

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE
ROLE OF THE CONFIDANTE IN THE TRAGEDIES OF JEAN RACINE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| PREFACE | ii |
| Chapter | |
| I. THE TRAGEDY BEFORE RACINE | 1 |
| II. THE LIFE AND WORKS OF RACINE | 13 |
| III. THE ROLE OF THE CONFIDANTE | 23 |
| CONCLUSION | 44 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 46 |

PREFACE

Countless critics, authors, students, and laymen have devoted a great deal of time to the study of the works of Jean Racine. Needless to say, his great character creations have been analyzed from every possible angle. The minor characters, especially the confidantes, have suffered thereby and indeed have received scant recognition. This study will endeavor to prove that these confidantes have such an integral part in his dramas, that one cannot dispense with them lightly.

The writer, having checked reliable sources and journals, has found no evidence to indicate that this aspect of the tragedies of Racine has been treated to date. This study of the role of the confidante should, therefore, contribute in some manner to a better understanding and appreciation of the tragedies of Racine.

In studying the works of an author, particularly Racine, one should discuss certain personalities, and aspects of the genre which preceded him. The writer considered it necessary, therefore, to present an account of the origin and the evolution of the French tragedy before Racine. The introductory chapter will include such material.

In order to comprehend and appreciate the genius of Racine, a brief, but complete biographical sketch of him, and the evolution of his dramatic talents will be offered in Chapter II. Chapter III will be concerned with the theater of Racine, with special emphasis on the

actual role of the confidantes and their influence on the plot development of the tragedy. A brief resumé of the play in which the confidante appears will be presented. At the end of Chapter III, the writer will offer her evaluation of this aspect of the theater of Racine.

The writer would like to make acknowledgements to the following persons: Dr. Benjamin F. Hudson, whose sincere and continuous efforts inspired her to acquire an appreciation for French literature; and Dr. Edward A. Jones who over a period of years, has assisted and encouraged her to continue her course of study.

INTRODUCTION

The second half of the sixteenth century in France was dominated by the work of the Pléiade. Its seven members were Ronsard, du Bellay, Belleau, Jodelle, Dorat, Baif, and Pontus de Tyard. The writer's attention will not be focused upon the entire group but only upon one of its illustrious members—Etienne Jodelle, the dramatist of the Pléiade. Jodelle made many attempts to write plays based on classical models. It was with Cléopâtre captive that he gained fame in 1552. This was the first tragedy manifesting the new tendencies of French dramatic literature.¹ Lebegue stated that "the play was mediocre in itself due to the fact that it was badly composed and badly written."²

Jodelle broke completely with the medieval theatre and did not borrow anything from it. He furnished the model by which so many tragedies of the Renaissance would be patterned. The characteristics of the tragedies were: (1) the subjects taken from antiquity, (2) the tragedy consisted of five acts, (3) the introduction of "le choeur" between acts, (4) very little action, (5) sadness was essential, (6) a great deal of lamentation before and after the tragic event, and (7) une ombre in the first act and un récit in the last.³

¹Elliott Forsyth, La Tragédie française de Jodelle à Corneille (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1962), p. 146.

²Raymond Lebègue, La Tragédie française de la renaissance (Bruxelles: Office de Publicité, 1954), p. 33.

³Ibid.

One is able to note the influence of Jodelle's works on other writers. Many poets who attempted to write tragedies during this period were young students who lacked the knowledge and experience to contribute to the development of the genre. Some interesting works of the period were: La Médée by La Péruse, Sophonisbe by Saint-Gelais and La Mort de César by Grévin. La Péruse was the first writer of tragedy who alternated regularly masculine and feminine rimes.¹

Jacques and Jean de La Taille were the immediate successors of Jodelle. Jacques de La Taille was the younger of the two and he died at the age of twenty. He composed six tragedies of which only two were printed-Daïre and Alexandre. His older brother, Jean, was the better dramatist. Jean was the only writer of note before Garnier. Lebègue wrote: "c'est avec raison que Faguet et Lanson considèrent La Taille comme le meilleur homme de théâtre du XVI^e siècle."²

In 1572, Jean de La Taille published Saül le furieux which was preceded by a small treatise entitled, "l'Art de la tragédie." It was the best work of this genre that a Frenchman had written before the period of Classicism.³ For La Taille who patterned his works after the ancients, it was necessary for the subjects of a tragedy to be a "great misfortune". In the work, "l'Art de la tragédie", he recommended the use of noble characters, that intrigue, with the fatal dénouement, be enlarged without any superfluous elements. That all unpleasant events or scenes be excluded from the spectators, such

¹Ibid., p. 36.

²Ibid., p. 41.

³Ibid., p. 39.

as suicide, murder, or assassination.¹ Jean de La Taille introduced also the aristotelian rule of the unities. He wrote, "Il faut toujours représenter l'histoire ou le jeu en un même lieu."² The dramatic writers of the period accepted, without protesting, these rigorous laws. Robert Garnier conformed to them in the eight plays that he wrote.

Robert Garnier was the most famous dramatic poet of the Sixteenth century.³ If one wanted to cite another tragedy writer before Corneille, he would be the one.⁴ Garnier was inspired first by Seneca for his first four tragedies: Porcia (1568), Hippolyte (1573), Cornélie (1574), Marc-Antoine (1578). Then with La Troade and Antigone he was inspired by the Greek theatre. His two last works Bradamante and Les Juives were his chief plays. He created the genre of the tragi-comédie, in which the action was tragic, but it did not have the other requirements to be considered a real tragedy. Les Juives announced the evolution of "les tragédies bibliques" for which Racine will also be acclaimed for writing. Garnier's works were lyrical and full of passion. They are also characterized by rhetoric and realistic dialogues. The choeurs recited beautiful firm strophes. It was with Garnier that the lyric tragedy reached its peak in the sixteenth century.

Garnier was a moralist as well as a dramatist. The theatre appeared to him the most efficacious means for presenting his moralistic doctrines. His tragedies were destined, therefore, to propagate certain

¹Léon Levrault, Drame et tragédie (Paris: Librairie Classique, N. D.), p. 23.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 24.

⁴André Lagarde and Laurent Michard, XVI^e Siècle (Bordas: Collection Textes et Littérature, 1961), p. 168.

moral, as well as political and social ideas.¹ Garnier introduced characters whose only mission was to comment on the events and discuss the moral points involved. This technique was employed in order to answer questions that the reader or spectator might have.

In his last plays, Garnier marked a progression of the tragedies of the times. The monologues were few, the tirades were not as long but they were interrupted by retorts, the recits were cut by exclamations. These characteristics differentiated his tragedies from those of the classical period: the characters did not express or reveal violent interior conflicts; they did not evolve psychologically and their sentiments had almost no influence on events.²

Garnier gave to the French tragedy a style which was imitated for a half of a century.³ The principal characters possessed a certain nobility which was felt by the reader or spectator, through their words and deeds. His style was impregnated with rhetoric. The lamentations were full of exclamations, of apostrophes and of imprecations which were used by Seneca, Jodelle and La Péruse. Among all the French dramatists of the sixteenth century, Garnier was uncontestedly the best master of verse, according to Lebègue.⁴

After Garnier, the tragedy of the Renaissance had only one representative of note, Montchrétien, a transitional writer belonging to both centuries, sixteenth and seventeenth. Montchrétien was a talented

¹Lebègue, op. cit., p. 47.

²Ibid., p. 55.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

writer of tragedy, and a moralist, whose life was quite eventful.

He composed six tragedies which were published in one volume: l'Écossaise, la Carthaginoise, les Lacènes, David, Aman and Hector. The most interesting was l'Écossaise which evoked the death of Marie Stuart.¹

This work had a penetrating sensibility, a melancholic grace and elegiac sweetness.² In 1615, he published a work which immortalized his name, le Traité de l'économie. In this essay he was concerned with the political aspect of the economy. This was founded on the treatises of Seneca. It recommended virtue, reason, honor, duty, exercise of the will, triumph of the will over passions, and generosity of the soul.³ It admitted the Christian idea of help sent from God by grace.

Montchrétien's merit as a writer of tragedy was based on two things: moral teaching and the stress upon pathetic elements. Considering the former, his plays had moral subtitles: David ou l'adultère and Aman ou la vanité are good examples.⁴ Through moralizing, he excited pity and admiration. His treatment of dramatic action was accompanied by a few scènes à faire. His characters, like those of Garnier, declaimed long tirades. They lamented their conditions, and gave accounts of their omens, dreams, fights, and violent deaths. Montchrétien's taste was more delicate than that of Garnier. His plays were constructed without a great deal of horrible or repugnant scenes.⁵

¹Lagarde and Michard, op. cit., p. 172.

²Lebègue, op. cit., p. 79.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 78.

⁵Ibid., p. 81.

The style of Montchrétien was characterized by clearness, facility and fluidity of his verse, and the rare use of inversions. He was influenced by Desportes, Garnier, and especially Malherbe. He tried to purify his vocabulary, to clarify and organize his poetic lines in order to make them rhythmic. One may readily note the merits of Montchretien which was an improvement over the other writers of this genre. Lebègue summed up the merits of Montchrétien:

"Par sa conception de la tragédie, Montchrétien est très loin de notre théâtre classique; mais, par son style, il appartient aux temps modernes plutôt qu'à la Renaissance. Il imite les Anciens avec la même indépendance que le fait Malherbe: le problème des sources ne se pose pas pour lui comme pour un Garnier ou un Ronsard. Dans le dernier état de ses pièces, les archaïsmes et les néologismes sont rares et la syntaxe est proche de la nôtre. Sauf exceptions, il évite le "forcènement", et, en employant la mythologie, il se garde du pédantisme. Quand il exprime dans d'harmonieux alexandrins des lieux communs de morale, il fait déjà penser à un Racan."¹

After Montchrétien, the most illustrious representative of this period was Alexander Hardy. His works numbered more than seven hundred, which were mainly tragi-comédies and pastorales.² Let us not confuse this term "tragi-comédie". This was not a play in which the tragedy and the comedy were mixed. These types of works were characterized by a happy ending, interest of love, changing of fortune, the neglect of time and place, and a romantic subject. Such sentiments for nature, love, adventure, and idyllic representation of natural life were dominant traits.³

¹Ibid., p. 85.

²Levrault, op. cit., p. 27.

³Lagarde and Michard, op. cit., p. 92.

Alexander Hardy maintained the tradition and assured the continuity of Garnier and Montchretien to Mairet and especially Corneille.¹ He continued the regular tragedy of the sixteenth century by keeping the ideas of Garnier's period. Hardy had a firm desire to please the public, even if it meant breaking rules and disregarding the principles established by them. His task continued to be difficult because of his desire to revive classical idealism. This particular aspect had no appeal to this uncultivated public. In spite of his difficulties, Hardy became the most popular of all dramatic writers of his day. He prepared a public for Corneille who was soon to make his debut in 1629.

After Alexander Hardy, uncertainty persisted, until Theophile de Viau presented les Amours tragiques de Pyrame et Thisbé. This romantic work had traces of the tragedy, tragi-comedy and pastoral. Racan later presented his pastoral, Les Bergeries, at l'Hôtel de Bourgogne. This work was praised because of the harmony of the poetic lines, the elegance of the style and the charm of certain scenes.²

During this period there was no continued and orderly evolution or progress towards the regular classical tragedy. There was no great writer to set the tone or standards for the genre and confusion prevailed. An author, who was far from being a great writer appeared on the scene to put an end to this confusion. He did this without being conscious of the revolution that he would bring about. Jean de Mairet

¹Ibid.

²Levrault, op. cit., p. 31.

was responsible for the reappearance of and the return to rules which were to be characteristic of the French classical tragedy. He was also one of those writers who reacted against the tendency toward the tragi-comédie. Mairet was not the creator of these famous rules, but he was their champion. It was in the Préface de sylvanire (1631) that Mairet presented the rules for the classical tragedy. In order to illustrate what he proposed, Mairet wrote Sophonisbe in 1632 which was the first regular classical tragedy.¹

Certain influences were being exerted on all literary genres during this same period when the rules were introduced. The salons exercised their influence on the theaters. The new patrons of the theater conformed to the manners and language of the salons. Another influence was that of the critics, especially Chapelain who wanted to apply Italian models to French literature. Also, there was the influence of Richelieu who demanded "l'ordre, le règlement, et l'organisation."² The last great influence of this period in the development of the French tragedy was Corneille who dominated the scene for more than thirty years.

Pierre Corneille was considered the father of the classical tragedy in France. The presentation of Le Cid in 1636 opened a new epoch for the French theater. For more than a century throughout Europe, the tragedy searched for favorable conditions for existence. In France, where the State and social life dominated, the tragedy took the essential rules of the Greek tragedy. It adapted them to a social life

¹ Joseph Bédier et Paul Hazard, Histoire de la littérature française (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1924), p. 278.

² A. F. B. Clark, Jean Racine (Harvard University Studies in Comparative Literature; Cambridge, 1939), XVI, p. 30.

dominated, the tragedy took the essential rules of the Greek tragedy. It adapted them to a social milieu entirely different from any other.¹

The French tragedy separated the serious from the pleasant. Instead of having vast tableaux which embraced an entire epoch, the new tragedy concentrated on rapid crises and circumscribed facts. It did not have many characters and it was not concerned with action, but with the psychological development of the character. The unities were observed by placing the action in one place, in order to obtain more clarity, rapidity, and vraisemblance. The action lasted for twenty-four hours. It tightened the action by having only one intrigue and it adopted the use of orations. Like the court life and the taste of the salons, this eloquence was reasonable because the characters were noble and the language was convénable. The subjects were chosen from antiquity by the imitation of "la tragédie antique" and because the éloignement raised interest.²

The tragedy was on the way to perfection when Corneille began to write. He endeavored to apply the rules to his tragedies, but he was not always completely successful. He had a great deal of difficulty in restricting his subjects to the limits of time, of place, and of action. There was harmony between the psychological invention of Corneille and the real history of the souls of this time. "Corneille paints the exalted, the fanatics, the intellectual passions, the

¹Larroumet, op. cit., pp. 134-35.

²Tbid.

characters who see their passions, reason on them, transform them into ideas, and these ideas into principles of conduct."¹ In spite of the gaucheries that Corneille made in trying to conform to the unities and the almost superhuman qualities of his characters; the tragedy remained what he made it according to Lanson: "une tragédie dont le ressort est l'amour et l'action est psychologique."²

The writer has already mentioned that Le Cid played an important part in the development of the French theater. Near the end of December 1636, the troop of Mondory presented it at le Théâtre du Marais.³ One critic stated that "it was not a success, but a triumph!"⁴ Sainte-Beuve wrote that Le Cid, "ce n'était pas seulement le commencement d'un homme, c'était l'aurore d'un grand siècle."⁵ After the success of the Cid, and the end of the resultant "querelle du Cid," Corneille wrote a series of great tragedies the most important of which are: Horace and Cinna in 1640; Polyeucte in 1642; and Tite et Bérénice in 1670. Although Corneille had many successes, he also had his failures. The failure of Pertharite (1651), caused him to renounce the theatre temporarily and turn to meditation and sacred lyricism. During this same period of retreat, he devoted time to the composition of "les trois discours" and "les Examens" of each of his plays; this included reflections on his art and his system of dramatics.⁶

¹Gustave Lanson, Histoire de la littérature française (Paris, 1923), pp. 325-27.

²Ibid., p. 137.

³Levrault, op. cit., p. 38.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 39.

⁶Lagarde and Michard, op. cit., p. 97.

Corneille, until he was eclipsed by Racine was considered as "le Prince de la Tragédie."¹ There were a few of his contemporaries who cherished him and who defended him at the moment of the unforgettable Querelle du Cid. Among the disciples or rivals of Corneille, there was no dramatist who could equal him. His domination of the theatre was challenged around 1664 by a writer who was approaching the heights of his creative powers, while the genius of Corneille was declining. This new writer opposed the dramatic system of Corneille. He wrote many chefs-d'oeuvre which cooled the public's favor of Corneille.² This daring young man was Jean Racine. He had all the talent that was necessary in order to discover and impose a new dramatic formula in the classical tragedy. Racine was in constant opposition to his predecessor. Corneille had chosen Roman history as a source for his plays, while Racine chose Greek antiquity. The former portrayed noble and heroic men who were rulers of their passions. Racine disagreed completely on this point. Both Racine and Corneille were similar in regards to one aspect of their tragedies. They both provided the principal characters with a companion, friend, or nursemaid. These minor characters were better known as confidants. It was true that they both included confidants in their tragedies, but Racine changed their roles from passive to active. Corneille portrayed these characters, both male and female, as colorless individuals who exist only for the main characters. Racine changed this by giving the confidants new personalities which permit them to take an active role in his tragedies.

¹Levrault, op. cit., p. 51.

²Ibid.

This, and other aspects of the original genius of Jean Racine can better understood and appreciated by a discussion of his life and works. The chapter immediately following will discuss this adequately, after which Chapter three will be devoted to the role of the confidantes and their paramount importance in the technique of Racine.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF RACINE

The intellectual and moral life of Jean Racine was influenced and determined by his relation to the group of protesting Jansenist Catholics, who were called the Solitaries of Port-Royal. Among their number were such master minds as Lemaistre de Sacy, le Grand Arnauld, and Lancelot. These men of sturdy faith were dominated by puritanical elements that persisted within the established church of France.

Jean Racine was born into a family of the upper middle class on December 22, 1639 in a small city named la Ferte-Milon. During his early childhood, he became an orphan and he was raised by his grandmother. She was a pious Jansenist in whose home he grew up amid a society of people who treated him as one of the family and permitted him to participate in all family discussions. From 1649 to 1653 he was a student at the Petites Écoles de Port-Royal. Then he entered the Collège de Beauvais where he pursued excellent Latin and Greek studies for two years. At the age of sixteen in 1655, Racine continued his studies at l'École des Granges under the immediate direction of the noted Greek scholar Lancelot, and Nicole, who was a moral philosopher and a good Latinist. The three years that he passed there left an ineffaceable mark not only upon his mind but also upon his character.

"Racine became an exceptional classical scholar due to his readings and his annotations of all the classics from Homer to Plutarch and to Saint Basil from Terence to Sulpicius Severus."¹ "He could recite long passages from Greek classics and declaimed to astonished friends the choruses of Sophocles, who remained, with Euripides, his model in dramatic art to the end."² In addition to this, he acquired three very important things for his later work: (1) a puritanic tenacity of mind, (2) the Puritanic uprightness, (3) and reasoning devotion to the excellent teachings and instruction from Nicole and Lancelot. There were other elements that entered into his education which interested him. The primary reason for his interest in sentiments, whether spiritual or worldly was the fact that they offered problems for the mind to analyse. While pursuing social success and recognition, Racine succumbed to worldly interests and influences which lead him away from the austere life of the Jansenists. Racine was estranged from these childhood influences but he never grew completely indifferent to them. This was evident in the fact that in his declining years, Racine became reconciled with Port-Royal and returned there to die.

Racine went to Paris in 1658 to live with his cousin Vitart. At the Collège d'Harcourt he continued his studies of the classics. There he became acquainted with Jean de la Fontaine, Chapelain and the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne.³ Racine's association with these poets inspired him to write also. He made his debut in French literary circles as a poet. Racine had composed many short poems, sonnets and

¹ Benjamin Wells (ed.), Racine's Andromaque (Boston: D. C. Heath Co., 1909), p. iv.

² Ibid., p. v.

³ Gustave Larroumet, Racine (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1939), p. 20.

madrigals. These first poems were unnoticed; he won his first acclaim as a poet when he wrote "La Nympe de la Seine" (1660), on the occasion of the marriage of Louis XIV and Marie Thérèse. This ode was dedicated to the queen. It made him famous because it was the best ode written for, and inspired by the marriage of the king. Racine was congratulated by Chapelain who presented him to the king, to the grief and chagrin of his friends and relatives at Port-Royal. Racine thus became a fashionable poet.

This brilliant debut, and the many compliments received by Racine did not have a negative effect on his talent in lyric poetry. He continued in his efforts to improve his writings and to experiment in all genres in attempting to discover the one for which his talents were best suited. Finally attracted by the theatre, he made an unsuccessful attempt to write a play, Amasie. This tragedy was refused by the actors of l'Hôtel de Marais. The following year, 1660, he had begun des Amours d'Ovide for l'Hôtel de Bourgogne. This rising passion for the theater did not please Port-Royal and the relatives of Racine decided to send him to Uzès in September, 1661. This was done in order to prepare him for a more respectable future because writing was not considered a career; and also, to save him from the life of immorality and licentiousness that he was living in Paris. This last period of the education of Racine, although forced upon him in 1661 by his relatives, had a definite effect on his scholarly efforts. Racine traveled to Uzès which was his longest trip. He was sent to Uzès to study for the clergy, and remained there some fifteen months. His studies consisted of reading the works of the Church Fathers as well as the Greek, Latin and Italian poets and historians. In his correspondence with

La Fontaine, Racine did not write with enthusiasm about his stay in Uzès. But in his letters to his cousin Vitart, he indicated an appreciation for the climate of the winter over that of the springtime.¹ In his admiration for the winter-time, verse was employed instead of prose which demonstrates Racine's facility as a writer. Even though Racine did not like the inhabitants of this region, he admired the passionate temperament of the young and at the same time, he had become acquainted with the exaggerations of these sentiments of the provençaux which were unknown in the north of France.

While traveling to Nîmes, Racine described the city and its pleasures with short, precise sentences. At the sight of the arena, he stated simply that it is,

un grand amphithéâtre, un peu ovale, tout bâti de prodigieuses pierres, longues de deux toises qui se tiennent là, depuis plus de seize cents ans, sans mortier et par leur seule pesanteur.²

Racine had the gift of impersonal description which he uses in his account of the details of the arena. He also had the gift or virtue of complexity which one detects from his letters about Uzès. These letters reveal a style similar to that of Voiture, and they change their tone or mood easily, according to the correspondent.

With La Fontaine, one denotes the poet; with Le Vasseur, one denotes a variety of subjects; with Vitart, a rather serious tone; and with his sister Marie a familiar Jansenist type of correspondence.³

¹Ibid., p. 25.

²Ibid., p. 28.

³Larroumet, loc. cit.

These correspondences reveal the continued development of Racine, "le grand écrivain".

Racine's stay in Uzès was not, therefore, fruitless. He was able to meditate on his first important dramatic piece (Théagène et Chariclée ou La Thébaine).¹ His visit to Nîmes was quite fruitful in that the descriptions reveal his ability to describe the sight of their ruins which represented roman grandeur may have inspired him to write a tragedy based on Roman history, La Thébaine.

Jean Racine returned to Paris around the end of 1662 or the beginning of 1663. He wrote an ode "Sur La Convalescence du Roi" followed by "La Renommée Aux Muses" which gained for him once more the attention of Chapelain. He made the acquaintance of the Comte de Saint-Aignan who later became his protector. It was in this same year of 1663 that Racine presented his first dramatic piece, La Thébaine ou Les Frères Ennemis. According to Grimarest, it was Molière who introduced to Racine the subject of this tragedy.² As the writer has already stated, it seems probable that it was started in Uzès. To a mind so imbedded in the classics as Racine's, La Thébaine expressed the theban cycle and all the tragic history of the family of Oedipus; but the same expression is frequently used in French to denote a deep solitude.³ It is with La Thébaine and its presentation by the troupe of Molière that Racine began his career as a dramatic writer. Racine also entered into a

¹André Lagarde and Laurent Michard, XVII^e Siècle (Bordas: Collection Textes et Littérature, 1961), p. 284.

²Larroumet, op. cit., p. 31.

³Mary Duclaux, The Life of Racine (New York: Harper and Brothers, N. D.), p. 47.

lasting friendship with La Fontaine Molière and Boileau. These "four friends" as they were called by La Fontaine in his Preface to his adaptation of Apuleius' Cupid and Psyché had a great deal of influence on the production of his early tragedies and on his later chefs d'oeuvre.¹

During this period there were two important theatres in Paris which specialized in producing tragedy: l'Hôtel de Bourgogne which was the old established theatre whose actors declaimed in the old traditions, and noble style; and the new Théâtre du Palais Royal, where Molière reigned supreme.² Racine naturally wanted his play presented by the actors of l'Hôtel de Bourgogne. La Thébaidé had been accepted but Racine was told that his play would be considered only after three other plays had been presented. Racine, young and impatient, did not want to wait a long time for the production of his play. He therefore permitted Molière to produce it without delay. La Thébaidé enjoyed moderate success, although Racine attributed this cool attitude of the public to the shortcomings of Molière's actors. In the Anecdotes of Furetier, there is a statement in support of Racine's contentions.

This fine play fell from the boards. M. Racine, in despair at such a desperate failure, accused his friends, who, he declared, had given him too good an opinion of his own work and thus induced him to produce it in public. The friends replied, 'Your play is an excellent play. But you have put it into the hands of comic actors who play it as though it were a comedy; and there is the whole secret of its fall. If the comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne were to produce your tragedy you would see what a success it would have!'³

¹Ibid., p. 52.

²Duclaux, loc. cit.

³Ibid.

Racine selected as subject for his next play Le Grand Alexandre. This play had two main purposes: (1) to please the public and (2) to flatter the king by presenting a parallel between Alexander the Great and Louis XIV. Although his friends praised the play and predicted its success, the play was no more successful than La Thèbaïde. Racine made many attempts to prove that Alexandre was worthy of more praise. He even appealed to the king himself, who granted Racine the right to present his play at court. "It was received with satisfaction and delight".¹ By a happy coincidence, a fortnight after the presentation of Le Grand Alexandre at the Palais Royal, it appeared on the stage of both theatres. Finally, Racine received the acclaim that he felt was due him.

Racine was praised for his first two tragedies, La Thèbaïde and Alexandre, by the influential people in the court of Louis XIV. He was enjoying a mild success in the year of 1665. A few days after Alexandre was presented in 1665 by the troop of Molière, Racine committed an unforgivable offence. He decided that the play was interpreted badly by Molière and his group, and placed it in the hands of l'Hôtel de Bourgogne. Molière was offended because he was not notified by Racine of his intentions. This started "la brouille" between the two writers and ended their friendship and association.² Another serious event which contributed to this "rupture de l'amitié" was "la liaison avec la Du Parc."³

¹Duclaux, loc. cit.

²Lagarde and Michard, op. cit., p. 284.

³René Jasinski, Vers le vrai Racine (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1958), p. 141.

Mademoiselle du Parc, a beautiful and charming actress and dancer in Molière's troop, was given the role of Axiane in Alexandre. Racine took her completely from the troop in 1666. She was given the principal role in Andromaque which was presented at l'Hôtel de Bourgogne.¹ Racine loved her with complete devotion and passion. Molière had loved her too without success, although she inspired in him a touching and fiery passion.² This loss of la Du Parc was a serious blow to Molière. For Racine, his liasion with her contributed immensely to his profound knowledge of love and of human passions. There was a capital event in their lives which sealed their relationship: the birth of a daughter around 1667.³ This illegitimate child opened up to him a world of new sentiments which inspired him to write later Iphigénie.⁴

Racine wrote Andromaque for la Du Parc and coached her in this role. She was acclaimed by many although the comedians of l'Hôtel de Bourgogne resented a newcomer playing the principal role. At the height of success, la Du Parc died in December 1668. This was a fatal blow to Racine but he was not prevented from loving again. His tenderness for Mademoiselle Champmeslé, another actress, was quite different from his love for Mademoiselle du Parc. Larroumet states that, "dans Mlle du Parc, il vit surtout la femme, dans Mlle Champmeslé, l'interprète."¹ It was Mademoiselle Champmesle who created all of his great roles after Andromaque. She was successively Bérénice, Atalide,

¹Lagarde and Michard, loc. cit.

²Larroumet, op. cit., p. 48.

³Jasinski, op. cit., p. 146.

⁴Ibid., p. 147.

Monime, Iphigénie and Phèdre. It appeared that Racine wrote to please her which was proven in regards to the admirable role of Phèdre. Larroumet quotes les Frères Parfaict as saying that,

elle l'avait prié, de lui donner un rôle ou toutes les passions fussent exprimés; M. Racine chercha temps, et il s'arrêta au sujet de Phèdre.¹

It was with Mademoiselle Champmeslé as his "interprète" that Racine fulfilled his potentials and produced his masterpieces. These works were presented within one or two year intervals. They were: Britannicus (1669), Bérénice (1670), Bajazet (1672), Mithridate (1673), Iphigénie (1674), and Phèdre (1677). The last of these tragedies is Racine's favorite and it re-opens the gates of Port-Royal to him. Phèdre failed to gain recognition because of political jealousy and intrigue. At the age of thirty-eight, Racine was completely disillusioned with the theater and retired from the stage. Lancaster states that there were mixed emotions concerning Racine's retirement and the "Cabale de Phèdre". Some controversy over the effect of the so-called "Cabale", still exists, and many critics contend that Racine would have left the stage soon regardless of the play's success or failure. As an example, Lancaster states:

Some writers have supposed that his giving up dramatic composition was due to the cabale that was formed against Phèdre, but Racine had won too much fame to warrant such a supposition. Already in Phèdre ... he had shown the struggle of a conscience ... it is probably true that his Jansenist relations and teachers at last won the struggle that must have been taking place in his soul.²

¹Ibid., p. 67.

²H. C. Lancaster, Racine: Andromaque, Britannicus, and Phèdre (New York: Scribners, 1934), p. xviii.

Racine remained, however, a favorite of Madame de Maintenon. In 1679 he and Boileau were appointed the king's historiographers. Although a mediocre historian, Racine was able to lead a life of luxury without monetary wants because of his position at court.

For ten years after Phèdre, Racine made no attempt to write drama. In 1690, at the request of Madame de Maintenon, he presented Esther at the girls' school of Saint-Cyr. This biblical drama received much acclaim from the court.¹ Madame de Maintenon asked Racine for another play and Racine responded by writing Athalie. Many critics are of the opinion that Athalie is his greatest work.² However, these two masterpieces did not influence the renascence of Racine's dramatic career. His renunciation of a career as a dramatist was as firm as ever. Racine incurred the disfavor of the king around 1697, two years before his death. The king was displeased by Racine's defense of the nuns of Port-Royal. The last years of Racine's life was saddened by this event and the wrath of the king toward Jansenism. Racine died April 22, 1699.

¹Petit de Juleville, Le Théâtre en France (Paris: Colin, 1927), p. 168.

²Felix Lemaistre, Théâtre complet de Jean Racine (Paris: Librairie Garnier Frères, 1905), p. ix.

CHAPTER III

THE ROLE OF THE CONFIDANTE

After the two plays of his novitiate, La Thébaïde and Alexandre le Grand, Racine attained full stature of genius at a single bound with a new type of tragedy. His own peculiar type of tragedy portrayed the characters as slaves to love. Jealousy and hatred were natural consequences of this type. Reluctance to share the affections of another accounted for their miserable existence. Their natures became warped, and they went to the extremes in attempting to work out their own destinies. The combination - "l'amour et passion" was degrading, in that those attacked by it developed into degenerates.

Racine portrayed the basic emotions with an exactitude that demonstrated a thorough knowledge of human nature. He knew how people responded to various situations. His characters expressed the sentiments common to the masses. The people who represented his theater belonged to royal families and to the nobility, but their actions were not restricted to their social rank. These characters appeared as living examples, more dramatic, more complete of human nature, and as an enlarged mirror of our souls.¹

This new type of tragedy was originated and perfected in Andromaque (1667), a masterpiece which stands on an essential parity with Racine's very best subsequent work. It is in this first great work and masterpiece

¹G. Le Bidois, La Vie dans la tragédie de Racine (Paris: Poussielgue, 1901), p. 156.

that one finds the new role of the confidants in the classical tragedy. Those insipid, colourless figures found in the plays of Corneille have taken on new meaning and worth.¹ They have their own personalities and do not exist solely to listen to their respective principals, but to inform them, advise them, and sympathize with them.² For example, in their conversation with the principal characters, they provide an effective means of outlet for the thoughts of the main characters. Also, it is by the talk of these minor characters that one knows the past history of the principal actors. According to one critic, the confidants are "the lieutenants and ambassadors for the spectators and readers."³ They present questions which one might like to have answered, thus permitting the main characters to explain. This device avoids the too frequent use of monologues, and permits the author to present narrated background material. In fact, from the confidants' lives and actions, one may receive a bird's-eye view of the entire action of the play.

Usually Racine begins his plays with a major character and his confidant, or a confidential conversation between two minor characters. These opening scenes outline the existing situation and state the problem which is to be the theme of the whole play. Too, these confidants often-times direct the thoughts of the main characters. In directing and encouraging the thoughts of these primary figures, they definitely and directly influence the course of action itself. Through

¹Ibid., p. 229.

²H. Taine, Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1858), p. 124.

³Le Bidois, loc. cit.

their sympathetic listening, their subtle, and even point-blank suggestions, they encourage the potential urge to action within the minds of the main characters. Through encouragement and approbation, plans of action not yet fully conceived, or unfulfilled because of convention, timidity, or morals, are given the necessary impetus to carry them to full fruition.

Finally, it is to be noted that these confidants carry the complex burden of minute details whose smooth and unnoticed working is an essential part of unity in a play. "With Racine," says one critic, "everything is followed, allied, easily intelligible ... and the subtlest activities of life are manifested to us."¹ This unity would be impossible without the use of the confidants. They knit the play together and present scenes that would be difficult or impossible to stage. They portray actions and events, which according to Le Bidois:

There are some actions which would not be good to put before the eyes, whether through the difficulty of execution in order to render them truly, or because of the horror of the objects represented.²

These confidants include both men and women. However, the feminine characters of this type are of greater importance. This is true for two reasons. First, their actual roles more directly affect the action of the play. Second, they are more interesting as a study because they are more realistically and more definitely portrayed. This last statement is true because Racine excelled in his understanding and portrayal of women characters. Taine says:

¹Ibid., p. 229.

²Ibid., p. 90.

Racine est le plus grand peintre de la délicatesse et du dévouement féminin, de l'orgueil et de la dextérité aristocratique; partout de fins mouvements de pudeur blessée, de petits traits de fierté modeste des aveux dissimulés, des insinuations, des fuites, des ménagements, des nuances de coquetterie puis des effusions et de générosités touchantes.¹

The former statement is applicable not only to his portrayal of celebrated characters such as Phaedra, Hermione and Andromaque, but it is equally characteristic of certain of his confidantes. The role of Oenone in Phèdre is an excellent illustration which will be the first, of three, to be discussed. This will be preceded by a resumé of Phèdre in which Oenone appears.

Phaedra, the wife of Theseus, is in love with Hippolitus. She believes her husband dead and confesses her love for her step-son. Desperate, after the return of Theseus, she permits her nurse to incriminate Hippolitus. Learning that Aricie is her rival, she does not try to dispel the impression of guilt in Theseus' mind. Theseus abandons Hippolitus to the fury of the gods, who cause his death. Phaedra confesses her crime to Theseus and dies from self-administered poison.

Oenone is the confidante, nurse, and bosom companion of Phaedra. She remains throughout the play an individual whose life, thoughts and actions are dominated by one passion only: the desire that Phaedra will always be happy. She never deviates from this interest; it motivates all her actions and eventually results indirectly in her death. To Le Bidois, Oenone represents a "power superior to that of

¹Larroumet, op. cit., p. 175.

the worthiest and most dignified of men, the power of evil."¹ However, a detailed study of the life, of the position, and of the devotion of Oenone for Phaedra makes possible a more sympathetic opinion of her.

Oenone appears first in Act I, scene II of Phèdre; she addresses Hippolitus:

Oenone Hélas! Seigneur, quel trouble au mien peut
 être égal?
 La Reine touche presque à son terme fatal.
 En vain à l'observer jour et nuit je m'attache:
 Elle meurt dans mes bras d'un mal qu'elle me cache.²

Thus from her first words, one is able to realize to a certain extent the depth of her love for her mistress.³ The love of Oenone for Phaedra is reciprocated at least in part, because in the scene immediately following, Phaedra greets her as "chere Oenone." These words would not have been addressed to a conventional confidante; the relationship here is far more intimate and more personal than that of mere maid and queen. Oenone reminds Phaedra that hers are the arms which received her at birth, and that she has left her country, her children, all, for her.⁴ Oenone is one of those rare persons who are capable of a love so great that all is forgotten, save the desire to serve. Knowing this and more of the past history of Oenone and the strength of her devotion to Phaedra, one may understand better her actions throughout the play.

¹Le Bidois, op. cit., p. 167.

²Jean Racine, "Phèdre," Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1950-52), All future references will be to this edition with only the title of the play in the notes.

³Ibid., l. 153.

⁴Ibid., lf. 234-235.

In scene iii, Oenone discovers by alternate questioning and pleading that Phaedra loves Hippolyte, and her reaction indicates her devotion to her mistress:

Oenone. Juste ciel! tout mon sang dans mes veins
 se glace!
 O désespoir! ô crime! ô déplorable race!
 Voyage infortuné! Rivage malheureux¹

Oenone is not so much appalled as distressed. That she is not overcome by the declaration of Phaedra is revealed when Panope comes with the news of the supposed death of King Theseus. Phaedra is speechless, but Oenone quickly dismisses the messenger. Her mind analyzes the situation now facing her mistress and her counsel is given without hesitation:

Oenone. Madame, je cessais de vous presser de vivre,
 Déjà même au tombeau je songeais à vous suivre;

 Mais ce nouveau malheur vous prescrit d'autres
 lois.
 Votre fortune change et prend une autre face:
 Le Roi n'est plus, madame; il faut prendre sa
 place.
 Vivez, vous n'avez plus de reproche à vous faire:
 Votre flamme devient une flamme ordinaire
 Hippolyte pour vous devient moins redoutable;
 Et vous pouvez le voir sans vous rendre coupable.
 Peut-être
 Il va donner un chef à la sédition.
 Dérompez son erreur, fléchissez son courage ...
 Unissez-vous tous deux pour combattre Aricie.²

The first two lines show that Oenone is not motivated by evil, which contradicts Le Bidois' suggestion of the evil person. She was ready to follow Phaedra to the tomb as long as her love was a guilty one, but now that her passion has been made legitimate by the death of

¹Ibid., ll. 265-267.

²Ibid., ll. 337-362.

Theseus, father of Hippditus, Oenone urges Phaedra to arouse herself. She uses these arguments. First she appeals to her mother love:

Oenone. ... Sa mort vous laisse un fils à qui
vous vous devez;
Esclave s'il vous perd, et Roi si vous vivez.¹

* Second, she points out that she is no longer guilty of immorality in loving Hippolitus. "Votre flamme devient une flamme ordinaire." Finally, she tells her that they have a common enemy against whom they must unite, namely, Aricie, a princess of the royal blood who claims some of the royal domain.

Phaedra unresistingly follows her counsels. Led by Oenone to an interview with Hippolitus, the purpose of which should be to discuss the political crisis created by the death of Theseus. The distraught queen makes avowal of her love, then in a moment of shame seizes the sword of Hippolitus in order to kill herself. Oenone intervenes and snatches the sword from her hands.

Oenone. Que faites vous, Madame? Justes Dieux!
Mais on vient. Évitez des témoins odieux;
... fuyez une honte certaine.²

Not only is Oenone concerned with saving Phaedra's life, but also she strives to save the Queen's honor, and avoid any scandal. In Act III one sees a listless and forlorn Phaedra, resigned to whatever may be destined for her, and Oenone trying to stir her to some action worthy of her station and rank.

Oenone. Vous nourissez un feu qu'il vous faudrait éteindre.
Ne vaudrait-il pas mieux, digne sang de Minos,
Dans de plus nobles soins chercher votre repos,
Contre un ingrat qui plait recourir à la fuite,
Régner, et de l'État embrasser la conduite?³

¹Ibid., lf. 343-344.

²Ibid., Act III, ll. 711-714.

³Ibid., ll. 744-748.

Thus Oenone urges Phaedra to extinguish her passion and become interested in something more worthy of her. Phaedra cannot. Oenone then suggests flight, in order to get away from the fatal presence of Hippolitus.

Phèdre. ... Je ne le puis quitter.
Oenone. Vous l'osâtes bannir, vous n'osez l'éviter.¹

Bitterly, Phaedra accuses Oenone of being the cause of her sorrow, and the latter justifies her actions.

Oenone. Mais si jamais l'offense irrita vos esprits,
Pouvez-vous d'un superbe oublier les mépris?
Avec quels yeux cruels sa rigueur obstinée
Vous laissait à ses pieds peu s'en faut prosternée!
Que son farouche orgueil le rendait odieux!
Que Phedre en ce moment n'avait-elle mes yeux?²

Through the words of Oenone, one feels the indignant rage which fills the heart of the woman who sees her mistress abasing herself before an unworthy object. Disdaining the cause of Phaedra's unhappiness, she emphasizes to her mistress the cruel indifference of Hippolitus, hoping that she can persuade her to try and forget him. This is the theme which Oenone is to play upon now and later; it is the one instrument which she finds effective in dealing with Phaedra.

Phaedra, still hoping that she may win the love of Hippolitus, sends Oenone to plead with him. All pride lost, she urges her to use any means of persuasion, tears, complaints, and offers of the empire. Once more she reveals her complete confidence in Oenone: "... je n'espere qu'en toi."³ Oenone returns with the news that the report of the king's death is false. In no uncertain terms she demands:

¹Ibid., lf. 763-765.

²Ibid., ll. 775-780.

³Ibid., l. 811.

Oenone. Il faut d'un vain amour étouffer la pensée,
Madame. Rappelez votre vertu passée.
Le Roi, qu'on a cru mort, va paraître à vos yeux;¹

Once more one sees Oenone urging Phaedra to forget her love for Hippolitus, because now that Theseus is not dead, she realizes that Phaedra's love has become incestuous. It is therefore offensive in Oenone's sight. Phaedra turns, as is natural, on the nearest person to vent her wrath upon. She also exhibits another human failing—placing the blame for one's mistakes upon someone else:

Phèdre. Je te l'ai prédit: ...
J'ai suivi tes conseils: Je meurs déshonorée.²

Oenone's only reply is: "Vous mourez?" She then realizes that Phaedra is going to choose death rather than face the inevitable shame which awaits her. Then and only then, does Oenone's influence become evil. She changes from a person who both reveres and fears the Gods, to an individual obsessed by the fear of losing the one about whom her whole life revolves. From this point on, fear of losing the one about whom her whole life revolves. From this point on, she casts aside all scruples, and disregarding truth, the anger of the Gods and the fate of Hippolitus; she fights viciously and tenaciously to protect Phaedra. As Phaedra prepares to expiate her sin by death, Oenone presents the picture of the proud, scornful, cruel Hippolitus.

Oenone. Hippolyte est heureux qu'aux dépens de vos jours
Vous-même en expirant appuyez ses discours.
A votre accusateur que pourrai-je répondre?
Je serai devant lui trop facile à confondre.

¹Ibid., lf. 825-827.

²Ibid., lf. 835-838.

De son triomphe affreux je le verrai jouir,
Et conter votre honte à qui voudra l'ouïr.
Ah! que plutôt du ciel la flamme me dévore!
Mais ne me trompez point, vous est-il cher encore?
De quel oeil voyez-vous ce prince audacieux?¹

These lines are spoken with the intention of goading Phaedra to the limit of her patience. Judging from the first part of her speech, one cannot believe that if Phaedra still loved Hippolitus, Oenone would have failed to carry out her plans. As Phaedra wavers, Oenone pursues her advantage. Why not forestall Hippolitus and accuse him first? To Phaedra's remonstrance that she cannot accuse an innocent person, Oenone replies:

Oenone. Mon zèle n'a besoin que de votre silence.
Tremblante comme vous, j'en sens quelque remords.
Vous me verriez plus prompte affronter mille morts.
Mais puisque je vous perds sans ce triste remède,
Votre vie est pour moi d'un prix à qui tout cède.
Je parlerai. Thésée, aigri par mes avis,
Bornera sa vengeance à l'exil de son fils.²

Oenone admits remorse but pleads that Phaedra's life is worth more to her than anything else. The thought expressed in the last two lines--that Hippolitus, at the worst would only incur exile--coupled with the look of scorn on the face of Hippolitus as he and his father approach the two women, convinces Phaedra:

Phedre. Fais ce que tu voudras, je m'abandonne à toi.³

The accusation follows shortly thereafter, and Oenone advances the sword as proof.

Thésée. Ah! qu'est-ce que j'entends? Un traître, un
téméraire
Préparait cet outrage à l'honneur de son père?
Avec quelle rigueur, destin, tu me poursuis!

¹Ibid., ll. 875-883.

²Ibid., ll. 894-900.

³Ibid., l. 911.

Je ne sais ou je vais, je ne sais ou je suis.
O tendresse! ô bonté trop mal récompensée!
Project audacieux! détestable pensée!
Pour parvenir au but de ses noires amours,
L'insolent de la force empruntait le secours.
J'ai reconnu le fer, instrument de sa rage,
Ce fer dont je l'armai pour un plus noble usage.
Tous le liens du sang n'ont pu le retenir?
Et Phèdre différerait à le faire punir?
Le silence de Phèdre épargnait le coupable?

Oenone. Phèdre épargnait plutôt un père déplorable.
Honteuse du dessein d'un amant furieux
Et du feu criminel qu'il a pris dans ses yeux,
Phèdre mourait, Seigneur, et sa main meurtrière
Éteignait de ses yeux, l'innocente lumière.
J'ai vu lever le bras, j'ai couru la sauver.
Moi seule a votre amour j'ai su la conserver;
Et plaignant à la fois son trouble et vos alarmes,
J'ai servi, malgré moi, d'interprète à ses larmes.

Thésée. Le perfide! Il n'a pu s'empêcher de pâler.
De crainte, en m'abordant, je l'ai vu tressaillir.
Je me suis étonné de son peu d'allégresse;
Ses froids embrassements ont glacé ma tendresse.
Mais ce coupable amour dont il est dévoré
Dans Athenes déjà s'était-il déclaré?

Oenone. Seigneur, souvenez-vous des plaintes de la Reine.
Un amour criminel causa toute sa haine.¹

Theseus, convinced of his son's guilt, calls upon the Gods to avenge his honor. The scenes intervening before Oenone's final appearance, contain a meeting of Theseus and Hippolitus; wherein Hippolitus confesses his love for Aricia. Phaedra learns this from Theseus and hears his prayer to the Gods. Stunned by this, she returns to her apartment to find Oenone. The confidante tries to console her, first by telling her that Hippolitus and Aricia will not be able to see each other. Phaedra is consumed with jealousy; yet even in the midst of her frenzied raving, she stops to condemn once more herself and her forbidden love.

¹Ibid., Act IV, Sc. i, ll. 1001-1030.

Oenone seeks to comfort her, begs her, a mortal, to submit to a mortal's fate. No one can fight against destiny -

Oenone. Hé! repoussez, Madame, une injuste terreur.
Regardez d'un autre oeil une excusable erreur.
Vous aimez. On ne peut vaincre sa destinée.
Par un charme fatal vous fûtes entraînée.
Est-ce donc un prodige inoui parmi nous?
L'amour n'a-t-il encore triomphé que de vous?
La faiblesse aux humains n'est que trop naturelle.
Mortelle, subissez le sort d'une mortelle.
Vous vous plaignez d'un joug imposé des longtemps.
Les Dieux même, les Dieux, de l'Olympe habitants,
Qui d'un bruit si terrible épouvantent les crimes,
Ont brûlé quelquefois de feux illégitimes.¹

Phaedra refuses to listen, bitterly blames Oenone for all the misfortune which has arrived, and dismisses her with these peremptory words:

Phèdre. Va-t'en monstre exécration.²

✕ Hurt beyond endurance by the sharpness of Phaedra's words, though they are to some extent justifiable, Oenone once more calls upon the Gods. A world of pathos is revealed in her admission that she has well deserved her treatment.

Oenone. Ah! Dieux! pour la servir j'ai tout fait, tout quitté; Et j'en reçois ce prix? Je l'ai bien mérité.³

After the horrible death of Hippolitus, Phaedra goes to the grief-stricken Theseus and confesses everything. It is this confession which tells us of the death of Oenone.

Phèdre. Le ciel mit dans mon sein une flamme funeste;
La détestable Oenone a conduit tout le reste.
Elle craint qu'Hippolyte, instruit de ma fureur,

¹ Ibid., ll. 1297-1306.

² Ibid., l. 1317.

³ Ibid., lf. 1327-1328.

Ne découvrit un feu qui lui faisait horreur.
La perfide, abusant de ma faiblesse extreme,
S'est hâtée à vos yeux de l'accuser lui-même.
Elle s'en est punie, et, fuyant mon courroux,
A cherché dans les flots un supplice trop doux.¹

Oenone's part in the play is multiple. At times she seems merely an audience to Phaedra's monologues. However, her role is much greater than this. As a complement to Phaedra, she is the embodiment of many hidden thoughts which Phedre does not express.² Thus she has the complementary task of revealing the true Phaedra through monologue and the symbolical function of revealing the subconscious Phaedra.

Oenone's most important role, is that of advancing the action. It is she who directs the love affair of Phaedra, the mainspring of the entire drama. She was not without moral sense, though her accusation of Hippolitus may seem to the contrary. In all probability, it was prompted by her mistress' outburst of hate and by her own worry and frenzied perplexities. It probably should be interpreted as a tribute of devotion, rather than as a deliberate act of evil.³ In any case, Oenone stands forth as a militant and vivid personality. As such, she qualifies as an example of the minor character playing a major role.

The role of Cleone in Andromaque will serve as the second example of the important confidante in a tragedy of Racine. Although she is not as domineering and militant a personality as Oenone, her role is important. Before Cleone is discussed, the writer will offer a brief resume of the play in which she appears.

¹ Ibid., Act V, ll. 1625-1632.

² A. Tilley, Three French Dramatists (London: The University Press, 1933), p. 54.

³ Ibid., p. 57.

Andromaque represents maternal love and jealous love. Pyrrhus loves Andromache, his Trojan captive and wishes to marry her, but memories of their dead husband and circumstances surrounding his death prevent her from accepting Pyrrhus. Hermione affianced to Pyrrhus, but loved by Orestes, becomes very jealous and influences the Greeks to demand the life of Astyanax, son of Andromache. Pyrrhus's refusal to deliver the child increases Hermione's anger. Andromache consents to marry Pyrrhus because he threatens to surrender Astyanax. Hermione commits suicide near the body of Pyrrhus; Orestes becomes insane.

Cleone is the female attendant and friend of Hermione. She appears with Hermione in the opening scene of the second act. The occasion is one in which Cleone has persuaded her mistress to see Orestes and listen to what he has to say.

Cleone. Hé bien, madame, hé bien, écoutez donc
Oreste.
Pyrrhus a commencé, faites au moins
le reste
Pour bien faire il faudrait que vous le
prévinssiez..
Ne m'avez-vous pas dit que vous le haïssiez?¹

In reply to Hermione's harsh retorts to her questions, Cleone suggests that it would be better to flee from Pyrrhus. Cleone foresees what the destructible vengeance and hate of Hermione will lead to.

Cleone. Fuyez-le donc, madame; et puisqu'on vous adore ...²
Cleone goes even further in her persuasion. She tries to play upon the indifference of Pyrrhus who does not mind injuring Hermione's love

¹Andromaque, Act II, sc. i, ll. 409-412.

²Ibid., l. 417.

We see Cleone again in the fourth act, but she is not as calm as before.

Cleone expresses all of her pent up feelings concerning Hermione's tranquil reaction to the changing of Pyrrhus' plans to marry her.

Cleone. Non, je ne puis assez admirer ce silence.
Vous vous taisez, madame; et ce cruel mépris
N'a pas du moindre trouble agité vos esprits?
Vous soutenez en paix une si rude attaque,
Vous qu'on voyait frémir au seul nom d'Andromaque?
Vous qui sans désespoir ne pouviez endurer
Que Pyrrhus d'un regard la voulût honorer?

Il l'épouse; il lui donne, avec son diadème,
La foi que vous venez de recevoir vous-même,
Et votre bouche encor, muette à tant d'ennui,
N'a pas daigné s'ouvrir pour se plaindre de lui?
Ah! que je crains, madame, un calme si funeste!
Et qu'il vaudrait bien mieux ...¹

Perhaps it is because of Cleone's angry words that Hermione becomes a quivering compound of intense emotions, impulses, unreason, and vicious spite.

At any rate, Hermione's conversation with Orestes concerning the death of Pyrrhus is one of the factors which causes Cleone to realize that Hermione's vengeance will result in her ruin. Their conversation begins with Cleone:

Cleone. Vous vous perdez, madame; et vous devez songer ...

Hermione. Que je perds ou non, je songe à me venger.
Je ne sais même encor, quoi qu'il m'ait pu
promettre,
Sur d'autres que sur moi si je dois m'en remettre:
Pyrrhus n'est pas coupable à ses yeux comme aux
miens,
Et je tiendrais mes coups bien plus sûrs que les
siens
Quel plaisir de venger moi-même mon injure,
De retirer mon bras teint du sang du parjure,
Et, pour rendre sa peine et mes plaisirs plus grands,

¹Ibid., Act IV, sc. vi, ll. 1130-1142.

De cacher ma rivale à ses regards mourants!
Ah! si du moins Oreste, en punissant son crime,
Lui laissait le regret de mourir ma victime!¹

After this frenzied scene, Cleone obeys gladly Hermione's wishes to detain Orestes from his task. During this period that Cleone is away, she attends the wedding ceremony of Pyrrhus and Andromache.

In Cleone's last appearance in the play, one sees her deliberately infuriating her mistress to the utmost by describing the wedding. This account of the happiness and of the love of Pyrrhus for Andromaque is the fatal blow to Hermione and to her hopes of ever gaining the love of Pyrrhus.

Cleone. Il est au comble de ses vœux,
Le plus fier des mortels et le plus amoureux.
Je l'ai vu vers le temple, où son hymen s'apprête,
Mener en conquérant sa nouvelle conquête;
Et, d'un œil où brillaient sa joie et son espoir,
S'enivrer en marchant du plaisir de la voir.
Andromaque, au travers de mille cris de joie,
Porte jusqu'aux autels le souvenir de Troie;
Incapable toujours d'aimer et de hair,
Sans joie et sans murmure elle semble obéir.²

Cleone continues:

Cleone. Madame, il ne voit rien: son salut et sa gloire
Semblent être avec vous sortis de sa mémoire.
Sans songer qui le suit ennemis ou sujets,
Il poursuit seulement ses amoureux projets.
Autour du fils d'Hector il a rangé sa garde.
Et croit que c'est lui seul que le péril regarde.
Phoenix même en répond, qui l'a conduit exprès
Dans un fort éloigné du temple et du palais.
Voilà dans ses transports le seul soin qui lui reste.³

Cleone has hitherto tried to restrain Hermione from rash acts, false accusations and violent passions. She realized that her attempts

¹Ibid., ll. 1255-1266.

²Ibid., Act V, sc. ii, ll. 1432-1440.

³Ibid., ll. 1449-1457.

were in vain and this is evident in the last act, when she gives her account of the wedding. Perhaps through disillusionment, Cleone feels that this wedding is the best for all concerned since her attempts to save her mistress were not effective. Although Cleone was not successful, she was an integral part of this play and a true individual which makes the role of the confidante unique.

The role that Albine plays in Britannicus is another illustration of the new personality of the confidante. A brief resume of Britannicus will be presented first.

Agrippina is disappointed when she finds that her son, Nero, does not intend to permit her to share in the rule of the Roman Empire. She threatens to have Britannicus, legitimate heir to the throne, named emperor. Fearing loss of power and jealous of Britannicus whom Junia loves, Nero has Britannicus poisoned. After this murder, Junia enters the temple of the Vestals and Agrippina foresees her doom.

The confidential friend of Agrippina, Albina, does not refrain from criticizing her mistress openly in her efforts to restrain her ambitions and anger. Throughout the play, there are scenes in which Albina proves that in her own unique way she is the friend of Agrippina. Albina's role is also to try to bring about logical reasoning in her mistress, in order to check her ambitions.

The first act provides information about Albina's attitude toward the desire of her mistress to observe every move of Nero.

Albine. Quoi! tandis que Néron s'abandonne au sommeil,
Faut-il que vous veniez attendre son réveil?
Qu'errant dans le palais sans suite et sans escorte,
La mère de César veille seule à sa porte?
Madame, retournez dans votre appartement.¹

¹Britannicus, Act I, sc. i, ll. 1-5.

But Albina half-way attempts to soothe her mistress' pride and vanity, when she enumerates to Agrippina all the efforts she has exerted so that Nero's success might be assured:

Albine. Quoi! vous à qui Néron doit jour qu'il respire?
 Qui l'avez appelé de si loin à l'empire?
 vous qui, déshéritant le fils de Claudius,
 Avez nommé César l'heureux Domitius?
 Tout lui parle, madame, en faveur d'Agrippine:
 Il vous doit son amour.¹

Albina is not sympathetic to Agrippina's claims of concern for Nero exclusively; she suggests that self-interest has caused her to be so cruel and unjust to Nero, whom she, Agrippina, considers ungrateful.

Albine. S'il est ingrat, Madame? Ah! toute sa conduite
 Marque dans son devoir une âme trop instruite.
 Depuis trois ans entiers, qu'a-t-il dit, qu'a-t-il
 fait
 Qui ne promettre à Rome un empereur parfait?
 Rome, depuis deux ans par ses soins gouvernée,
 Au temps de ses consuls croit être retournée:
 Il la gouverne en père. Enfin Néron naissant
 A toutes les vertus d'Auguste vieillissant.²

One notes that Albina continues to disapprove of the distress of her mistress over Nero's attitude toward her. She even voices her opinion on the matter quite freely.

Albine. Une injuste frayeur vous alarme peut-être,
 Mais si Néron pour vous n'est plus ce qu'il
 doit être,
 Du moins son changement ne vient pas jusqu'à nous,
 Et ce sont des secrets entre César et vous.
 Quelques titres nouveaux que Rome lui défère,
 Néron n'en reçoit point qu'il ne donne à sa mère;

 Quels effets voulez-vous de sa reconnaissance?³

¹Ibid., ll. 15-20.

²Ibid., ll. 23-30.

³Ibid., ll. 75-87.

Although Albina is free to voice her opinions and ask questions, she is not forceful enough to transform Agrippina's plans or to assuage her vexations as regards her wane in power. This is revealed in her conversation with Agrippina.

Agrippine. Un peu moins de respecte, et plus de confiance.
Tous ces présents, Albine, irritent mon dépit;
Je vois mes honneurs croître et tomber mon crédit.
Non, non, le temps n'est plus que Néron, jeune encore,
Me renvoyait les voeux d'une cour qui l'adore,
Lorsqu'il se reposait sur moi de tout l'État,
Que mon ordre au palais assemblait le sénat,
Et que derrière un voile invisible et présente.
J'étais de ce grand corps ...¹

Albina replies thusly:

Albine. Ah! si de ce soupçon votre âme est prévenue,
Pourquoi nourrissez-vous le venin qui vous tue?
Daignez avec César vous éclaircir du moins.²

Albina has been present at all of her mistress' conversations with Burrus, Britannicus and Narcissus. She has not participated actively, but she has listened. After her mistress' conversation with Burrus, Albina cannot refrain from calling upon the gods.

Albine. Madame, au nom des dieux, cachez votre colere.
Quoi! pour les intérêts de la soeur ou du frère,
Faut-il sacrifier le repos de vos jours?
Contrairez-vous César jusque dans ses amours?³

Albina continues to advise her mistress to conceal her anger and not interfere in Nero's love interests. This appears as Albina's last attempt to reason with her mistress.

Albina's role in Britannicus did not have an effect on the action of the play or even on the ambitious personality of her mistress.

¹Ibid., ll. 88-96.

²Ibid., ll. 115-117.

³Ibid., Act III, sc. iv, ll. 875-879.

Nevertheless, she is important because never before has a confidante been able or rather, permitted to express openly their opinions. Albina goes even further because she criticizes the actions of Agrippina throughout the play. She never agrees, or has the feeling that she must, with Agrippina's views concerning her son, Nero. Although she has her mistress' interests at heart, she does not, as Oenone in Phèdre, become an accomplice to her.

Although the writer has limited this study of the role of the confidantes to three illustrations, there are others who are equally important. Some of these are: Doris in Iphigénie, Cephissa in Andromaque, Phaedime in Mithridate and Zaïre in Bajazet. Racine developed these confidantes in a manner which is similar to the development of those which the writer has already treated. There is a consistent tendency in Racine to consider and treat the confidante as an integral part of the development of the plot of the play, and as individual personalities in their own right.

CONCLUSION

Racine lived and wrote in an age when classical tragedy was required to conform to the same manners and speech which were followed in the salons. The selection of themes and the use of plot was important in order that etiquette not be violated and the sacredness of rules be threatened. He was also faced with the need of concentrating as much attention as possible upon the two or three primary characters about whom the play revolved. For this reason, perhaps, one often neglects the minor or secondary figures. Yet as this study has shown, these minor figures live on a plane all their own and have an importance that cannot be denied.

As pointed out in Chapter III through the examples of Oenone in Phèdre, Cléone in Andromaque, and Albine in Britannicus; one can readily conclude that this group of characters were indispensable to the mechanics of the play. These confidantes are oftentimes the directing force of the whole action or lay out the course for the main characters. They are not so finely drawn or developed as the main characters because these characteristics are reserved for the principal actors.

It is by such examples that the writer has mentioned above and other confidantes such as Cephise in Andromaque, Zaire in Bajazet, and Doris in Iphigénie, that one must judge the importance of the confidantes in the racinian tragedy. The writer does not pretend

to have solved the question of the role of the confidante; but she is happy to say that there are some services rendered to the action of the play by these modest characters, who have great potentialities but who, due to the decision of the author, are prevented from developing completely. It is hopeful that the evidence presented above is sufficiently conclusive to prove that the confidentes of Racine are a tribute to his genius, and to his originality.

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