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Le Change in Corneille and Racine

by

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Le Change is a concept typically associated in the seventeenth century with the baroque, with the pastoral, and with comedy. In the simplest terms, a lover abandons the object of his or her affections for another. In baroque aesthetics, *change* is linked to the larger concepts of mobility and metamorphosis (Rousset 44). It is a common motif in the pastoral as well, both in drama and prose fiction. The classic pastoral figure of *change* is Hylas from Honoré d'Urfé's *Astrée*, who moves cavalierly from one mistress to the next.¹ Invariably in seventeenth-century France, *change* is held to be a crime, but it is a common one. Indeed, Hylas, for all of his infidelities, was as popular with readers as Céladon. Cornelian comedy, with its sizeable debts to the pastoral, takes *change* as one of its major themes, as Susan Read Baker has noted (139). Jean Rousset is even more categorical: "à structure baroque, âme baroque : toutes les comédies de Corneille tournent autour d'un thème central : l'inconstance, le *change*" (205-06). Phylis, the *volage* of *La Place royale*, flits happily from one lover to the next. Money and social standing seem to motivate *change* in *La Suivante*. Characters in *Le Menteur* and *La Galerie du palais* flirt with the possibility of *change*, while Clindor's infidelity in the fifth act of *L'Illusion comique* has fatal consequences, but only within the safe confines of the play-within-a-play. The most harsh treatment is found in Corneille's first play, *Mélite*, where Philandre is banished and not forgiven for having left Cloris for Mélite.² In sum, Corneille adapted the motif of *change* to his comedies with variety and persistence.

¹ Kevorkian lists these different mistresses in order and, furthermore, finds a female equivalent for Hylas in Stelle, a young widow in Forez (107).

² Marc Fumaroli notes that in *Mélite*, "Tircis, traître à l'amitié, n'en porte nulle peine ; Eraste, fidèle jusqu'au crime, est absous ; Philandre, moins coupable [but guilty of *change*], est condamné" (38).

While usually associated with comedy, the baroque, and the pastoral, *change* is almost as common in the tragedies of Corneille and Racine,³ although it is virtually never called by that name.⁴ The vocabulary has shifted to *infidélité* or *manque de foi*, but the meaning and moral weight remain essentially the same. Why this frequent recurrence? I would like to suggest two possible responses. First, *change* lends itself well to complications of plot. It is essentially an agent of instability, almost invariably altering the direction of the play's action and allowing for different permutations of dramatic possibilities. In a theater in which love has an ever more consecrated place, *change* operates to disrupt and complicate the classic continuum of love-*aveu*-marriage. Second, the concept of *change*, itself limited to the amorous loyalties of characters, is ripe with metaphorical extensions: change – exchange – transformation; the links are numerous and quickly multiply to embrace the essence of drama itself.⁵ Thus *change* offers the playwright a rich source of dramatic possibilities.

At the same time, *change* is also problematic in several respects. Because it is considered to be a crime, the playwright who employs this motif has to contend with its moral implications. Furthermore, *change* destabilizes. Not only are social relationships disrupted, but questions of identity are raised as well: what does it mean to abandon one's commitment to another, to abandon one's word? To be associated with *change* is not only a blemish, but also a source of fragmentation of the self.

While frequent, the motif of *change* in no way precludes the presence of its opposite. Both playwrights offer examples of extreme fidelity (Racine's Bérénice or Oreste, Corneille's Suréna or Camille, among

³ I am using the term tragedy loosely, encompassing the *comédies héroïques* and *pièces à machines* of Corneille. All textual references to the plays come from Georges Couton's edition of Corneille's *Œuvres complètes* and Jacques Morel and Alain Viala's edition of Racine's *Théâtre complet*.

⁴ The term *change* is used in this sense 22 times in Corneille's serious dramas (*Le Cid* 1072; *Médée* 861, 1602; *Horace* 155; *Don Sanche d'Aragon* 778, 1034; *Andromède* 482, 1140, 1181; *Pertharite* 391, 412, 444, 1128; *La Toison d'or* 989, 1227, 1256, 1496, 1626; *Sophonisbe* 49; *Othon* 128, 390; *Agésilas* 1624), while Racine avoids it entirely.

⁵ Given the limitations of this paper, I will not be able to explore these metaphorical extensions in anything but the most rudimentary fashion. Two obvious examples are the conversions in *Cinna* and *Polyeucte*. Marie-Odile Sweetster has discussed the metaphorical extension of *change* at length in "De la comédie à la tragédie: le 'change' et la conversion de *Mélite à Polyeucte*."

others). Such fidelity is entirely in keeping with a heroic or tragic ethos. *Le change* is not.

In order to examine how *change* functions in the serious drama of Racine and Corneille, it will be useful to create a set of four categories to describe its variations. In the first category, the character goes from truly loving object A to truly loving object B. This variety of *change*, with its complete transformation, is the most difficult to explain and indeed is uncommon in these plays. In the second category, the character whose affections change in fact loves neither A nor B. Such instances are more typical of baroque comedy where flightiness and superficiality of feeling are not uncommon. In the third category, *le change* is motivated by something other than love, and the character's feelings for the original beloved do not in fact change, even if he/she must take the role of lover or spouse to someone new. Conversely, in the fourth category, the attraction to the new object is overwhelmingly powerful while the character's feelings for the original beloved are called into question. Unlike in category 1, here the two loves are incomparable; love for the new object is far stronger than that for the original object.

As a general tendency, the *change* we find in Corneille's theater is of the third variety. Different motivations, from ambition to *devoir* to political necessity, impel a *change* from an original object who was loved to a replacement who must be married. Thus, Othon accepts a move from Plautine to Camille in the hopes of securing the throne, Pulchérie abandons Léon for a sterile marriage with Martian in order to conform to her own sense of *devoir*, Tite shifts from Bérénice to Domitie for reasons of political obligation, but spends the play wavering between the two. Jason is a classic figure of *change* based on ambition. Corneille gives us two episodes from his life and two amorous betrayals. In *La Conquête de la Toison d'or*, Jason goes from Hypsipyle to Médée in order to secure the golden fleece, while in *Médée* he abandons Médée for Créuse for his own political advantage. Jason says of himself: "J'accomode ma flamme au bien de mes affaires" (*Médée*, 26).⁶ In *Sertorius*, Pompée is presented as having agreed to divorce his beloved Aristie in order to marry Sylla's step-daughter for political reasons. In *Polyeucte*, Pauline knew that she would have to leave behind Sévère to marry whomever her father might choose

⁶ Liliane Picciola puts it well when she says: "Jason se caractérise par une belle constance dans l'inconstance, l'hypocrisie et la mufferie dans l'une et l'autre des deux tragédies" (46-47).

for his own political advantage.⁷ Sophonisbe abandoned her engagement to Massinisse for Syphax, whom she married in order to obtain an ally for Carthage, and Agésilas accepts Aglatide in the place of Mandane for the sake of political harmony. Two examples of the fourth type of *change* exist in Corneille's theater as well. In *Suréna*, Pacorus abandons Palmis for Eurydice, although the latter, herself a figure of fidelity, is not receptive to his attentions. In *Sophonisbe*, Massinisse abandons his engagements to Eryxe when his former fiancée, Sophonisbe, shows interest in him. The dominant model throughout Corneille's long career, however, is the *change* motivated by diverse unsentimental reasons.

There is a general progression in Corneille's theater as regards *change*. Rousset believes that Corneille reacted strongly against his own infatuation with the subject in his early plays, and worked to create, presumably in the tetralogy, an individual impervious to such instability. Indeed, it is in the first three plays of this group that we find models of faithfulness, and in extension, rigidity, such as Horace, Camille, Rodrigue, or even Emilie.⁸ But the status of the notion of *change* evolves further. While any suggestion of *change* is immediately rejected as criminal in the tetralogy and resisted forcefully in such plays as *Théodore* and *Héraclius*, it later comes to be seen and even accepted as political necessity (*Othon, Tite et Bérénice, Pulchérie*). Finally, in *Suréna*, the value of absolute fidelity returns.

When discussing Corneille's theater it is difficult to avoid the subject of heroism. Heroism and *change*, however, are not easily reconcilable. Prigent attempts to recuperate *le change* as a prerogative of Cornelian heroism once it is the state and no longer the hero himself who determines values; that is, in the later plays (409-10). According to Prigent, "une infidélité politique n'est pas une vraie infidélité" (408). In a different vein, one might perceive the *changes* of Pauline, Tite, Agésilas, and Pulchérie as examples

⁷ One might argue that Polyeucte, in a metaphorical extension of *change*, betrays Pauline with his newly-found Christianity.

⁸ In Rousset's words, "Tout se passe comme si Corneille, après une première plongée dans l'univers trop mobile du Baroque, avait éprouvé le besoin d'un violent coup de barre qui le mit à l'abri des sortilèges de l'instabilité; ayant trop goûté à ce qui lui parut un poison, il n'eut plus de cesse qu'il n'eût trouvé le contre-poison; de sorte qu'à partir du 'change' il s'évertue à construire un homme qui échappe au 'change': il s'en échappe, mais comme un naufragé suspendu au-dessus du courant. On s'explique mieux ainsi la tension, la violence soutenue, la frénésie poussée jusqu'au paradoxe, la surenchère de férocité ou de dépassement qui animent furieusement ces héros de l'inaltérable" (212-13). This rejection of *change* in any form is also linked to overcoming the problem of time. Michel Prigent states: "L'ambition la plus haute du héros [est de] maîtriser le temps. La constance était le seul moyen de transformer l'instant en figure de l'éternité" (410).

of heroic self-sacrifice. *Change* nonetheless remains morally problematic and destabilizing. Whatever its justification, one has only to consider its outcomes to understand how questionable any claims for its ties to the heroic are. Othon is crowned but never fully attains heroic status, Tite wavers throughout until Bérénice makes a final decision, Jason is punished by the death of his children and takes his own life; Pulchérie's self-sacrificial *change* becomes so gratuitous that it seems to suggest some perverse hidden motive. Every one of these *changes* is disquieting by its very nature as *change*, and thereby undermines the heroic potential of the characters who choose it. No character's heroic status is enhanced by this act; *le change* sullies.

Most typical of Racine's theater, in opposition to Corneille's, is the fourth category wherein a new love object overwhelms a character, forcing a *change* and retrospectively calling into question feelings for the original beloved. In *Andromaque*, Pyrrhus's love for his captive leads him to reject Hermione and incur the wrath of the Greeks; Néron is overwhelmed by his attraction for Junie, leaving behind Octavie (or perhaps Agrippine); Roxane abandons Amurat for Bajazet, while Phèdre is overwhelmingly drawn to Hippolyte.⁹ The case of Bérénice is somewhat ambiguous: at the very least she had given Antiochus some reason to hope that she might marry him before she met Tite. Furthermore, Antiochus hopes for a *change* in the queen's affections once Tite has rejected her, but it does not come about. While *change* does not actually occur in Racine's other tragedies, it is feared in *Mithridate* and *Iphigénie*. Mithridate fears that Monime has betrayed him, first imagining that it is with Pharnace and then with Xipharès.¹⁰ In *Iphigénie*, both Iphigénie and Clytemnestre fear a *change* in Achilles's affections from Iphigénie to Eriphile. While only a brief complicating factor in the plot, the suggestion of *change* does remind the reader that Helen, the motivating force for the Greeks' war against Troy, has been unfaithful to Menelaus. Thus *change* is at least a potential factor in all seven of Racine's central tragedies.

⁹ It is worth noting that where *change* in Corneille's theater was decidedly non-adultrous (the only exception would arguably be Jason abandoning both Hypsipyle, who calls him "mon époux" [*La Conquête de la Toison d'or* 1191] and Médée, with whom he had a family), in Racine's theater the situation is far more mixed: only Pyrrhus can be said to be tied to Hermione by no more than his word.

¹⁰ The concept of *change* is complicated in this play by what I will term an original love: Xipharès and Monime loved each other from afar before she was given, as a political pawn, to Mithridate. So admitting her love to Xipharès when she believes Mithridate to be dead cannot really be seen as a *change*. Similarly, when Mithridate gives Monime to Xipharès as he is about to die, no *change* takes place.

The attraction motivating the *change* we find in Racine's theater is entirely one-sided. Where in Corneille's plays the object of the proposed *change* was generally complicit and satisfied (Médée eager to fly off with her new lover, Polyeucte delighted at receiving Pauline, etc.), in the case of Racine we find only coercion. Indeed, *Andromaque* can be read as an opposition between a male desire for *change* and female resistance to it, with Pyrrhus employing the threat of Astyanax's death and Oreste plotting Hermione's abduction. Similarly, Néron forces Junie to reject Britannicus, but cannot make her accept him; Roxane wants Bajazet to marry her and threatens to have him killed unless he accedes to her wishes; and Hippolyte refuses Phèdre's advances despite the offer of the throne.

Fidelity in Racine's tragedies often takes the form of original love: just as Monime cannot be accused of infidelity to Mithridate with Xipharès because her love for Xipharès dates back to before she knew Mithridate, so too Bajazet has loved Atalide since childhood, and Junie and Britannicus were destined for each other since the time when the throne seemed to be Britannicus's birthright.

Here, unlike in Corneille's theater, the moral problem is in no way obscured by considerations of heroism. No effort is made to mask the dark associations with *change*. However, where Corneille would wish to make the profoundly non-heroic *change* heroic, Racine seeks to make the non-tragic tragic. In general terms, it is the implacably inalterable that is tragic, not change, so Racine dresses up the impulsion for *change* with the force of fate. The attraction of the new object is so overwhelming that it is ascribed to a superior force. This is explicit in the case of Phèdre: Venus is responsible for her love for Hippolyte. But one *change* inevitably opens the door to the possibility of another, thereby undermining any tragic potential that these situations may have.

These, then, are the general lines of distribution of the motif of *change* in the works of Corneille and Racine. However unlikely this motif may seem in the environment of tragedy, it is both prevalent and sufficiently stable to allow generalization. Occasionally, however, both Racine and Corneille deviate from their own norms; these examples warrant closer examination.

Néron is typical of the Racinian agent of *change* in that he is overwhelmed by his feelings for Junie and pursues her avidly and ruthlessly. He is far from typical, however, in that he aborts his *change*. In the fourth act, acceding not to Agrippine but to Burrhus, Néron agrees to make peace with Britannicus, thereby dropping all hope of taking Junie from him. "Il éteint cet amour, source de tant de haine" (1477). The audience is clearly led to believe Néron's sincerity at the moment when he

makes concessions to Burrhus and cedes Junie to his rival (IV, iii).¹¹ Like other Racinian characters, Néron is frustrated in his desire for *change*; unlike the others, he gives up. The degree to which his abandonment of his own *change* is complete or successful is rendered unclear when Burrhus announces near the end of the last scene that Néron is in despair and that "Le seul nom de Junie échappe de sa bouche" (1746). Néron's disquieting and uncertain abandonment of his *change* is matched by the indeterminacy of its original configuration; whom does Néron leave behind as he becomes enamored of Junie? The simple answer is his wife, Octavie. Néron speaks explicitly of repudiating Octavie and putting Junie on the throne in her place (II, iii). But the complete absence of Octavie on stage coupled with the frequent presence of Agrippine complicates the issue, all the more so because Agrippine complains repeatedly of having lost Néron's affection along with her influence. Thus the typically overwhelming Racinian *change* is clouded here, with the original love-object rendered unclear and the *change* itself called into question by its abrupt suspension. What is not in doubt is the metaphorical extension of the concept in this tragedy. Néron is in the process of transforming himself from his mother's puppet to his own man, moving from the static, repetitive virtue set out by Burrhus¹² to a far less stable existence governed by desire. Néron's *change* to Junie can be read as only the least successful part of the larger thematics of change in this play.

Bajazet deviates from the Racinian norm in a different fashion. Not only does this tragedy contain a *change* which fits Racine's general pattern – Roxane abandons Amurat for Bajazet because she has fallen in love with the latter – but it contains a typically Cornelian *change* as well. Bajazet's proposed *change* from Atalide to Roxane is of the third variety, motivated by political necessity. Generally, the objects of Racinian *change* resist stubbornly; even Andromaque, who attempts to find a solution in order to save her son, offers Pyrrhus only the hollow capitulation of a dead bride. Bajazet, on the contrary, pushed by Atalide, imagines that some solution might be found to satisfy both Roxane and his own feelings for Atalide. While the hope of such a compromise might not seem entirely out of place in the polygamous setting of the seraglio, it certainly is in the context of a

¹¹ His sincerity can best be gauged by the difficulty Narcisse has in convincing him to return to his original plans for assassinating Britannicus.

¹² Sur ses aïeux, sans doute, il n'a qu'à se régler ;
 Pour bien faire, Néron n'a qu'à se ressembler,
 Heureux si ses vertus, l'une à l'autre enchaînées,
 Ramènent tous les ans ses premières années ! (217-20)

seventeenth-century tragedy.¹³ Bajazet's vain hope of effecting a *change* which is not really a *change*, fudging an absolute, if you will, has serious consequences. Because of the unstable, indeterminate nature of the *change* that Bajazet contemplates, Atalide becomes uncertain about what category of *change* it is. She mistakes the third category, politically motivated *change*, for the first, a sincere and complete change of love-object. While she actively encouraged a *change* of the third category for Bajazet, she panics at the thought of the alternative :

Ah, peut-être, après tout, que sans trop se forcer,
 Tout ce qu'il a pu dire, il a pu le penser.
 Peut-être en la voyant, plus sensible pour elle,
 Il a vu dans ses yeux quelque grâce nouvelle. (915-18)

Atalide's inability to distinguish between appearance and reality is a crucial and fatal moment in the play.

The third category of *change* would seem to lend itself easily to such confusions of appearance and reality because of its inherent lack of sincerity, and yet Corneille does not seem to exploit this possibility, perhaps because it would run counter to his preoccupation with the potential nobility of the gesture of *change* for some higher purpose. One exception, although perhaps an inadvertent one, is *Pertharite*, in which conflicting explanations are given to explain Grimoald's *change* from his fiancée Eduïge to Pertharite's supposed widow Rodelinde. It is never made entirely clear whether this *change* belongs to the third variety or the fourth (or even the first). Unlike in *Bajazet*, however, its indeterminacy plays no direct, crucial role in the plot, contributing instead to an atmosphere of confusion and uncertainty in harmony with the general atmosphere of the play.

Andromède deviates from the norms of *change* in that it takes *change* as its central subject and that it is the only example of a pure, complete *change* of the first category depicted in the course of the action of the play. *Andromède* begins the play in love with Phinée and moves her affections completely to Persée. It is as if Corneille set himself the challenge of examining and making palatable this crime of the heart, all the more scandalous in that it is a woman and not a man whose affections change. Phinée begins the play as the ideal lover; he has faithfully served *Andromède* for six years, patiently awaiting the moment when their marriage would be finalized. *Andromède*'s love is depicted as equally perfect: a nymph informs us that "Il n'est point de cœur si fidèle" (549) as

¹³ Lucien Goldmann discusses the problem of compromise in this play in *Le Dieu caché* (387).

Andromède's and that "Phinée est plus aimé, qu'Andromède est belle" (546). While Andromède acknowledges that Persée is attractive, she does not equivocate: "Mais j'aime trop Phinée, et le change est un crime" (482). Thus Corneille takes great pains to establish the perfect, faithful couple as the play begins, as if to insure that the *change* will be all the more radical when it occurs.

He takes equal pains to exculpate his heroine. The source of Andromède's *change* is presented as the gods' will; it is they who do not find Phinée worthy of her. Andromède, however, is by no means quick to reject Phinée. Even when she is attached to the rocks and awaiting the monster's fatal arrival, she defends her fiancé to her mother, asserting that he must be already dead. Cassiope's cynical response ("Dis plutôt que l'ingrat n'ose te mériter," 908) and the fact that Phinée is most certainly not dead work to highlight Andromède's faithfulness.¹⁴ The young woman's *change* is also tied to obedience to her parents: it is Cassiope who offers Andromède to Persée in exchange for his help fighting the monster: "Andromède est à toi, si tu l'oses gagner" (916), and she later instructs her daughter, "Ne pense plus, ma fille, à ton ingrat Phinée" (958). Céphée, father and king, ratifies the *change*. Finally, Andromède is herself amazed by her own *change* (1130-31, 1140-41), and this amazement serves to assure us that it was not her own doing.¹⁵

Where Persée is the perfect hero and Andromède is exculpated entirely, it would have been a simple matter for Corneille to make Phinée completely despicable. Instead, the playwright goes to considerable lengths to make him a complicated character, simultaneously deserving and undeserving of the *change* that deprives him of his fiancée. Phinée's crime is one of absence interpreted as *lâcheté*: when Andromède must face the monster he is not there to defend her, however futilely (20 lovers died defending an earlier victim). Phinée's second sin is whining. He whines when Andromède accepts her fate as the monster's victim, when her parents accept it as well, and he whines when Andromède is given to Persée, wanting to know if she has agreed, "Par un change honteux, de l'Arrêt de ma mort" (1181). Just at the point where we have lost all sympathy for him, Corneille turns the situation around and depicts Phinée, at the beginning of the fifth act, as a sympathetic, albeit lovesick, faithful

¹⁴ Andromède herself directly rejects Phinée only when he provokes her by calling her "mon bien" (1187) and suggesting that she is flighty and incapable of faithfulness (1595-99).

¹⁵ Indeed, as John Lapp notes, Andromède's *change* is remarkable for its rapidity, thereby suggesting some superior force as its source (172).

lover. He is reluctant to attack Persée, at least ostensibly because he knows that killing Persée will not help him win back Andromède. Rather he hopes against hope that Andromède still loves him, that he can appeal directly to her. He is even ready to accept Andromède's *change* if he could believe that "Elle change forcée, et son cœur me demeure" (1492). He argues, quite correctly, that Persée's rescue was hardly a miraculous feat because he was aided by the gods. He asserts, again with reason, that his six years of fidelity should not be dismissed so lightly. Although Andromède rejects his arguments, it is worth noting that this is a relatively rare instance in Corneille's theater of time and space being given significant weight, for while Phinée claims time – the six years – as part of his defense, he conspicuously neglects space. Cassiope, conversely, explicitly compares Andromède to a space in justifying the *change* :

[...] Persée a trouvé la place abandonnée,
Et n'a fait autre chose, en prenant son parti,
Que s'emparer d'un lieu dont vous étiez sorti [...] (1500-02)¹⁶

Thus, while Phinée is guilty, he is not nearly as guilty as he might have been. Because he attacks Persée with an unequally large cohort, he deserves his fate of petrification, but it is less certain that he deserves the *change* that has befallen him. Thus Corneille uses this machine play both to depict a complete and unqualified *change* and, implicitly, to examine the ethical issues involved.¹⁷

As we noted earlier, *change* destabilizes ; it does so by upsetting the standard expected progression of love and marriage and by calling into question one's word and even one's identity. A complicating factor in several of these plays is the possibility of a second *change*, or *re-change*, often back to the first love object. Needless to say, *re-change* compounds the destabilizing tendency by illustrating the force of the kinetic energy

¹⁶ *Change* is linked to place quite differently in *La Conquête de la Toison d'or* when Hypsipyle suggests that Jason's affections are tied to the place in which he finds himself. In Colchos, he prefers Médée to Hypsipyle, but as the latter points out, "peut-être qu'en Grèce / Quelque troisième objet surprendrait sa tendresse" (1296-7).

¹⁷ It is no accident that *le change* is given a central role in machine plays. (In *La Conquête de la Toison d'or*, Jason's former engagements to Hypsipyle are an important part of the plot). The genre of the machine play, with its breathtaking changes of scenery, is a natural metaphorical extension of the *change* we are examining. In the machine plays, metamorphosis is the norm on many levels. In the words of Laudyce Rétat, "Les pièces à machines unissent le fantastique aérien de la puissance (envol de la Toison d'or, char de Médée, chevauchée de Pégase) à la réalité psychologique du change, équivoque, mais valorisé" (304).

unleashed by the first *change*. Put more simply, one *change* leads to another.¹⁸ In *Bajazet*, Roxane more than once envisions returning to Amurat, but as Orcan's orders to kill her reveal, issued as they were before the action of the play began, *re-change* is not an option for Roxane. Sophonisbe is eager undergo a *re-change* to Massinisse despite being already married to Syphax ; she is later even willing to consider a further *re-change* to Syphax for the sake of political expediency (1099-1104). Neither comes to pass. Agésilas does effect a *re-change*, but it is highly attenuated. He had once shown some interest in Aglatide, but made no offer of marriage. By marrying her at the play's denouement and renouncing his hopes for a union with Mandane, he traces a figure of return, but hardly a strong one.¹⁹ In *Andromaque*, Pyrrhus contemplates a *re-change* to Hermione numerous times, but imbedded in this oscillating structure between Andromaque and Hermione is the impossibility of *re-change* : Pyrrhus never truly returns to his fiancée.

A curious variant of this resistance to *re-change* can be found in *Polyeucte*. While Pauline accepted the *change* from Sévère to whomever her father might choose for her, she refuses to consider a *re-change* to Sévère when it is proposed by Polyeucte as he awaits execution.²⁰ Pauline claims that she could not now marry Sévère because he will have been in a sense responsible, "encor qu'innocemment" (1338), for Polyeucte's death. While certainly very noble sounding, this argument completely discounts Polyeucte's agency, both in deciding to give her to Sévère and especially in devising his own martyrdom. In fact, I would suggest that Pauline's refusal veils a resistance to the non-heroic instability of *re-change*. If Pauline has changed once, then her husband assumes she can do so again. But what would then preclude a further *change*, and what will become of her noble virtue of marital fidelity? While Corneille and Racine have deeply different ideas about what constitutes tragedy, a circular structure of return

¹⁸ The earliest example can be found in the first of Corneille's plays, *Mérite*, where Philandre wants to return to Cloris once he discovers that Mérite is not in love with him. She refuses him.

¹⁹ Claire Carlin notes that "The primary royal couple [Agésilas and Aglatide] is formed on a note of cynicism" (126).

²⁰ Polyeucte says to Sévère :

Vous êtes digne d'elle, elle est digne de vous,
 Ne la refusez pas de la main d'un époux,
 S'il vous a désunis, sa mort va vous rejoindre.
 Qu'un feu jadis si beau n'en devienne pas moindre,
 Rendez-lui votre cœur, et recevez sa foi,
 Vivez heureux ensemble ... (1305-10)

(specifically a *re-change* back to the original love object) is favored by neither. One of Racine's characters, however, is defined by *change*. Thésée, "volage adorateur de mille objets divers" (636), known for his many romantic entanglements, recalls d'Urfe's Hylas. While he gives absolutely no indication of unfaithfulness throughout the course of *Phèdre*, Thésée's reputation for infidelity follows him relentlessly; his disappearance during the first two acts is ascribed to some "nouvelles amours" (20). Thésée can be said to embody the dangers of endless *change*, with a son who is ashamed of his amorous conduct and a wife who herself is falling victim to the same vice. Interestingly, Thésée's *change* never takes the form of a *re-change*. He is known for moving on, not for returning.

In only one play do we find an unqualified example of a *re-change*; it is perhaps no accident that it is in *Pertharite*, a tragedy whose failure precipitated Corneille's seven-year disappearance from the stage. Before the opening of the play, Grimoald abandons his longtime fiancée, Eduïge, for Pertharite's widow, Rodelinde. Much of the first three acts is devoted to escalating and fruitless efforts to convince Rodelinde to accede to Grimoald's courtship. When Pertharite surprises everyone by returning, a *re-change* sends Grimoald back to Eduïge. While Grimoald resists acknowledging that the deposed king is alive, the specter of adultery seems to immediately put him off Rodelinde, who in any case was doing a grotesquely successful job of keeping Grimoald at bay. As in *Andromaque*, the women do not change, but remain faithful.²¹ The presence of *re-change* raises the specter of possible endless *change*, perpetual instability. Eduïge in the third act warns her rival that it is unlikely that Grimoald will remain faithful to her, any more than he did to herself. Even at the denouement, where all problems have been resolved, the ricocheting potential of *change* is alluded to once again by Eduïge: "je mériterais un nouveau changement, / Si mon cœur n'égalait celui de mon Amant" (1837-8). *Re-change*, compounding the scandal of *change* itself, is well-suited to the unsettling dramatic universe of *Pertharite*.

In conclusion, one can only be struck by the sheer frequency of the motif of *change* in both of these œuvres. While it is in the nature of *change* itself to resist association with either the heroic or the tragic, both playwrights find ways to make it a natural extension not simply of their plots, but of their far more abiding preoccupations. Specifically, in Corneille, change is a natural extension of the aesthetics of surprise that are so central

²¹ Indeed, in the second line of the play, Rodelinde declares, "Je vous le dis encore, rien ne peut me changer." Similarities between *Andromaque* and *Pertharite* have been commented on often since Voltaire first noted a certain resemblance. See Couton in Corneille 2: 1499-1501.

to his dramaturgy (May 58). To be unfaithful to one's beloved, whatever the motivating factors and the noble self-sacrifice involved, is invariably surprising. Almost paradoxically, *change* can be linked in Racine's theater to the immutability of his dramatic universe. The desire that is at the root of the fourth variety of *change*, characteristic of the younger playwright, is never satisfied. No actual *change* ever fully transpires in Racine's theater ; there is only eternal frustrated desire and the specific negative consequences of that desire.

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