segment of the past allotted to it, it could encompass the expression of any event or process, however long or short in duration, as punctual, complete in itself and making way for the next event

in series.

On the other hand, the Past Indefinite, in relation to prepared and selective narrative--such narrative as rightly belongs to literature and the written record--revealed an insufficiency that stemmed from its form, origins and associations. To recapitulate:- its auxiliary, borrowed from the Present Indicative, chains it inevitably to the present subjective reality of the narrator, which is the more serious that the major auxiliary 'avoir' implies a personal acquisitive attitude to the event or events narrated; its past participle adds a static quality inimical to narrative developing by skilful selection towards climax; its daily association in speech with the unarranged inconsequentialities of life clings to it wherever it goes.

The result has been, not that the Past Definite stubbornly lingers as a semi-learned tense in literature while a more efficient form is waiting to take its place, but rather that the language has thrown up two separate narrative systems, the newer radiating from the reality of the Present Indicative, the older from that of the Imperfect Indicative-- the one concerned with placing events

on a plane that merges the past event with the present, the other with arranging them at a distance on a plane parallel with the present but never merging with it.

This phenomenon to many does not seem an enrichment of the language. Since the nature of the two narrative systems imprisons the one in literature and the other in speech (or literature mirroring the spoken attitude) it appears naturally as a crime against the laws of language development.

In consequence there has been an evident desire in certain quarters to convict the Past Definite of archaism and ignore the essential facts behind the problem it presents.

It is pointed out, for example, that the Past Definite is mainly to be found in the 3rd person, sometimes in the 1st and less and less in the 2nd. It is suggested that the difficulty of the 1st person and 2nd person endings have contributed to this. Such forms as 'vous aimâtes', 'vous fûtes', etc., are archaic. A measure of how far externals have influenced opinions on the Past Definite can be taken in this particular instance. Is it, indeed,

indeed, the external form of the three persons of the ~~narrative~~ tense that determines its incidence in the first place? Our qualitative analysis of several plays showed the following ratio of  
1.  
occurrence:-

1st Person... 24%  
2nd Person... 6%  
3rd Person.. 70%

The meaning of these figures based on the text of drama written at a time when the Past Definite was still spoken is surely this, that the nature and connotation of the tense is such as to favour the 3rd person rather than the 1st and 2nd... A simple illustration of the truth of this, without straying too far from our essential subject, can be given in relation to narrative. The subject of ~~o~~narrative which concerns events seen at one remove from the present is most likely to be a third party usually not in the audience listening. the narrator is completely free to judge and assess objectively the events he tells since he is only indirectly concerned with them. Narration in the 1st person of the Past Definite

Definite presupposes a reflective mood on the part of the narrator and an intimate audience to listen to him. Narration or casual comment in the 2nd Person of the Past Definite is likely to be rare since it presupposes an extreme familiarity between narrator and listener, the listener being told objective facts about himself-- facts which he must know better than the narrator.

It is obvious that though a feeling of archaism may to-day affect our attitude to the 2nd Person of the Past Definite, this has little to do with the difficulty of its conjugation and much to do with the connotation of the tense which induced its scarcity of occurrence.

Regrettable though the deviation from spoken usage may be, the Past Definite and its literary narrative system can be considered to have

1.  
enriched the French language.

L.C.F.E. Pichon, Temps et Idioms (Extraits de Recherches Philosophiques, 1935-36.), p. 218:-

La case passée du répartitoire d'énarration s'appelle dans notre nomenclature, le présent. C'est le passé simple, type il fit. Son peu d'emploi dans le parler courant n'est pas sans valeur psychologique; il va avec sa fonction/

It can be maintained that in the highly civilised language changes in spoken usage cease to exert their influence on its written medium, once a great peak of culture (such as the French seventeenth century) has been reached and passed, with the same categorical authority as before. It is in addition a characteristic of civilised peoples that they tend to express their conception of time with <sup>2.</sup>  
increasing variety and refinement.

/fonction même, telle que nous la révèle le style soutenu, car il y tient encore en français, un rôle où il est irremplaçable. Il fait mention des faits passés sous forme ponctuelle, sans leur attribuer vis-à-vis du présent aucune valeur même de pur acquêt et sans leur conférer aucune réviviscence affective actuelle.

L.M. Leroy, op. cit., pp. 30-31:-

.. la mesure du temps est une notion à laquelle l'homme n'atteint qu'après avoir acquis un certain niveau de culture; les langues des peuples non évolués expriment avec une grande précision une foule de détails matériels qui nous échappent et accordent notamment une prédominance nette aux considérations spatiales, alors que les considérations temporelles sont négligées ou imprécises. C'est que la prise de conscience du temps relève de la faculté d'abstraction.....

Surely it is this latter factor that has endowed the tense with a particular attraction for the creative artist and that has maintained it in literature. Its value in the novel is to mask the presence of the novelist behind an atmosphere of objectivity and authenticity so that Flaubert's Madame Bovary, c'est moi! achieves the character of a highly original statement. This atmosphere is the 'klassische Dämpfung' of Leo Spitzer --<sup>1.</sup> a suppression of the emotional by the intellectual viewpoint, a focussing on reality from long distance.

The innate difference in the emotive value of the Past Definite and the Past Indefinite in narrative we have already illustrated in a contrast drawn between L'Étranger and La Peste of Camus.<sup>2.</sup>

The spoken archaism of the Past Definite has, in certain contexts, endowed it with a power of evocation not implicit in its basic meaning.<sup>3.</sup>

1. Linguistics and Literary History, Princeton, 1948, p. 110.

2. pp. 242, 246.

3. S. Ullmann, Le Passé défini et l'Imparfait du Subjonctif dans le théâtre contemporain, Le Français Moderne, 1936, p. 354:-

"cette désuétude elle-même doit communiquer à nos deux temps une certaine force évocatrice."

meaning. But this peculiarity is still limited to drama.

Many of the invaluable studies of the Past Definite which inspired and encouraged this work and without which it would have been impossible -- our debt is acknowledged by frequent quotation-- we feel in all humility have been adversely affected by several factors that we have attempted to avoid. Too many have attempted to explain the process of linguistic change which expelled the Past Definite from spoken French in terms of time only. Too many have generalised on the basis of too little evidence. Too many have thought that to prove the Past Indefinite a preterite was to serve notice of dismissal on the Past Definite. And too few have searched for evidence of a profoundly abstract phenomenon of linguistic change in the proper place, the works of creative artists in a medium close to speech at a moment of high culture.

Rotrou, Corneille, Racine and Molière afforded all the evidence on which our conclusions

conclusions are based. The position of the Past Definite in the structure and detailed contexts of classical drama reveals its position in contemporary language-- and reveals it as vastly different from what the rules of the grammarians implied. "herein lies the significance of the Past Definite in classical drama-- and in the light it throws on drama as a literary genre and on the classical poet who writes it.

The evidence pointing to our conclusions lies in innumerable quotations throughout these pages, in new analyses of passages which have been for centuries the household words of education and which are not yet fully comprehended; it lies also in exhaustive counts of Past Definite incidence and their implication for the act-to-act structure of tragedy and comedy. It can be summarised thus:-

(1) Mythological reference consistently found expression in the Past Definite, never in the Past Indefinite. This one realm uninvaded by the new tense revealed its inability to penetrate a plane of living remote and unconnected with present reality.

(2) The Récit du Cid and the exposition of Rodogune

Rodogune show that the Past Definite could isolate an event or series of events, creating a gap which preventing overlapping into present reality as represented by the Present Indicative. It represented therefore parallelism in past time. Proof of this was to be found in the ever obvious necessity of the dramatist to find transitional tenses between Past Definite narrative and the Present Indicative of the play's intrinsic action. By a peculiar paradox the Historic Present served most often as a transitional medium.

(3) A qualitative analysis of every Past Definite in seven plays and particular scrutiny of the variants of Corneille showed the Past Definite yielding place to the Past Indefinite in the middle past, but unshaken in the remote. Loss of its perfect function, twenty four hour banishment from contact with the present and this yielding in the middle past confirmed the connotation of remoteness. The theory of general obsolescence is wrong.

(4) Graphs of incidence of the Past Definite in tragedy and comedy appeared misleading, suggesting at first an increase of Past Definite usage in tragedy and a drastic decrease in comedy, phenomena which might have been taken to indicate archaism. The time-basis of tragedy was shown to be different from that of comedy. Tragedy favoured the incidence of the past. Comedy was more and more integrating itself in present time. If the Past Definite still occurred frequently in comedy, although on a reduced scale-- and in the mouth of ordinary characters--this was proof of the tense's stubborn resistance to the forces against it.

(5) Its persistence in comedy and in the spoken language appeared due to a misconception which endowed it with the connotation of remoteness. This, coupled with the failure of the ordinary Frenchmen to appreciate the aspect-value of completeness in the tense, was fatal to it in the spoken medium. The Past Indefinite could record the remote event equally well-- in terms of time-- and as an easier analytical form was certain to replace the Past Definite.

(6) Peaks of Past Definite incidence in classical drama, particularly in tragedy, coincide with narration and silhouette the dramatist's attitude to past events having indirect significance for the action of the play— events which evoke the presence of causality. Corneille's complicated plots employ the Past Definite freely in exposition, but as a regrettable necessity.<sup>1</sup> Racine's whole conception is wedded to the Past Definite. Not only do his expositions use it more than those of any other dramatists, but there is a secondary peak of incidence immediately before dénouement. Racine's heroes and heroines agonise in a situation predetermined, live in a past irreconcilable with the present. The Past Definite appears then as a touchstone of style. Conversely the dramatist's style reveals the basic nature of the tense.

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1. C. f. his Examen de Cinna (Oeuvres, pp. 381-2):—

... enfin la facilité de concevoir le sujet, qui n'est ni trop chargé d'incidents, ni trop embarrassé de récits de ce qui s'est passé avant le commencement de la pièce, est une des causes sans doute de la grande approbation qu'il a reçue. L'auditeur aime à s'abandonner à l'action présente et à n'être point obligé pour l'intelligence de ce qu'il voit, de réfléchir sur ce qu'il a déjà vu, et de fixer sa mémoire sur les premiers actes, cependant que les derniers sont devant ses yeux. C'est l'inconvénient des pièces embarrassées qu'en termes de l'art on nomme implexes-- telles que sont Rodogune et Héraclius.

(This should be related particularly to what we have said on the optimum density of the Past Definite in drama.)

It is obvious that on the basis of this Examen Corneille -- who had a keen sense of the theatre-- realised that there did exist limits to the possible incidence of the past in any stage action.)

(8) The so-called errors of the poets, taken with the honest mystification of Estienne and the opinions of Maupas, emphasise that the Past Definite remained in the language because of a connotation distinct from that of the Past Indefinite. Both tenses can record the same past event, the difference that separates them does not lie in scope or reach, but in the different relationship that each establishes between the event recorded and the reality of the present from which the past event must always be seen. The Past Definite remained in literature because this distinctiveness justifies it and will disappear when the French language no longer values it.

The value of the text of classical drama in enabling us to reach the conclusions we have reached on the basis of the evidence it affords of surface and below-surface phenomena in the language is obvious. But we should not like to close this study without a last word on style and the Past Definite.

It is not too much to say that whoever has not cast a particular glance at the role of past time and its verbal expression has not yet tasted the full savour of the great masterpieces of classical drama. One last illustration-- we have discussed already the pregnant line from Andromaque:

Que je le hais; enfin, que je l'aimai?  
(IV, iii.)

Throughout our work we have had reason to turn over such lines in our mind a hundred times. It now occurs to us that in this scene in which Hermione drives Oreste to murder her unfaithful lover Pyrrhus scarcely any word more acutely diagnoses Hermione's murderous intent than aimai. It is an example of the pregnant use so often mentioned in these pages— a use which in nine cases out of ten appears in company with the thought of death. Here aimai -- exploiting the full aspect-value of the Past Definite— means that her love for Pyrrhus has reached its final term. Does it not also imply that in her imagination she has already killed him, that behind every word of the scene lies her mental image of his body torn, trampled on and bleeding?

*Not necessarily. It is rather a stimulating fact and an incentive to Oreste.*

We give this last example of the reverberation of one Past Definite in the human mind to emphasise the complexity of the task undertaken. This complexity could have been safely dealt with by cautious analysis and negative conclusions. At no point has it been our temptation to avoid a

a positive synthesis for only such a synthesis can reveal and clarify the interplay between poetic thought and daily usage, the basic movement and organisation of human thought behind  
1.  
all language.

We invoke therefore in conclusion the  
2.  
words of Charles Bally:-

....C'est entre les créations de style d'un écrivain et les créations du langage spontané que nous croyons reconnaître quelques affinités secrètes. Sans doute, le langage ne connaît pas de création ex nihilo; un examen un peu attentif fait toujours trouver dans la langue existante les modèles qui ont servi pour les formes nouvelles. Mais c'est précisément cela qui est intéressant; ce sont ces créations qui nous fait comprendre le mécanisme du langage.

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1. We are encouraged by the opening statement in A. Dauzat's *Génie de la Langue*, Paris, 1944, p. 7:-

" Trop techniques, et par là même peu accessibles au grand public, les travaux des linguistes sont aussi presque toujours fragmentaires; plus la spécialisation s'accroît, plus on se méfie de la synthèse. "

2. *La Langue et la Vie*, Genève, Lille, 1952, p. 28.

**APPENDIX.**

Analysis of Past Definite Usage in Maitet's Sophonisbe  
(1634).

ACT 1.

Scene 1.

Syphax:

QTP .... cette vieille haine  
Que ta race eut toujours pour la race Romaine..

RP Tu l'as toujours aimé, depuis le jour fatal  
Qu'il te fut accordé par ton père Asdrubal,  
Et que de tes regards l'atteinte empoisonnée,

RP Me fit prendre pour moi ce funeste Hyménée,  
Heureux dans ce malheur, si le même flambeau,

RPRP Qui nous mit dans le lit, nous eut mis au tombeau.

QTP ... jamais oreille  
N'ouit extravagance à la tienne pareille:

Sophonisbe:

Que jamais le flambeau d'un amour impudique,

QTP Quoi que vous en croyez, ne m'échauffa le sein:

RP A qui le nom Lybique avec nous fut commun.

Syphax:

Soit maudit a jamais le lieu, l'heure et le jour,

RP Que son aspect charmeur me donna de l'amour...

.... alors que sa beauté

RP Me fit perdre le sens avec la liberté.

RP Depuis que cette tâche eut obscurci ma vie,

Scene III.

Phénice:

Assurez-vous, madame,

Que l'Eunuque en ceci n'est point digne de blâme,

MP Et qu'il ne vous manqua ni de foi, ni d'esprit,

MP Ni de constance même, alors qu'on le surprit.

Quand son propre malheur, aussi bien que le vôtre

MP Sur la pointe du jour le fit tomber es mains

D'un escadron errant de chevaux Africains,

MP Qui comme fugitif entr'eux le dépouillèrent,

MP Et si soigneusement à l'envi le fouillèrent,

MP Que l'un d'eux aperçut le papier attaché

Dans le bord de sa robe, où nous l'avions caché;  
Et tous pour profiter d'une telle aventure,  
MP Le rendirent au Roi, sans en faire l'ouverture:  
Sophonisbe:  
Hélas, il paraît bien que l'Amour pour mes crimes,  
RP M'alluma dans le cœur ces feux illégitimes!

ACT II.

Scene I. Sophonisbe:

QTP Pour un sujet ingrat, qui n'en fut jamais digne!

RP Où le sort me fit voir ce visage charmant!

Scene II. Caliodore:

jamais l'espoir...

QTP Ne flatta notre armée avec plus d'apparence,

QTP Et ne la fit combattre...

IP Comme l'événement le fit bientôt paraître.

(This Past Definite records an event of a few moments before-- a detail in a story told mainly in the Historic Present, but containing a previous Past Indefinite.. Loose usage?)

Scene III. Corisbe:

PrTP Comme nous eûmes part à vos prospérités,  
Il faut bien nous sentir de vos adversités.

ACT III.

Scene I. Massinisse:

Il est mort ce barbare et lâche Usurpateur,  
PrTP Qui de tant de combats fut l'objet et l'auteur.  
(The death-associative Past Definite. The 'fut' reviews the dead man's career and so dismisses him.)  
Philip:

RP De nous mener plus loin que ne fut Alexandre.

... ces vieilles Phalanges

RP Qui virent tant de mers et de terres étranges.

Scene IV. Massinisse:

QTP Certes jamais esprit n'eut un plaisir si doux..

Sophonisbe:

PrTP Par les sceptres que j'eus, par ceux que vous avez,  
( The commorvanished-past and living-present contrast... This example could be termed 'pregnant' since it expresses the completeness of Sophonisbe's defeat and present ruin.)

QTP

..... jamais un généreux Vainqueur  
N'affligea son vaincu d'un langage moqueur  
Massinisse:

RP

A propos où naquit, en quel temps et pourquoi,  
La bonne volonté que vous avez pour moi?  
Sophonisbe:

Volontiers je m'en vais vous l'apprendre.

RP

Vous savez qu'autrefois nous fûmes sur le point,

RP

De conclure un Hymen qui ne s'acheva point.

Ce Prince malheureux, à qui les Destinées  
Voulaient sacrifier mes premières années,

RP

Fut cause que mon père à ses vœux complaisant,

RP

Rompit le noeud sacré qui nous lie à présent.

.....

Si l'étrange accident que vous allez entendre,

MP

N'eut rallumé ce feu qui mourait sous sa cendre.

Vous souvient-il du jour où Syphax et les siens,

MP

Sortirent pour forcer vos Massessiliens?

MP

Il se passa pour vous avec tant de gloire,

Que vous en devez bien conserver la mémoire.

Car pour votre vertu les nôtres repoussés

MP

Vous laissèrent venir jusqu'au bord des fosses

MP

Où je vous vis combattre avec tant de vaillance,

MP

Que j'eus déjà pour vous assez de bienveillance,

.....

MP

Je vis de votre armet la visière haussée,

MP

Que pour vous rafraîchir vous levâtes exprès,

MP

Et qu'il me fut permis d'observer d'assez près

Ce visage.....

MP

De là je commençai de vendre mon pays,

MP

Et de là dans mon coeur les miens furent trahis,

MP

D'une flèche de feu j'eus l'âme outrepercée,

MP

De sorte que de tous je fus la plus blessée.

Scene 11. Scipion:

MP ..le même esprit qui le fit entreprendre,

Scene 111. Scipion:

Certes quand le récit de toutes ces merveilles,

MP

De Lélie et de moi vint frapper les oreilles,

Tous deux poussés pour vous d'une même amitié,

MP

O grands Dieux! dîmes-nous, c'est trop de la moitié.

RP La main qui fit le votre a fait le mien aussi,

RP Les vôtres qu'il perdit...

Massinisse:

QRP Dont vous fûtes jadis le témoin oculaire...\*

Scene IV. Lélie:

RP Et dès qu'ils furent joints par le noeud conjugal,

QTP Fut-il jamais malheur à mon malheur egal?

RP Elle ne cessa point que pour plaire à sa haine,  
Il n'eût abandonné la puissance Romaine,  
Et par cette imprudence, à sa perte animé,

QRPQRP Ceux qu'il aima jadis, et dont il fut aimé.

ACT V.

Scene I. Massinisse:

...le même Soleil

QMP Qui vit hier mon bonheur à nul autre pareil,...

Scene V. Sophonisbe:

QMP Vous savez qu'hier au soir lorsqu'Hymen nous joignit,

QMP Par deux diverses fois son flambeau s'éteignit,

Que même à ce matin une brebis frappée,

S'est de la main du Prêtre et du Temple échappée,...

(Note rigid adherence to the twenty four hour  
rule!)

Lettre de Massinisse:

PrTP De tant de biens que j'eus, c'est le seul qui me reste,...  
(Again the totality of the past in the presence  
of death, contrasted here with the last moments  
of that present.)

Dites, Caliodore, et ne me trompez point,

IP Avez-vous observé ce qui vous fut enjoint?

( Here a recent event, within the twenty four  
hours, is in the Past Definite-- the second lapse  
of this kind in the play!)

QMP Oh mon funeste Hymen hier au soir s'accomplit.

Scene VII. Caliodore:

QTP Hélas! jamais poison n'eut un si prompt effet.

---

\*\*\* Erratum:....line omitted...:-

RP Que vous fîtes tomber ce misérable corps.

Qualitative Summary of Past Definite Usage in

Mairet's Sophonisbe.

Total Number of Past Definites= 68

Quantitative Distribution:-

Act I =19.

Act II = 6.

Act III= 6.

Act IV =30.

Act V = 7.

Qualitative Distribution:-

RP = 22.

MP = 23.

QRP= 3.

QMP= 4.

Pr TP = 4. \*\*\*

QTP= 10.

IP = 2

1st Person occurs 9 times.

2nd Person occurs 3 times.

3rd Person occurs 56 times.

---

\*\*\*TP, the Past Definite which denotes the end of a chapter and refers to events of the past reviewed right up to the present of the speaker, infringes in practice the twenty four hour rule. In almost every case the thought of death is in the background. Hereafter, therefore, the sign TP is automatically accompanied by the sign Pr. That is to say that the TP Past Definite expresses much more than mere time.

Analysis of Past Definite Usage in Corneille's Polyeucte  
(1640).

ACT 1.

Scene 1. Pauline:

RP Dans Rome, où je naquis, ce malheureux visage

RP D'un chevalier romain captiva le courage;

Stratonice:

Est-ce lui qui naguère aux dépens de sa vie

QMP Sauva des ennemis votre empereur Décie,

QMP Qui leur tira mourant la victoire des mains,

QMP Et fit tourner le sort des Perses aux Romains?

Lui qu'entre tant de morts immolés à son maître,

QMP On ne put rencontrer, ou du moins reconnaître;

A qui Décie enfin, pour des exploits si beaux,

QMP Fit si somptueusement dresser de vains tombeaux?

Pauline:

RP Je l'aimai, Stratonice.....

( This might be taken as a Pregnant use, since in this her first mentioning of her former love for Sévère she relegates it to the the remote past and the realm of absolute completion. At least it can be said that this first telling of her love for Sévère is consistent with her subsequent refusal to abandon Polyeucte. In her life the episode with Sévère is, indeed, irrevocably ended.)

QRP ..... jamais ma raison

N'avoua de mes yeux l'aimable trahison..

(On the use of 'jamais' with the Past Definite, one may compare this example with Pauline's previous words on Sévère:-

Hélas! c'était lui-même, et jamais notre Rome  
N'a produit plus grand coeur, ni vu plus honnête  
homme.

While the reasons for using the Past Indefinite or Past Definite after 'jamais' are not always evident sometimes, as here, the distinction is obvious. The first of these examples means 'never within that remote segment of time'. The second means 'never, right up to the present day.' Again it is the particular relationship of the event to present time that is the determining factor.)

Pauline:

RP Enfin je quittai Rome...

RP ..lui, désespéré. s'en alla dans l'armée  
..... non abord en ces lieux

RP RP Me fit voir Polyeucte, et je plus à ses yeux;

RP Mon père fut ravi qu'il me prît pour maîtresse

RP Et par son alliance il se crut assuré...

RPRP Il approuva sa flamme et conclut l'hyménée;

RP Et moi, comme à son lit, je me vis destinée,

RP Je donnai, par devoir, à son affection.....

Scène IV. Albin:

MP Vous savez quelle fut cette grande journée,

MP Que sa perte pour nous rendit si fortunée,

Où l'Empereur captif, par sa main dégagé,

MP Rassura son parti déjà découragé,

MP Tandis que sa vertu succomba sous le nombre;

MP Vous savez les honneurs qu'on fit faire à son ombre,

MP Après qu'entre les morts on ne le put trouver;

Le roi de Perse aussi l'avait fait enlever.

Témoin de ses hauts faits et de son grand courage,

MP Ce monarque en voulut connaître le visage;

MP On le mit dans sa tente, où tout percé de coups,

MP Tout mort qu'il paraissait, il fit mille jaloux;

MP Là bientôt il montra quelque signe de vie;

MP Ce prince généreux en eut l'âme ravie,

Et sa joie, en dépit de son dernier malheur,

MP Du bras qui le causait honora la valeur;

MPMP Il en fit prendre soin, la cure en fut secrète

MP Et comme au bout d'un mois sa sante fut parfaite,

MP Il offrit dignités, alliance, trésors,

MP Et pour gagner Sévère il fit cent vains efforts.

MP Ainsi revint au camp le valeureux Sévère

De sa haute vertu recevoir le salaire;

MP La faveur de Décie en fut le digne prix.

ACT II.

Scène I. Sévère:

QRP Jamais à ses desirs mon cœur ne fut rebelle:

RPRP Mais son devoir fut juste et son père eut raison:

Scene II. Pauline:

RP Je le vois encore tel qu'il alluma mes feux,

RP Mais ce même devoir qui le vainquit dans Rome,

ACT III.

Scene II. Pauline:

RP Je l'aimai par devoir: ce devoir dure encore.  
( The recurring past and present contrast!)

QTP C'est une impiété qui n'eut jamais d'exemple:

ACT IV.

Scene III. Polyeucte:

RP Avec trop de mérite il vous plut la former,  
Pauline:

PrQTP Va, cruel, va mourir, tu ne m'aimas jamais..  
( We call this the Pregnant and qualified total past. While 'jamais' permits the Past 'definite' close contact with the present here the approaching death of Polyeucte and the totality of denial in Pauline's words do make the 'aimas' more potent than its mere connotation in time warrants.)

Scene V.

RP L'amour que j'eus pour vous tournerait .....

Scene VI. Fabian:

QTP Quelle est et fut toujours la haine de Décie?

ACT V.

Scene I. Felix:

QRP Et s'il l'aima jadis, il estime aujourd'hui..

Scene III. Polyeucte:

Un Dieu qui, nous aimant d'une amour infinie,

RP Voulut mourir pour nous...

Scene VI. Sévère:

QTP Je les aimai toujours...

Qualitative Summary of Past Definite Usage in

Corneille's Polyeucte.

Total number of Past Definites= 52.

Quantitative Distribution:-

Act 1 = 38.  
ACT 11 = 5.  
Act 111= 2.  
Act IV = 4.  
Act V = 3.

Qualitative Distribution:-

RP = 21.  
MP = 19.  
QMP= 5.  
QRP= 3.  
QTP= 4.

( Omission made of the one Pregnant use since the 'jamais' may be considered to account sufficiently for the Past Definite accompanying it.)

Noteworthy, however, is the number of Past Definites referring to a love as dead and done with...6..!

1st Person occurs 8 times.  
2nd Person occurs once.  
3rd Person occurs 43 times.

Analysis of Past Definite Usage in Rotrou's Venceslas  
(1647)

ACT 1.

Scene 1. Venceslas:

RP Et je croyais, mon fils, votre mère immortelle  
Par le reste qu'en vous elle me laissa d'elle.  
Ladislas:

...hier.....  
QMP Nous en vinmes sûr l'art de régir les provinces,

.....  
QMP Je coulai mes avis dans ce libre murmure,  
Et, mon sein à ma voix s'osant trop confier,

QMP Ce discours m'échappa, je ne le puis nier:

QMP " Comment, dis-je....."

QMP "N'est-ce pas sur cet art, leur dis-je..."

MP Vous en mîtes le prix à sa discrétion.

ACT 11.

Scene 1. Cassandre:

MP De ceux qu'il crut pouvoir servir sa passion,

MP Et tant d'offres enfin, dont il me crut toucher,

Scene 11. Ladislas:

Et le plus adorable et plus divin objet  
QTP Qui de son souverain fit jamais son sujet.

MP Ma jeunesse d'abord porta sa passion;

MP Je les contemplais seuls et ne recherchai qu'eux.

MP Mon respect s'oublia dedans cette poursuite,

MP Mais un amour enfant put manquer de conduite:

Cassandre:

MP D'abord que votre amour fit voir dans sa poursuite..

Et que le seul objet d'un dessein vieux

MP Sur ma possession vous fit jeter les yeux,

MP Je ne vous regardai que par l'ardeur infâme....

M<sup>P</sup> Je pris en telle horreur vous et votre service,

Ladislas:

MP Cet insensible objet eut pour moi de froideur.

ACT III.

Scene V. Venceslas:

MP J'engageai mon honneur engageant ma parole;

ACT IV.

Scene II. Ladislas:

QMP Sur ce qu'Octave, enfin, hier me fit entendre...

Scene III. Venceslas:

QTP Votre mauvaise humeur lui fut toujours contraire,

Scene IV.

QTP Jamais coeur ne conquit une douleur si forte.

Scene V.

RP ... me fut un voisin généreux et loyal.

Cassandre:

MPMP L'un qui me crut honnête, eut un but légitime,  
Et l'autre, dont l'amour fol et capricieux

MPMP Douta de ma sagesse, en eut un vicieux.

MP J'eus bientôt d'eux aussi des sentiments contraires,

MP Je ne les pus aimer ni haïr à demi;

MP Je tins l'un pour amant, l'autre pour ennemi;

MP Alexandre, qui vit son rival en son frère

MP Et qui craignit, d'ailleurs, l'autorité d'un père,

MP Fit.....

MP Ménagea votre vue avec tant de conduite..

MP Nous crûmes que l'hymen pouvait seul s'en défendre,

MP A peine eut mis le pied sur le seuil de la porte...

MP Oui, de ce coup, Seigneur, un frère fut capable,

Ce fer porte le chiffre et le nom du coupable,

MP Vous apprend de quel bras il fut l'exécuteur,

MP Il en fut le témoin, il en sera le juge;

Ladislas:

MP Au prix du coup fatal qui me perça le coeur,

MP Quand de ma liberté son bel oeil fut vainqueur:

MP J'en fus désespéré jusqu'à tout entreprendre;

MP Il m'ôta le repos, que l'autre me doit rendre:

\*\*\* Erratum, the following line omitted:-

MP Et, quoiqu'ils soient vos fils, ne les trouvai  
point frères.

ACT V.

Scene IV. Ladislas:

MP Je pourrai du dernier m'excuser sur l'erreur  
D'un bras qui s'est mépris et crut trop ma fureur:  
(Note here the unaccustomed mixture: Past Indefinite plus Past Definite. The events described, the murder of Alexandre by Ladislas etc.,, took place at an indeterminate hour of darkness, either on the previous evening or after midnight; they are consistently related in the Past Definite. The mixture is caused, no doubt, either by the nearness of the events to their actual narration or by Rotrou's general haziness as regards precise time limits in his plays. There is, again, the fact that he is more guilty of facile, slipshod writing than any of our other dramatists. Certainly there seems no specific stylistic value in the mixture.)

Scene V. Venceslas:

RP Si mon élection fut un choix légitime;

Scene VIII. Octave:

QTP Jamais sédition ne fut plus disposée.

Qualitative Analysis of Past Definite Usage

in Rotrou's Venceslas.

Total number of Past Definites: 48.

Quantitative Distribution:-

Act I = 7.

ACT II = 12.

Act III = 1.

Act IV = 25.

ACT V = 3.

Qualitative Distribution:-

RP = 3.

MP = 35.

QMP = 6.

QTP = 4.

1st Person occurs 14 times.

2nd Person occurs once.

3rd Person occurs 33 times.

Analysis of Past Definite Usage in Corneille's

Sophonisbe (1663)

ACT 1.

Scene II. Sophonisbe:

RP Tu vis en tous les deux l'amour croître avec l'âge.

RP Il porta dans l'Espagne et mon cœur et ma foi;

RP Mais durant cette absence on disposa de moi.

RP J'immolai ma tendresse au bien de ma patrie:

Pour lui gagner Syphax, j'eusse immolé ma vie.

RP Il était aux Romains, et je l'en détachai;

RP J'étais à Massinisse, et je m'en arrachai.

RPRP J'en eus de la douleur, j'en sentis de la gêne;

.....

RP Syphax de Massinisse envahit les Etats,

.....

RP Tu me vis écouter ni ma foi ni mon cœur.

.....

Eryxe, ma captive, Eryxe, cette reine

RP Qui des Gétuliens, naquit la souveraine,

RP Eut aussi bien que moi des yeux pour ses vertus,

RP Et trouva de la gloire à choisir mon refus.

RP Ce fut pour empêcher ce fâcheux hyménée

RP Que Syphax fit la guerre à cette infortunée.

RPRP La surprit dans sa ville et fit en ma faveur

Ce qu'il n'entreprenait que pour venger sa soeur;

RP Car tu sais qu'il l'offrit à ce généreux prince,

RP Et lui voulut pour dot remettre sa province.

Herminie:

RP Ce fut, s'il m'en souvient, votre prière expresse

RP Qui lui fit par Syphax offrir cette princesse;

Scene IV. Syphax:

RP Alors qu'on vit dans Cyrthe entrer d'un pas égal,

RP Je vis ces deux héros, jaloux de mon suffrage,

Le briguer, l'un pour Rome, et l'autre pour Carthage;

RP Je les vis.....

.....

RP Votre beauté, madame, emporta la balance:

RP De Carthage pour vous j'embrassai l'alliance;

Sophonisbe:

RP Elle seule pour vous rompit ce doux lien.

RP Je brûlais d'un beau feu, je promis de l'éteindre;

**ACT 11.**

Scene 11. Eryxe:

...j'ai toujours soupçonné

QTP Que cet amour jamais ne fut déraciné.

RP Je n'en exigeai qu'il reprît ses Etats...

**Scene IV. Sophonisbe:**

RP Et si ce qu'entre vous on vit d'intelligence...

RP Je fus ambitieuse...

RP Plus votre amour fut grand...

Massinisse:

RP Vous me fûtes promise auparavant qu'à lui;

Pr TP Il en fut moins l'époux que l'heureux ravisseur;

**Sophonisbe: -**

RP Ce que vous déroba tant d'infidélité?

**Massinisse:**

RP Que votre changement n'éteignit point ma flamme,

RP Qu'il ne vous ôte point l'empire de mon âme;

Sophonisbe:

RPRP Quand j'épousai Syphax je n'y fus point forcé:

• • • • •

RP Je vous quittais sans peine, et tous mes vœux trahis

RP Cédèrent avec joie au bien de mon pays.

Act 111.

Scene 11. Eryxe:

QTP ..... je ne sus jamais feindre,

RPRP L'un fut mal allumé, l'autre fut mal conçu;

Scene VI. Syphax:

RP Elle que j'adorai dès le premier aspect,

**Sophonisbe:**

RP Je me donne au monarque à qui je fus promise,  
..une première foi

..une première foi

RP Qu'il recut...

RPRP Je l'aimai; mais ce feu, dont je fus la maîtresse,

**ACT IV.**

Scene 11. Lélie:

RP Le fameux Scipion, de qui vous fûtes l'hôte..

**Syphax:**

RP Je fus l'ami de Rome...

RP .. et ce fut le plus beau de mes jours,

RP Par leurs grands héros briguèrent mon secours.

RP J'eus des yeux assez bons....

- RP Lorsque je vous aimai j'étais maître de moi;  
RPRP Et tant que je le fus, je vous gardai ma foi;  
Mais dès que Sophonisbe avec son hyménée  
RP S'empara de mon âme et de ma destinée,  
RP Je suivis de ses yeux le pouvoir absolu...
- RP Sophonisbe par là devint ma souveraine,  
RPRP Régla mes amitiés, disposa de ma haine,  
RPRP M'anima de sa rage, et versa dans mon sein  
De toutes ses fauteurs l'implacable dessein.  
Lélius:  
IP Si l'hymen fut trop prompt, le divorce est aisé.
- Pr TP Plus d'amour ou de foi qu'elle n'en eut pour vous.  
Syphax:  
RP Des murs que ma perfide eut pour séjour natal.  
Scene III. Lélius:  
RP Ce don pour tout effet n'eut qu'un lâche abandon.  
RP Dès que Syphax parut ....  
Massinisse:  
RP Carthage la força...  
Lélius: ..le même artifice  
RP Qui nous ôta Syphax nous vole Massinisse.  
Massinisse:  
Pr TP Tout ce qui m'appartint me doit être rendu.

ACT V.

Scene IV. Sophonisbe:

- PrTP Ce que j'en eus pour lui vous le rend avec joie.  
Lélius:  
PrTP Mais si cette bonté qu'eut pour lui votre flamme..

Qualitative Summary/

Qualitative Analysis of Past Definite Usage in

Corneille's Sophonisbe.

Total number of Past Definites= 75.

Quantitative Distribution:-

Act I = 28.

Act II = 14.

Act III = 8.

Act IV = 23.

Act V = 2.

Qualitative Distribution:-

RP = 67.

Pr TP = 5.

QTP = 2.

IP = 1.

1st Person occurs 26 times.

2nd Person occurs 4 times.

3rd Person occurs 45 times.

Analysis of Past Definite Usage in Molière's L'Avare  
(1668)

ACT 1.

Scene 1. Elise:

MP Je me représente à toute heure ce péril étonnant  
qui commença de nous offrir aux regards l'un  
de l'autre; cette générosité surprenante qui vous  
MP fit risquer votre vie..... ces soins pleins  
MP de tendresse que vous me fîtes éclater après  
m'avoir tirée de l'eau...

Scene 11. Cléante:

MPMP Je me sentis transporté le moment que je la vis.

Scene 1V. Harpagon:

QMP ... dix mille écus qu'on me rendit hier..

ACT 11.

Scene V. Frosine:

QTP J'mais je ne vâs vis un teint si frais et si  
gaillard..  
QMP il n'y a pas quatre mois encore..elle rompit..  
QMP son amour fit voir.....et qu'il ne prit  
QMP point de lunettes .....

ACT 111.

Scene 1. Maître Jacques:

QMP .. une fois vous fîtes assigner le chat d'un  
QMP de vos voisins.. que l'on vous surprit la nuit..  
votre cocher qui était celui d'avant moi, vous  
QMP donna dans l'obscurité je ne sais combien de coups  
QMP de bâton, dont vous ne voulûtes rien dire...

ACT 1V.

Scene 111. Cléante:

QMP ..je l'aime, depuis un jour que je la vis..

ACT V.

Scene 1V. Elise:

MP Oui, mon père, c'est celui qui me sauva de ce  
MP péril que vous savez que je courus dans l'eau...

Scene V. Anselme:

RP ...l'homme dont vous nous parlez périt sur mer  
avec ses enfants et sa femme, en voulant dérober  
leur vie aux cruelles persécutions qui ont  
accompagné les désordres de Naples, et qui en  
RP firent exiler plusieurs nobles familles.

(Note the unusual mixture, Past Definite followed  
by 'ont accompagné'. It can be assumed that

this mirrors the occasional mingling of the two tenses in conversation. The phenomenon is not, however, common.)

Valère:

Oui, mais apprenez, pour vous confondre, vous, que

RP son fils, âgé de sept ans, avec un domestique, fut sauvé de ce naufrage par un vaisseau espagnol, et que ce fils sauvé est celui qui vous parle:

RPRP apprenez que le capitaine de ce vaisseau, touché de ma fortune, prit amitié pour moi; qu'il me fit élever comme son propre fils, et que les armes

RPRP furent mon emploi dès que je m'en trouvai capable; que j'ai su depuis peu que mon père n'était point mort, comme je l'avais toujours cru; que passant ici pour l'aller chercher,

MP une aventure, par le Ciel concertée, me fit voir

MP la charmante Elise; que cette vue me rendit esclave de ses beautés; et que la violence de mon amour, et les sévérités de son père,

MP me firent prendre la résolution de m'introduire dans mon logis, et d'envoyer un autre à la quête de mes parents.

RP ..... ce domestique qui se sauva avec moi...

Marianne:

RP .. Le Ciel ne nous fit point aussi périr

RP dans ce triste naufrage; mais il ne nous sauva la

RP vie que par la perte de notre liberté; et ce furent

RP des corsaires qui nous recueillirent, ma mère et moi, sur un débris de notre vaisseau. Après dix

RP ans d'esclavage, une heureuse fortune nous rendit

RP notre liberté, et nous retournâmes dans Naples, où

RP nous trouvâmes tout notre bien vendu, sans y pouvoir trouver des nouvelles de notre père.

RPRP Nous passâmes à Gênes, où ma mère alla ramasser quelques malheureux restes d'une succession qu'on avait déchirée; et de là, fuyant la barbare

RP injustice de ses parents, elle vint en ces lieux, où elle n'a presque vécu que d'une vie languissante.

Anselme:

je suis Dom Thomas D'Alburcy, que le Ciel

RP Garantit des ondes

Qualitative Summary of Past Definite Usage in

Molière's L'Avare.

Total number of Past Definites= 39

Quantitative Distribution:-

Act I = 6.

Act II = 4.

Act III = 4.

Act IV = 1.

Act V = 24.

Qualitative Distribution:-

RP = 19.

MP = 10.

QMP = 9.

QTP = 1.

1st Person occurs 8 times.

2nd Person occurs 3 times.

3rd Person occurs 28 times.

Analysis of Past Definite Usage in Racine's Phèdre  
(1677).

ACT 1.

Scene 1. Théramène:

RP ... la mer qui vit tomber Icare,

RP Dangereuse marâtre, à peine elle vous vit,

RP Que votre exil d'abord signala son crédit.

QTP Jamais l'aimable soeur des cruels Pallantides  
Trempa-t-elle aux complots de ses frères perfides..

Scene III. Phèdre:

RP Dans quels égarements l'amour jeta ma mère!

RPRP Ariane, ma soeur, de quel amour blessée,  
Vous nourîtes aux bords où vous fîtes laissée!

RP Athènes me montra mon superbe ennemi.

RPRP Me le vis, je rougis, je pâlis à sa vue;

RP Un trouble s'éleva dans mon âme perdue;  
Mes yeux ne voyaient plus, je ne pouvais parler;

RP Je sentis tout mon corps et transir et brûler;

RP Je reconnus Vénus et ses feux redoutables,  
D'un sang qu'elle poursuit tourments inévitables.

RP Par des vœux assidus je crus les détourner;

RPRP Je lui bâtis un temple, et pris soin de l'orner:

RP Contre moi-même enfin j'osai me révolter:

RP J'excitai mon courage à le persécuter.

Pour bannir l'ennemi dont j'étais idolâtre,

RP J'affectai les chagrins d'une injuste marâtre;

RP Je pressai son exil, et mes cris éternels

RP L'arrachèrent du sein et des bras paternels...

(We place the above passage in the remote past, not only because of the lapse of time, but also because Phèdre herself, using the Past Indefinite for the later events at Trézène, justifies this placing.)

ACT II.

Scene 1. Aricie:

RP Le fer moissonne tout; et la terre humectée

RP But à regret le sang des neveux d'Erechtée.

Scene 11. Hippolyte:

RP L'adoption le mit entre les mains d'Egée,  
Athènes, par mon père accrue et protégée,  
RP Reconnut avec joie un roi si généreux,  
RP Et laissa dans l'oubli vos frères malheureux.

Scene V. Phèdre:

QTP Jamais femme ne fut plus digne de pitié,  
  
RP Lorsque de notre Crète il traversa les flots,

Pourquoi sans Hippolyte

RP Des héros de la Grèce assembla-t-elle l'élite?  
RP Pourquoi, trop jeune encore, ne pûtes-vous alors  
RP Entrer dans le vaisseau qui le mit dans nos bords?

Scene VI. Théràmène:

MP On prétend que Thésée a paru dans l'Epire.  
Mais moi qui l'y cherchai, Seigneur, je sais  
trop bien...

ACT 111.

Scene 1. Oenone:

RP Vous l'osâtes bannir, vous n'osez l'éviter..

QTP Mais si jamais l'offense irrita vos esprits,

Scene 111.

QTP Jamais crainte ne fut plus juste que la vôtre.

Scene V. Hippolyte:

MP C'est vous qui sur ces bords conduisîtes ses pas.

MP Vous daignâtes, Seigneur, aux rives de Trézène  
Confier en partant Aricie et la Reine.

MP Je fus même chargé du soin de les garder.

Thésée:

MP Moi-même, il m'enferma dans des cavernes sombres,

RP La Grèce, à qui mon bras fut tant de fois utiles..

ACT 1V.

Scene 1. Thésée:

RP Ce fer dont je l'armai pour un plus noble usage..  
Oenone:

RP Un amour criminel causa toute sa haine.

Scene 11. Thésée:

...si jadis mon courage

RP D'infâmes assassins nettoya le rivage...

Pitthée, estimé sage entre tous les humains,

RP Daigna m'instruire encore au sortir de ses mains.

Scene III.

QTP Jamais père en effet fut-il plus outragé?

Scene VI. Phèdre:

QTP Ce tigre, que jamais je n'abordai sans crainte,  
Oenone:

RP Par un charme fatal vous fûtes entraînée.

ACT V.

Scene VI. Thérémène:

PrIP Le flot, qui l'apporta, recule épouvanté.

Scene VII. Phèdre:

C'est moi qui sur ce fils chaste et respectueux

RP Osaï jeter un oeil profane, incestueux.

RP Le Ciel mit dans mon sein une flamme funeste;

RP Un poison que Médée apporta dans Athènes.

---

Summary of

Qualitative Analysis of Past Definite Usage in Racine's  
Phèdre.

Total number of Past Definites= 52.

Quantitative Distribution:-

ACT I = 22.

Act II = 11.

Act III= 8.

Act IV = 7.

ACT V = 4.

Qualitative Distribution.

RP = 40.

MP = 5.

QTP= 6.

PrIP= 1.

1st Person occurs 17 times.

2nd Person occurs 7 times.

3rd Person occurs 28 times.

Analysis of Past Definite Usage in Voltaire's

Sophonisbe (1774).

ACT 1.

Scene 1. Siphax:

PrTP Et l'on dira du moins, en respectant mon nom,  
Il mourut en soldat des mains de Scipion.  
(Death-associative, even 'pregnant'  
Past Definite!)

Scene 11. Letter of Sophonisbe:-

RP Vous êtes de mon sang; je vous fus longtemps chère.  
( This letter was equivocally written.  
Sophonisbe, endeavouring to re-establish a  
relationship with Massinisse whom she still  
loves, evokes with 'fut' their former  
affection with <sup>the</sup> underlying assumption that  
all that is over-- not a sincere assumption.  
Sophonisbe, when the letter falls into the  
hands of her husband, Siphax, is able  
therefore -- on the basis of the actual words  
she wrote-- to say:  
Eh bien! ai-je trahi mon peuple et mon époux?)

Siphax:

Massinisse, en tout temps mon fatal adversaire  
RP Et mon rival en tout, se flatta de vous plaire;

RP Il m'osa disputer mon trône et votre cœur:

Sophonisbe:

RP Je vous donnai ma main, prenez encore ma vie.

Siphax:

RP L'amour auprès de vous ne guida point mes pas;

Scene 111. Phaedime:

Vous coupable! Il l'était d'publier aujourd'hui

RP Tout ce que Sophonisbe osa faire pour lui.

Sophonisbe:

RP Tu sais que j'étouffai, dans mon secret ennui  
L'intérêt et le sang qui me parlaient pour lui.

RP ..... J'étouffai l'amour même;

RP Je soutins contre moi l'honneur du diadème;

RP Je demeurai fidèle à mon père Asdrubal,.....

RP D'un amant irrité je brevai la furie  
.....

RP Puisqu'il détestait Rome, il gouta la préférence.

.....  
MP....Mais il ne saura pas ce que j'osai tenter;  
‡ The letter being discovered and therefore  
her attempt to communicate with Massinisse  
made fruitless, the 'osai' justifies itself  
psychologically--- the attempt is finished  
completely, Massinisse will never even know  
of it.)

ACT 11.

Scene 1. Sophonisbe:

QTP Je n'offensai jamais l'hymen et la nature.

Scene 11. Actor:

RP Dont l'Afrique éprouva le courage emporté,

QRP Il s'est ressouvenu qu'autrefois son enfance  
Fut remis en mes mains, dans ces murs, dans ces lieux,  
Où ce prince aujourd'hui rentre en victorieux.

IP Il m'a comblé d'honneurs. Ayez, dit-il, pour moi  
PrTP Cette même amitié qui servit votre roi.  
Enfin, à Siphax même, il a donné des larmes;  
Il justifie en tout le succès de ses armes;  
IP Il répand des bienfaits, s'il fit des malheureux.

(This speech telling of the unexpected and radical change in Massinisse after his victory is interesting. The actual narrative tense is, of course, the Past Indefinite. Dit-il, servit and fit are exceptions in the Past Definite. The first is excusable as a recurrent cliché and may even be the Historic present, the second is death-associative, the third is the Past Definite placed alongside a Present Indicative for the sake of contrast. But the mixture resulting mirrors the fact that the anxious severity of rule so common in the classical period is now relaxed... The Past Definites here have all a 'literary' flavour.)

Sophonisbe:  
PrTP Quoi! les Carthaginois que je crus invincibles,

.....  
 Ont paru devant Cirthe et ne la sauvent pas!  
 (We prefer to regard this crus as expressing a total past, the end of Carthage, the beginning of a new era. Note the conscious contrast between it and the 'ont paru' which emphasises even at the end of a hundred years how the classical connotation has persisted.)

Scene III. Actor: fut

IP Le sang de son époux par vous répandu;  
 (death-associative. Siphax has only recently fallen.)

Alamar:

Au lieu même où Siphax est mort en combattant,  
 Nous avons retrouvé ce billet tout sanglant,  
 IP Qui peut-être aujourd'hui fut écrit par vous-même.  
 (Undoubtedly the twenty four hour rule is now, at the end of the eighteenth century, under serious threat. Here is a case of the Past Definite check by jowl with aujourd'hui -- such an infringement would be impossible in classical tragedy!)

Massinisse:

... sa fatale haine

Pr TP Que je vis si longtemps contre moi s'obstiner...

Scene V.

Tous ces rois dont le sang, dans nos veines transmis,  
 Pr TP S'indigna si longtemps de nous voir ennemis;

ACT III.

Scene I.

Pr TP Scipion qui m'aima se dément pour lui plaire;  
 Il me trahit....  
 (Again the total past with a pregnant meaning. It heralds the change of feeling between Scipio and Massinisse. Yet the latter must have seen Scipio quite recently.. The break with Rome is now foreshadowed!)

Scene III.

Ne les réclamez point; ils étaient inutiles;  
 IP Je n'en eus pas besoin:  
 (Again the eus refers to the immediate past. The oath he has sworn to Sophonisbe to save her from Roman chains is recent. At no point, in his interview with Lélie, did he require to remember it. He will see that Sophonisbe escapes imprisonment, not because he has given her his word, but because he loves her.)

Sophonisbe:

Seigneur, je mous ai fui, je vous ai rebuté;  
RP Siphax obtint son choix, sans consulter son âge;  
RP Je n'acceptai sa main que pour vous faire outrage;  
RP J'encourageai les miens à poursuivre vos Jours.  
RP Mais connaissez mon coeur, il vous aima toujours.

Massinisse:

Est-ce possible? Ô dieux! vous, dont l'âme inhumaine  
RP Fut chez les Africains célèbre par la haine...

Sophonisbe:

RP Je le voulus en vain....

RP Peut rallumer en moi les feux qu'il y fit naître,  
RP Et dont tout mon courage fut à peine le maître....

ACT IV.

Scenelll. Massinisse:

Victime de l'amour et de mon imprudence,  
Pr TP Mon coeur fut trop ouvert....  
( Again the total past in a pregnant sense...his  
reflections on his past career and his arrest  
by the Romans. For him life is over.)

Scene IV. Scipion:

QTP Du nom de votre ami je fus toujours jaloux,

Massinisse:

Quand ~~Quand~~ la fureur de mes ressentiments  
MP Je fis entre vos mains ces malheureux serments,  
.....  
MP Vos yeux furent témoins de mes jaloux transports;  
.....  
MP Je vous confiai tout, ma colère et ma flamme,  
J'ai revu Sophonisbe, et j'ai connu mon âme;  
(The pattern of tense is obvious. We place the  
remoter events in the middle past. But the  
entire emphasis is here on contrast--then  
and now.)

Massinisse:

RP Vous n'enlevâtes point une femme éplorée,

RP Il fut trop démenti dans son coeur ulcéré.

MP Je sais que mon épouse à Rome fut promise;

Scene VI. Sophonisbe:

Pr TP Le crime que tu fis en combattant Carthage.

ACT V. This act is very short and without example s  
of the Past Definite.

Qualitative Summary of Past Definite Usage in

Voltaire's Sophonisbe.

Total number of Past Definites= 44.

Quantitative Distribution:-

Act I = 14.

Act II = 11.

Act III= 10.

Act IV= 9.

Qualitative Distribution:-

RP = 23.

QRP= 1.

MP = 5.

Pr TP = 8.

QTP= 2.

IP = 5.

1st Person occurs 18 times.

2nd Person occurs twice.

3rd Person occurs 24 times.

Edition:- Stereotype, Paris, Didot, 1813.

Analysis of La Rue ST. Denis, comedy in one act

by Champmeslé (1682).

This one act comedy cannot fail to reflect spoken usage closely. Written in prose around the commercial affairs of a small petit bourgeois circle, it has one character, a hatter, who speaks now and then in verse, as comic contrast. We include this analysis to show how steady the connotation of remoteness (in daily speech at the end of the century) possessed by the Past Definite.

Scene 1.

QRP ..... Monsieur Armosin... qui... fit  
banqueroute il y a quelques années.

QTP ..... jamais Famille Bourgeoise ne fut  
plus féconde.

M. Guindé:

Je vay vous mettre au net. Monsieur de  
Armosin, ayant jugé à propos pour s'enrichir,  
RP de faire banqueroute, il m'en fit la confidence,  
RP et me mit dans la partie...

Scene 111. M. Guindé:

RP Nous passâmes un/contrat de société ensemble....

RP Après que je lui eus passé une contrelettre  
RP de tout ce qu'il laissa en mon pouvoir,  
RP un beau soir il fit un trou à la lune,  
RP et prit congé de tout le monde sans dire  
adieu à personne.

J. Guindé:

RP Il fit prudemment.

M. Guindé:

RP Les créanciers se rendirent en foule dans ma  
maison. Leur ayant fait voir que le plus  
beau et le meilleur était à moi, je leur  
RPRP abandonnai le reste, qu'ils partagèrent  
entre eux au sol la livre.

J. Guindé:

RP Ils furent bien chanceux.

And now, the exposition of necessary past event almost over, the stage action proper begins.  
Depuis and a change to the Past Indefinite:-

M. Guindé:

Depuis ~~cet~~ temps j'ai fait rouler.....

Scene X. Here an entire monologue to illustrate how the daily idiom has little need of the Past Definite, but still falls back upon it for the occasional remote or remoter event:-

M. Armosin:-

Hé bien, grâce au ciel, ô mon pauvre Armosin, te voilà de retour dans la chère Patrie. Je revois encore une fois cette bienheureuse Rue St. Denis, où il y aura soixante et trois ans, vienne la nuit du mardi gras, bonjours bon oeuvre, que je Eris naissance. J'ai pensé mourir de joie en voyant la Fontaine des Saints Innocents, dont la sculpture est admirable, à ce qu'on dit, car pour moi je ne m'y connais pas; et je n'ai pu retenir mes larmes, quand j'ai vu à la lueur des lanternes le gros poteau qui est dans le milieu de la rue. Me voici justement devant ma maison. Je voudrais avant que d'y entrer, trouver quelqu'un qui pût m'instruire de la façon qu'en use Monsieur Guindé. J'étais à Lyon lorsque je datai ma dernière de Constantinople.....etc.

RP

.....

la Fille qu'il laissa entre vos mains...

Scene XVI. J. Guindé:

(The following comic interlude on ancestors illustrates the tendency of the Past Definite to 'improve' on the Past Indefinite at the beginning which establishes the personal relationship between the petit bourgeois and the ancestors he claims.)

... Nous avons eu un autre nommé Sylvestre Guindé, qui est mort Grand Guidon de la

la Compagnie des Arbaletiers de Soissons.

Mme Binon:

C'est être illustre par la robe et l'épée.

J. Guindé:

Je vouslaisse à penser. Que n'y a-t-il point encore à dire sur Marcou Guindé, qui était honoré de tous les grands seigneurs de France à qui il faisait crédit? Ayant fait mal ses affaires, il fut si considérable à l'Etat, qu'il en obtint des lettres de répit. Oh, oh, sont-ce des prunes que cela?

RP

RP

.....

QTP ...l'Albâtre n'eut jamais tant de blancheur...

---

Fifteen out of the twenty Past Definites in this slight comedy have a connotation of remoteness not directly depending on a specific time adverb or expression. We offer the above analysis of a short play by a contemporary of Molière in support of our other evidence that the connotation of remoteness is in the seventeenth century a steady, if not increasing phenomenon, in conversation. In the long run -- and in the presence of an equivalent form, the Past Indefinite-- this connotation (without any particular value of aspect) could only imperil the Past Definite as a spoken tiroir.

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