



QUEENSHIP AND POWER



RULING WOMEN,
VOLUME 2

*Configuring the Female Prince in
Seventeenth-Century French Drama*

Derval Conroy



QUEENSHIP AND POWER

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For my parents, Séamus and Veronica Conroy



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INTRODUCTION

While the principal theoretical concerns underpinning this study are outlined in the Introduction to Volume 1, it is useful nonetheless at this juncture to highlight a number of issues specific to theatre.

As is clear from Volume 1, one of the central issues in this study is a broad understanding of what constitutes a political text. In addition to examining seventeenth-century “feminist” literature and galleries of women as political, this study is also wedded to an appreciation of drama as political, both in terms of tragedy as a political genre and, more fundamentally, theatre as a political institution. The debates concerning the political nature of drama are well rehearsed with regard to a multiplicity of historical eras and contexts, and that concerning seventeenth-century French tragedy is no exception. A recent and heated polemic has focused on the genesis of tragedy, examining the extent to which politics can be seen to serve the ends of poetics, or poetics the ends of politics.¹ Despite diverging viewpoints, mainly concerning authorial intentionality, the inscription of political ideologies in tragedy is undisputed. As is the case of the tragedies under examination here, the appellation political is merited to the very obvious extent that these plays, through their representation of political figures, treat of traditional political themes, of virtue, power, and authority, of sovereign–subject relations, of government and tyranny.² This treatment does not necessarily mean that the plays express specific political ideas, although they may, but that they stage “a thinking about the political,” and hence merit the term “a theater of the political.”³ As regards the political nature of theatre as an institution, my approach is informed by an understanding

of plays as what Jean Howard calls “sites of social struggle” implicated in the maintenance of, and challenge to, societal power relations.⁴ Specifically, my interest lies in the power relations of sexual politics, and hence in the creation, propagation, and subversion of certain paradigms of knowledge concerning hierarchies of gender. Despite the considerable differences between the institution of theatre in France and England at the time, the questions Howard has repeatedly asked as regards English Renaissance drama provide a particularly useful entry-point to our corpus, namely to what extent do the plays under examination challenge the subordinate role of women, or on the contrary recuperate and depoliticize the threat of women in power? To what extent can theatre therefore be perceived as an agent of cultural change or an agent of patriarchal conservatism? Above all, in whose interest is it to challenge or support particular discourses concerning gender? A key consideration throughout the study is the analysis of these representations *as* representations, as one formulation puts it, “interested constructions, not mirrors of truth.”⁵ As we will see, dramas of the period strive both to contain and to challenge, to uphold traditional paradigms, and to suggest new realms of the thinkable, in a constant jostling for power, which, in its creation of contradictions and incoherences, often within the same play, makes the idea of a “site of struggle” particularly apt. As Christian Biet and Christophe Triau put it, it is in the very nature of theatre not only to potentially uphold ideologically dominant codes of values, but to simultaneously—by the same mechanisms of aesthetics, poetics, and spectacle—introduce a criticism of those same values.⁶

The representation in drama of female rulership, more so than that in any other genre, hinges on a *mise-en-scène* of an understanding of the queen’s two bodies, as dramatists are obliged to confront the conflict between the queen as woman and the queen as prince, in sum between the individual and the office. It is the varying responses to that conflict that give rise

to a range of constructions of queenship. Chapter 1 draws on seventeen plays to analyze the configuration of female rule as unstable and tyrannical, examining the mechanisms deployed within theatre to contain the threat of female authority, and the role of dramaturgical convention, particularly of *vraisemblance*, in that containment. Underpinning this latter analysis, is an attempt, in the words of one feminist theatre critic, to disrupt “the ideological codes embedded in the structures of dramatic representation.”⁷ Attention will be paid to the conflict between the strategies of containment and the shades of a counter-model that are not easily suppressed. Chapter 2 examines the challenges mounted in drama (in seven plays) to the prevalent code of sexual ethics that defines appropriate virtue for men and women, and the manipulation of androgyny in sartorial, political, and linguistic codes (the cross-dressed warrior queen who appropriates the signifiers of male identity with alarming ease; the discourse of political legitimacy that focuses both on virtue and on rank; the use of the ultimate male lexical signifier *roy* to designate the female prince). Finally, chapter 3 examines a third group of plays (another seven), which challenge the exclusion of women from the throne in a very different way, and a more subtly radical way, to the plays concerning androgynous warrior queens, quite simply by dramatizing sovereigns in action who just happen to be women. Here, an alternative knowledge concerning gender is created by the representation of the female prince as a morally upright and politically astute agent, as a ruler imbued with the virtues associated with sovereignty and good government, as a skillful player in the mindgames and gambling of court politics.

Translation of French passages has been provided except in cases where the meaning of the French text is clearly evident to non-Francophones. These translations are all my own. The term *gloire*, however, has been left in French since it incorporates at the time connotations of honor, esteem, and reputation, which go beyond the English word “glory.” Some of the ideas

concerning Elizabeth I, Pulcheria, and Nitocris have appeared in “Reines, invraisemblables rois? Reines vierges et épouses célibataires dans le théâtre du XVII^e siècle: le cas d’Élisabeth, Nitocris et Pulchérie,” while some sections concerning Racine have appeared in “Gender, Power and Authority in *Alexandre le Grand* and *Athalie*.”⁸



CHAPTER I

THE POWER AND THE FURY, OR THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION IN DRAMA

In a sketched typology of characters who appear in “classical tragedy,” as he refers to it, Jacques Truchet identifies that of the “inflexible and cruel old queen,” to whom, he maintains, writers of tragedy were particularly attracted.¹ Leaving aside the problematic notion of character “type,” Truchet’s observation provides a fruitful point of access into the dramatic representation of the female sovereign of the period. Examination of a wide corpus reveals Truchet’s aging intransigent queen to be one manifestation of a larger assembly of ruling women,² and points therefore to a broader phenomenon: namely the frequency with which dramatists in seeking to create the world of disorder so central to tragedy and tragicomedy,³ chose to exploit (and, I would argue, hence propagate) the well-worn association of women, power and disorder—a constant in Western thought and one firmly embedded in the legal and political discourses of the Early Modern period.

While the following analysis focuses on the representation and construction of gender, it is useful to identify in advance certain issues that, while they have gender implications, must be viewed initially within a framework of dramaturgical structures and audience appeal. Firstly, any dramatization of sovereign power and its mechanisms is likely to raise the question of the relationship between sovereign and subjects, possibly the most rehearsed political debate in Early Modern societies.

Just as in plays concerning male sovereigns, therefore, we may expect to encounter in these plays questions of tyranny and arbitrary power. In addition, the choice of a tyrant as principal protagonist is a popular one since it draws on a quintessentially theatrical figure of age-old tradition and well-known audience appeal.⁴ Hence, the representation of a number of queens as tyrannical figures, that is, tyrants who happen to be women, is, of itself, unsurprising. Similarly, the centrality of vengeance as a tragic mechanism⁵ could explain its ubiquity in these plays and cannot be seen simply in terms of gender. In other words, representations of vengeful, explosive, tyrannical queens could, in theory, be aligned with representations of vengeful, explosive, tyrannical kings. A dramatist whose main protagonist is a capricious and volatile female ruler cannot be said to be expressly framing disorder as exclusively a female phenomenon: there is a strong possibility that he has written a play that he knows will appeal to his audiences and, in so doing, has created a part for one of the gifted actresses who dominated the Parisian theatre scene at the time, and for whom playwrights often wrote specific parts. It could be argued that there is nothing inherently gendered in the decision to represent a woman as passionate and ambitious: male characters as well as female can be portrayed as subject to the buffetings of passionate ambition and vengeance. The drama of the period is full of countless examples of ambitious, weak, power-hungry, misguided men.⁶ Furthermore, the demise of these heroines at the close of the play (by murder or, usually, suicide) could be partly explained in terms of the didactic requirements of the genre: order must be reestablished for tragedy to fulfil its moral purpose.⁷ Troublesome women must be removed, not because they are women but because, like any other troublesome element of society, they threaten the harmony of that society. Once again, it could be argued that there is nothing inherently gendered in their treatment.

All of this is true. In sum, representations of disorderly queens can be viewed within a broader framework of theatrical

tradition, the poetics and aesthetics of tragedy, and audience expectations. It would be erroneous and anachronistic to argue, therefore, that these representations of chaotic gynæcocracy are, of and by themselves, motivated by some vague misogynistic desire to portray women as unsuitable monarchs and hence to uphold the patriarchal values of the time. The point is, however, that, wittingly or unwittingly, they *do* uphold those values. Whether by the design of their creators or not, these plays provide a medium for the propagation of gender myths and hence of societal power dynamics. The issue of authorial intentionality, a nebulous and unhelpful concept at best, is, for our purposes, decidedly secondary to the key concern, namely the fashion in which these plays create meaning concerning gynæcocracy. Furthermore, examination of the ways in which their power is represented in gendered, essentialist terms will challenge the idea that their representation is solely explicable by certain aesthetic and dramaturgical conventions and traditions.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the mechanisms operational in a number of plays that function so as to undermine, and ultimately erase, the threat of female authority.⁸ Attention will also be paid to the fashion in which dramaturgical conventions—particularly the convention of verisimilitude (*vraisemblance*), and the related issue of the adaptation of historical sources—feed into these mechanisms. Although reference will be made to other plays as appropriate, focus is primarily on tragedies where the female protagonist is in a position of monarchical authority and that throw light on the dynamic of gender and government.⁹ There are considerable differences in historical context between these plays—the first of which (1636) is published some years into Marie de Médicis’ “exile,” the last of which (1691) appears thirty years after the end of Anne of Austria’s regency¹⁰—and these differences will be brought to bear in my analysis where relevant. However, as will become apparent, the constancy of the association of gynæcocracy and

disorder throughout the century straddles the contextual differences of the moment of publication of the plays.

Before examining how the construction of female authority carries within it the seeds of its own elimination, it is necessary to firstly examine the representation of that authority as despotic and unstable. It is to this that I will turn in the first half of the chapter.

Explicit Denunciations of Female Governance

Defenses of “Salic Law” and condemnations of female governance tend to be more implicit than explicit in the drama of the period. However, the issue is occasionally raised overtly. Two plays where reference to “Salic Law” is explicit were published in 1642 concerning Joan of Arc, one of the most common examples of a woman leader to feature in the writings of the seventeenth century.¹¹ The first to appear was a prose play by the Abbé d’Aubignac, the second a versification of this text by either La Mesnardière or Benserade.¹²

Throughout the d’Aubignac play, as Zarucchi has indicated, it would seem that the dramatist is ill at ease with the reversal of gender roles implicit in the story of Joan of Arc.¹³ The nature of power is implicitly perceived as patriarchal in his version, while the Benserade/La Mesnardière versification exposes the existence of alternative discursive elements that applaud the actions of a woman in power (see, e.g., the arguments raised in I.i). The construction of power as male becomes explicit rather than implicit, however, when the issue of female sovereignty is directly raised in the first so-called trial scene (III.ii in both versions); interestingly both plays concur at this point. In both cases it is Jeanne who openly upholds “Salic Law”; the exclusionist argument is therefore strengthened as the heroine (particularly one of such tremendous cultural significance as Joan of Arc) is made to voice an

opinion that supports the paradigm of male hegemony.¹⁴ In d'Aubignac's text, the heroine maintains that the first laws of a state (i.e., the fundamental laws) are decreed by God and are hence inviolable: "to contravene them is an impiety, it is to attack God." While the reference to "Salic Law" is implicit, Jeanne goes on to refer to it specifically and to elucidate its importance:

dans l'establisement de nostre Monarchie, Dieu qui pourveut les François d'un cœur absolument incapable de souffrir la domination des femmes, leur inspira cette fameuse loy Salique, qui n'admet que les hommes à la succession de la Couronne: loy toute sainte dans son principe, venerable à tous les autres Princes alliez, & pour jamais inviolable.

in the establishment of our monarchy, God who has granted the French a heart entirely incapable of tolerating rule by women, suggested to them the well-known Salic Law, which allows only men to succeed to the crown; it is a sacred law in its essence, respected by all other Princes, and entirely inviolable.

(d'Aubignac, *La Pucelle d'Orléans*, III.ii)

The argument that there is something peculiar to the French psyche that refuses government by women, a variation of Du Tillet's argument concerning the *magnanimité* of the French is here seen as divinely inspired.¹⁵ This French "strength" is immediately juxtaposed with English weakness: it is a sign of the weakness of the English that gynæcocracy is permitted at all in their country, an argument that again is directly borrowed from the political literature of the period. Only the English, apparently, can tolerate being enslaved to a woman, bearing the burden of a shameless rule, where passion replaces merit and capriciousness the rules of government ("[c'est à vous de] porter le joug d'une insolente domination, où d'ordinaire la passion fait toute la suffisance, et le caprice toutes les regles du gouvernement"; d'Aubignac, *La Pucelle d'Orléans*, III.ii). What emerges is the familiar positing of government by women within the

realm of pride, passion, and caprice, in a fashion entirely consistent with the exclusionist, essentialist argumentation common in the legal and political texts of the period (see vol.1, ch.1).

Little is altered in this regard in the Benserade/La Mesnardière text, which reflects the same influence of that politico-legal discourse. Again, Jeanne maintains that it is a credit to the French, and divinely ordained, that women cannot succeed to the throne. “Salic Law” is referred to not only as *saincte* (as in d’Aubignac) but also (and not without a certain irony for the present reader) as “la Reyne des lois.” Female government is once more associated with passion and caprice, and the weakness of the English again evoked, in this case even more pejoratively, as Jeanne castigates the English nobles whom she addresses (the duke of Somerset, Count of Warwick, et al.) as being themselves “women”: “Femmes, vous faictes bien d’obeyr à des femmes” (“Women, you do well to obey women”). To accept government by women to accept an effeminization, and thus a weakening, of the nobility and by extension of the state.¹⁶ Finally, to further consolidate the condemnation of female government, both texts contain an allegedly prophetic (and pejorative) reference to Elizabeth I, predicting the horrors the English will experience under a woman’s rule.

Unsurprisingly, references to female authority also feature in plays concerning Elizabeth herself, the figure who haunts both defenses and condemnations of “Salic Law.”¹⁷ In Boursault’s *Marie Stuard*, it is given to Norfolk to rail against female authority:

Je suis las d’obéir aux ordres d’une femme.
Depuis qu’Elisabeth regne sur les Anglois,
L’injustice triomphe, & fait taire les Loix.

I am weary of obeying the laws of a woman
Ever since Elizabeth has reigned over the English
Injustice has triumphed and laws have been silenced.

(Boursault, *Marie Stuard*, I.ii)

Defining Elisabeth primarily as “a woman” contributes to the impression that the queen is representative of all women and that (mis)rule by women is synonymous with the stifling of justice and law. A more broad-sweeping statement regarding the ills of gynæocracy comes later in the same play from another of Elisabeth’s enemies, Marie Stuard’s illegitimate brother Morray. England’s acceptance of gynæocracy is the exception that proves the rule:

L’Angleterre exceptée, en tous les autres lieux,
Le regne d’une femme est un regne odieux:
La plus ferme couronne un moment sur sa tête,
Dans l’Etat le plus calme excite une tempête.
Un sceptre ne sied bien que dans la main des Rois:
Et le trône chancelle à moins qu’il n’ait son poids.

With the exception of England, everywhere else
The reign of a woman is a vile reign;
As soon as the most stable crown is on her head,
A storm blows up in the most calm of states.
A scepter is only fitting in the hand of a king,
And a throne sways if there is not his weight.

(Boursault, *Marie Stuard*, I.iii)

Of course, on one level, much of this discourse is underpinned by a latent patriotism that revels in the opportunity to imply the superiority of France over its powerful neighbor. Notwithstanding such patriotism, the type of argument used draws on the accumulation of essentialisms typical of the *defamation litany*¹⁸ used to constitute the social and cultural construction labelled generic *woman*. Here, the opposition is not between *roi* and *reine* but between *roi* and *femme*. The word “roi” (a shifting signifier, as we will see in chapter 2, which can be used to accommodate the notion of the female prince, and which tacitly points to the fluidity of sovereignty) here designates specifically a male king. A “roi” cannot be female: sovereignty is a male prerogative. The only argument used to

support it, however, is the perennial idea that women's rule is stormy and unstable.

Civil unrest and military vulnerability frequently merge in the representation of this instability and the construction of the inherent insufficiency of female government.¹⁹ It is because these queens are *women* in authority that popular rebellion, foreign attacks, and widespread vulnerability are the norm. Two examples come to mind. Corneille's demonic Cléopâtre (*Rodogune*) is in the position she is in because of the insufficiencies of female governance. Believing her first husband Nicanor dead, as do her subjects, Cléopâtre marries his brother Antiochus in order to calm her people who object to a woman ruler.²⁰ It is the very condition of female government, therefore, which is the central mechanism of the tragedy, since it is this marriage to his brother that leads her angry first husband into a betrothal with Rodogune, which now leads to Cléopâtre's hatred and obsessive fear of losing her power. Similarly, the queen's decision to make one of her son's king is in part motivated by an awareness of her (military) weakness (ll. 496–497), and hence is implicitly gendered. Cléopâtre's exercise of power then is inextricable from her experience of, and position in, the patriarchal paradigm in which she is forced to operate, and is hence fundamentally gendered. In *Astrate*, Élise herself sees the unrest at the beginning of her reign as linked to her sex. The assassination of the royal family was a preemptive strike against the legitimate king's supporters, who, seeing the throne fallen to female hands, began once more to conspire.²¹ What this implies is that unrest is rife *because* she is a woman; male rulership, by implication, would not have provoked such strife. Gynæcocracy leads to disorder and bloodshed.

Disorder and Gynæcocracy: The Personal Politics of Tyranny

The condemnation of gynæcocracy primarily manifests itself, however, not so much through explicit criticisms of female rule

but rather (more insidiously) through a pervasive negative portrayal of regimes founded on a cynical and nonchalant abuse of power. In sum, in this unfavorable discourse at least, gynæocratic regimes are largely represented as tyrannical. In *Athalie*, *Rodogune*, *Rhodogune*, *Laodice*, *Théodat*, *Pirame*, *Astrate*, and the Marie Stuard plays, the queen is represented as a usurper, and hence, potentially, as a tyrant. Traditionally, in Western political theory, tyrants are categorized as tyrants by usurpation and tyrants by exercise.²² However, the issue is complicated by the fact that a usurped regime may gain legitimacy if it is successful.²³ Typically, tyrants abuse their power, perceive themselves as being above the law, are guided by their personal desires and emotions, and firmly believe they can dispose of their subjects as they see fit. Their government is arbitrary and founded on the principle of fear.²⁴ They themselves are consistently lacking in self-control (a key virtue extolled in the humanist model of the ideal prince, as we saw) and often brutal in their methods. In the theatre of the Early Modern period, the distinction between usurpation and exercise tends to be equivocal; focus is usually on the tyranny by exercise, which may or may not have stemmed from usurpation.²⁵ This is borne out in the plays mentioned above, where the queens (although rarely referred to as tyrants) are all represented as exercising, or having exercised, their power in a tyrannical fashion.²⁶

The disorder in government of these women cannot be separated from the disorder in the private sphere, into which it necessarily spills, and of which it is both a manifestation and a cause. Necessarily, because public and private tyranny are inextricable. As Truchet indicates, the tyrant is a tyrant because they themselves are tyrannized by their passions.²⁷ Here, an understanding of tyranny in terms of the concept of the king's two bodies is useful. As Jean-Marie Apostolidès indicates, only in suppressing the passions of the human body can the sovereign fully fulfil the role of his symbolic body. He must become "maître de lui comme de l'univers" ("master of himself as of the

universe”), to paraphrase Corneille’s Auguste, undergoing a “symbolic castration.” To fail to do this is to instigate a tyrannical regime; to lay claim simultaneously to both personal pleasures and royal honors is to behave as a tyrant.²⁸ While theories of the king’s two bodies are often problematic when applied to female sovereigns, the same basic premise holds here. In varying ways, all of these queens fail to sacrifice personal desires to their political commitments, or at least, as in the case of Elizabeth, fail to do so in time to avert the tragic *dénouement*.

It follows that emphasis in these plays is often deflected away from the political domain to the emotional sphere; furthermore, in some cases, politics is explicitly represented as a pretext for love. This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the introduction of a love interest can be seen to humanize the queen, believed up until then to be motivated uniquely by an obsessive *libido dominandi*. On the other hand, it can serve to situate women in the affective sphere, displacing them from the political, and from that which is accorded meaning. In many of these plays, there is no real sense of government, and little sense of the queen as a functioning monarch. In this emphasis on the emotional sphere, similar themes emerge in a number of plays: namely the use of violence by women as a political tool; the perceived (and well-rehearsed) correlation between sexual disorder and political disorder; the emotional tyranny exerted by women; and the nefarious effects of female sexual desire.

The Madwoman Next Door: Elizabeth I

The portraits of Elizabeth I in all six of the plays concerning her tend to concentrate on one, or both, of two models: the queen as pernicious Machiavellian, and the queen as lovelorn maiden.²⁹ Artful and duplicitous in *Jeanne, reine d’Angleterre*, Elizabeth harbors harsh and severe ideas concerning government that are highlighted even further by the fact that they contrast so starkly with those of Mary Tudor. The latter is certainly not the “Bloody Mary” of historical myth (the most

commonly propagated image of her in England following the Marian persecution of Catholics from 1555 to 1558), and is on the contrary portrayed sympathetically. In their various confrontations (II.i, IV.i, and V.iv—the only three scenes in which Elizabeth appears), it is Marie who is portrayed as solicitous of her subjects' well-being, highly critical of Henry VIII's bloody reign, moved by the fate of her "enemies," and wracked with uncertainty and later guilt.³⁰ Elizabeth, on the other hand, is portrayed as the petulant, headstrong younger sister, sees their enemies as traitors, is determined that Jeanne should die, cannot understand Marie's later regrets and reticence (V.iv), and excites accusations of cruelty from her half-sister by her Machiavellian comments:

J'approuve les leçons d'Herode & de Tybere
Je ne puis m'empescher de les loüer tous deux,
De les estimer grands, & mon pere avecque eux.
Ceux qui dans un Estat se sçavent bien conduire,
Ne pardonnent jamais, si le pardon peut nuire.

I approve Herod's and Tiberius' lessons
I find myself compelled to praise them both,
To judge them great, and my father with them.
Those who know how to govern a state well
Never pardon, if pardon can harm.

(La Calprenède, *Jeanne, reyne d'Angleterre*, IV.i)

The reference to Herod and Tiberius was not lost on La Calprenède's peers,³¹ and is greatly exploited in Regnault's *Marie Stuard*. Here, as Jane Conroy points out, Regnault, relying more on theatrical models than on history, represents Elizabeth as "une *furieuse* baroque," as the recurrence of epithets of *fureur* and *furie* highlights.³² The tone has already been set in the opening scene in which the eponymous heroine tells her own history, part of which involves a diatribe against Elizabeth and her "tyranny":

Barbare Elizabeth! [...]
Toy qui de mon Empire as la vertu bannie

Pour y faire à present regner la tyrannie: [...]
 Tu devois exercer ta cruelle manie
 Sur la brutalité des Tygres d'Hyrcanie;
 Et tu ne devois pas commander aux humains,
 Par ce Sceptre sanglant qui dégoute en tes mains.

Barbarous Elizabeth! [...]
 You who have banished virtue from my empire
 And replaced it currently with tyranny: [...]
 You should exercise your cruel fury
 On the brute nature of the tigers of Hyrcania;
 You should not rule over humans
 With this bloody scepter dripping in your hands.

(Regnault, *Marie Stuard*, I.i)

In Act I.ii, Elizabeth herself expresses a desire to imitate Herod and Tiberius, and—bringing La Calprenède's third model into play—to prove herself her father's daughter. Her government is characterized by a lack of control, lack of judgment, and above all, by injustice, betrayal, and deception—her “noire science” (“black science,” I.i). This *modus operandi* and the widespread disorder and corruption with which she has infected the English court, are particularly obvious in the farcical trial to which Norfolk is subjected.³³ In her command “Perdez-le pour me plaire” (“Kill him to please me,” II.iv), the queen demonstrates the ultimate suppression of political reasoning to personal will, when she is convinced (wrongly) of his rejection of her for Marie, and his conspiracy to overthrow her.³⁴ Twice she expresses a desire to invent a new “torment” for her enemies (I.ii and IV.i), and comments to Kent: “Vostre conseil me plaist / Je l'ayme tout sanglant & tout cruel qu'il est” (“Your advice pleases me / I like it, as bloody and as cruel as it is,” IV.i). Over forty years later in Boursault, although less of a fury and more of a hardened cynic, the image of the blood-thirsty vampire and grim sadist is still to be found.³⁵

In both Regnault and Boursault, the motif of illegitimacy—the ultimate correlation of political and sexual disorder—underpins the queen's representation: she is depicted as the

usurper and Marie Stuard as the legitimate heiress.³⁶ Her alleged usurpation of the English throne hinges on the perception of her as illegitimate by birth, an idea that has the dual effect, firstly, of representing her authority as completely unfounded, and, secondly, pointing to parental sexual excess. Allegedly the product of incest herself (an idea that stems from the myth that Anne Boleyn was Henry VIII's daughter) she cannot but continue in her father's evil ways.³⁷ In correlation with this, Regnault occasionally hints that there may have been a sexual side to her relations with Norfolk, although, given the *bienséances*, this idea is never explicit.³⁸

In the Essex plays, which provide a less negative portrayal of the queen, references to the queen's alleged violent methods of governance are fewer, but they are nonetheless present in two of the plays. La Calprenède gives it to Soubtantonne (Southampton) to allude to her methods,³⁹ while in Boyer's *Le Comte d'Essex* (the least sympathetic of the three), it is given to the queen herself to regret her cruelty and tyrannical mode of government:

... la voix des pleurs & du sang innocent
Qu'a versé si souvent ma noire politique,
M'a fait le seul objet de la haine publique.
Mon Thrône est assiegé de soubçons, de terreurs,
De haine, digne prix de toutes mes fureurs.

... the voice of tears and innocent blood
Which my dark politics so often spilt,
Has made me an object of public hatred.
My throne is besieged with suspicions and fears
And hatred, a just reward for all my fury.

(Boyer, *Essex*, ll. 1014–1018, IV.iii)

Her dark past has come back to haunt her and is made to seem directly responsible for the chaos in her realm. Disorder is her just desert. It follows (in this version, where the portrait of the queen comes closest to that of Regnault) that she is also an impassioned, jealous creature in her personal relations. As

befits “une amante en fureur” (“a furious lover”), as she refers to herself (l. 1370), a woman whose “violence” the young duchesse de Clarence fears (l. 556), her reaction to the reciprocal love of Essex and the duchesse de Clarence has all the hallmarks of Racine’s Roxane:

Je vous verray gemir & trembler l’un pour l’autre,
Je souleray mes yeux de son sang & du vostre.

I will see you moan and tremble for each other,
My eyes will revel as your blood and his spills.

(Boyer, *Essex*, ll. 1099–1100, IV.iv)⁴⁰

In Thomas Corneille, her tyranny is emotional rather than political (the word is used by Essex to refer to her hold over him, l. 118). She is presented as unnaturally possessive and inexorable in love.⁴¹ In fact, the dramatist gives the queen a *précieux* emphasis on Platonic love, and portrays a monarch, who, aware of her rank, could never contemplate marriage with a subject. Unlike many of her dramatic counterparts, Corneille’s Elizabeth has no interest in the physical fulfilment of her desires. However, this makes her no less tyrannical since she demands the same of Essex, maintaining he should continue to love her tirelessly albeit without any hope of any fulfilment (ll. 401–405). His failure to do so will cost him his head; in another blurring of political and emotional stakes, it is clear that the absence of any political threat or treason from Essex is irrelevant: his political submission is only required as a substitute for his emotional submission. That the dramatist gives his heroine a lucid cynicism in the blurring of these boundaries is evident from her later framing of “la raison d’État” as a pretext for “la raison d’Amour” (Corneille, *Essex*, ll. 1035–1036).

Now, while the origin of these negative portraits raises no startling questions (the key elements can be easily traced back to a forceful anti-Elizabeth Counter-Reformation discourse), their continuation into the late seventeenth century is not as easily explicable.⁴² Although her sometime persecution of

Catholics in the 1570s and 1580s, and most particularly her execution of a French dowager may well have continued to rankle in France, one must ask if this provides a sufficient explanation for what can be perceived as a demonization of both a queen and of gynæcocracy—particularly a queen whose highly successful forty-five year reign had only ended some thirty-five years before the publication of the first of these plays. When viewed in parallel with certain representations of distant (geographically and temporally) female rulers, together with the portraits of invented queens, it is evident that images of Elizabeth are not solely explicable by political and religious divides but rather can be seen to reveal the underlying fear of women in power ubiquitous in Europe at the time.

The Distant Other

When we look further afield, the script has changed but the players remain the same. In addition to the recurrence of corruption and popular rebellion—constants in these representations of female governance—once again the emphasis is on bloodshed and murderous (frequently infanticidal) tendencies. The *libido dominandi* of several of these characters is such that murder is a common tool in the maintenance of power,⁴³ be it of a spouse (Cléopâtre of *Rodogune*), offspring (Athalie and Laodice), or other unspecified mortals (Thomas Corneille's Amalasonthe of *Théodat*⁴⁴). Their government has all the hallmarks of tyranny: force dominates,⁴⁵ power is abused,⁴⁶ personal desires are prioritized over political concerns, and/or the law is perceived as a support for personal whims.⁴⁷ Two particular figures emerge in this tapestry of disorder (and, in the case of *Laodice*, converge): firstly, the figure of the usurping, power-hungry mother; and secondly, the archetypal furious woman scorned.

The Mother as Usurper: Rodogune, Laodice, Athalie, and Améstris

The figure of the infanticidal devouring mother can be traced back in Western literature to the figure of Medea.⁴⁸ Within

the corpus under examination here, the best-known infanticidal queen is undoubtedly Pierre Corneille's Cléopâtre (*Rodogune*, first performed 1644–45, published 1647).⁴⁹ Through this dramatically powerful creation (for whom the dramatist himself had a preference⁵⁰), Corneille sketches the obsessive and pure vision of the monomaniac, where sexual jealousy is decidedly secondary to a thirst for political power,⁵¹ and the throne alone the object of her passion (l. 476).⁵² Accustomed to ruling through her (second) husband, Antiochus, prior to his death (l. 462), Cléopâtre has murdered her first husband on his reappearance and now fully intends to maintain power and to rule through one of her sons (ll. 493–494; 470–474). As Greenberg points out, through this transgressive regime where the “natural” patriarchal order has been upturned, “*Rodogune* play[s] out the hidden fears of Patriarchy by figuring the return of what the Father and his Law had tried so hard to repress: the devouring, chaotic nature of omnipotent femininity.”⁵³ Doubly criminal as regicide and usurper, Cléopâtre adds to her heinous crimes by transferring all uxorial and maternal passions to the throne itself, thus refusing to occupy the role of mother or wife. (The language of possession, of carnal desire, together with the personification of the throne, underlines this transference.) Concretely, she reinforces her role as an agent of chaos by her attempts to manipulate the right of primogeniture, fundamental principle of sovereignty, in an explicit attempt to maintain power for herself (ll. 444–450). Alone in her knowledge of the order of her twin sons' birth, Cléopâtre attempts to “play God,”⁵⁴ and to decide for her own purposes who will reign: “je ferai régner qui me voudra servir” (“I will put on the throne whoever wants to serve me,” l. 502).⁵⁵ The kernel of the tragedy hinges on this secret, which ultimately is never revealed. A political fact is made a personal secret. Her power, and here her method of governing, involves making the public private.⁵⁶

Creating a play about royal power allows Corneille to present the paradoxes of Cléopâtre's rule. Firstly, on the one hand,

repeated references to all the signifiers of sovereignty (the crown, scepter, diadem, throne) leave us in no doubt of the extent to which the queen embodies the sovereign power of the play: the power and its trappings are hers.⁵⁷ Yet, as is fitting for a character whose ascent to the throne is inextricably linked to crime, we are simultaneously reminded throughout that her power and authority hinge on hypocrisy, duplicity, and Machiavellian behavior . . . in sum, on a *modus operandi* diametrically opposed to what Sweetser calls “a royal ethics of grandeur.”⁵⁸ The second paradox involves the nature of her power, or the distinction between her power and her authority. On the one hand, her power appears very fragile since, although her sons are quite happy (ironically) for her to remain on the throne (ll. 610–614), it is her people and the treaty with the Parthians that force her to act in a certain way, to name a king. Cléopâtre’s power is consistently fashioned, and ultimately thwarted, by the imperatives of patriarchal monarchy. On the other hand, however, it is precisely because she represents that institution, albeit in a corrupted and transgressive fashion, that her authority cannot be circumvented, despite her fragile power. Efforts by her sons to bypass her authority, to force Rodogune instead to “play God’ and choose a king—“Faites un monarque,” both Antiochus and Séleucus entreat her (l. 919 and l. 957)⁵⁹—can never be realized, a fact Rodogune is all too aware of (l. 940). Attempts, therefore, to ignore the imperatives of patriarchal monarchy, albeit represented and corrupted here by a woman, are destined to fail.

A crucial element of the construction of Cléopâtre as the incarnation of evil is her evolution from parricide to infanticide, presented by her as a logical progression (l. 1490). The murder of Nicanor could be justified (as she tries to⁶⁰) as an execution carried out in her sons’ interests and in the interests of maintaining the male line, since his marriage with Rodogune could have culminated in their disinheritance. However, the murder of her sons has no such “political” justification; although justified in her mind as a reaction to the

disobedience of her “unnatural sons” (l. 1325), it appears motivated partly by her all-consuming thirst for power (l. 1529), partly by a desire to avenge herself on those who have betrayed her, thwarting her will and hence power, and partly by sheer pleasure in evil. Their deaths, by being criminal, will make her happy (l. 1496). Through the dismissal of maternal *tendresse* (“dangereuse autant que importune” / “as dangerous as it is inconvenient,” l. 1511), and the smothering of all “natural” instinct (l. 1491), Cléopâtre becomes the ultimate monstrous unnatural mother, an infanticidal sorceress for whom we have been prepared by the incantatory nature of her opening lines (ll. 395–398).⁶¹ Through her, Corneille presents an image of the monstrosity that results, so the play suggests, from the refusal to accept the role of tender maternity carved out for women by society.⁶² In this most pessimistic and ambiguous of endings,⁶³ even more terrifying is the inescapability of the paradigm of evil that is suggested by Cléopâtre’s curse. The chaos she represents survives her death.

In Gabriel Gilbert’s tragicomedy published the following year, *Rhodogune* (1646), the emphasis shifts from the political back to the more familiar territory of sexual jealousy. The queen (here named Rhodogune) is a more volatile, less coherent, Amazon figure, who, abandoned by her husband, seeks vengeance initially on him and later on the object of his affections (here the princess Lidie). In an attempt to present a less terrifying creature (and in keeping with the tragicomic genre), Gilbert spares her the crimes of regicide and infanticide and allows her a certain amount of maternal affection, thus recuperating her back into the normative paradigm of maternity that Corneille had exploded.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, she admits murdering her nurse earlier, quite simply since the latter dared suggest remarriage (I.i), is still referred to as *furieuse, barbare, implacable*,⁶⁵ and pursues Lidie, and later her sons, with ferocity. There is little mention of the throne and of a desire to reign, although Gilbert does maintain the nonchalant manipulation of the right of primogeniture by the queen,⁶⁶ and the attempts

by her sons to bypass her authority by appealing directly to Lidie to choose a husband/king.⁶⁷

Over twenty years later, the figure of the power-hungry infanticide reappears in Thomas Corneille's *Laodice* (1668). The eponymous heroine differs in a number of ways from Cléopâtre, not least because of the introduction of an incestuous love interest, and because her only successful filicides are in the past of the play, thus at a remove from the spectator. Nonetheless, strikingly chilling is her composed articulation of past crimes and motivations, and her nonchalant perception of murder as simply a means to an end. As she calmly explains to her confidante in her first appearance on stage, all maternal instinct was smothered, as driven by an insatiable and sweeping ambition, she saw in the death of five sons only "the charms of reigning" ("le charme de régner," ll. 459, 463–464, II.i). Dramatic intensity is added when she later unknowingly discloses to her sole surviving (disguised) son, in the same calm fashion, her earlier attempts to kill him (ll. 99off), and reveals her attitude to her children's deaths to be cavalier in the extreme (ll. 965–968). Without any of the ambiguity surrounding Cléopâtre's motivations, where the *libido dominandi* is mixed with vengeance and betrayal, the younger Corneille's creation harbors an even greater cynicism in her coldblooded pursuit of power.

The younger Corneille also returns to the idea of the maternal legacy of vice, with which his brother ended *Rodogune*. Here, in fact, the supposed inheritance of evil serves as a justification for Laodice's final infanticide. Assuming her remaining son would have the same standards of moral depravity as herself, she presents this murder as preemptive self-defense (ll. 974–977). If she doesn't kill him, he will kill her. Why would he spare her?

C'est mon sang, et ce sang du Trône est trop avide
Pour trembler à l'aspect d'un simple parricide.

His is my blood, and this blood is too eager for the throne
To tremble at the prospect of a mere parricide.

(*Laodice*, ll. 999–1002, III.iii)

Laodice's maternal legacy, through her blood, is the propagation of homicidal tendencies. The metonymic use of the polysemic *sang*, used here in the sense of family, bloodline, but laden with connotations of life/birth and death/bloodshed is particularly powerful. The bloodline will continue the bloodshed; vice is genetic, biological, and inescapable.⁶⁸ Through birth, the ultimate female institution, evil is propagated. Laodice's cynicism, Machiavellianism, and general *mauvaise foi* is highlighted by a later additional argument. If, somehow, her son had escaped this cycle of evil and was not prepared to sacrifice his mother to his desire for the throne, she would still have to kill him. Aware that she had tried to end his days, he could not be allowed to live on as a witness to her shame (l. 1038).⁶⁹

The third and final filicide to be examined here, Racine's *Athalie* (1691), differs decidedly from the other two, although the differences are not immediately apparent. As in *Rodogune*, the queen is absent for the first act, and our impressions of her stem solely from the reports of her enemies. Josabet's tearful recollection of the massacre of the princes, Athalie's descendants, presents us with a graphic image of a bloodthirsty and vengeful figure, inciting her soldiers to massacre, she herself wielding a dagger among them (ll. 244–246). She is “une Reine homicide,” “une Reine cruelle,” an “injuste Marâtre” (“an unjust stepmother”), “détestable” and “détestée” (see ll. 259, 291, 171, 75, and 272). She is also, typically, “une impie Étrangère” (“an impious stranger,” l. 72).⁷⁰ Throughout the play, her enemies' discourse is peppered with references to her rage, her fury, her cruelty. Her bloodthirsty reactions to the revelation of Joas's existence are predicted; her past persistently recalled;⁷¹ her nefarious maternal lineage frequently evoked.⁷² Her depiction as transgressive element in society is given a crystallized form in the report of her penetration of the temple, where she simultaneously transgresses spatial, religious, and gender boundaries. So, as bloodthirsty, explosive fury, the similarities with images of Rodogune, Laodice, and indeed Elizabeth

I seem clear. However, this appearance of similarity masks a number of crucial differences, which make of Athalie, together with Élise of *Astrate*, a considerably more complex example of a female sovereign.

The first principal difference is that, just as Laonice's portrait of Cléopâtre in Act I of *Rodogune* is revealed to be untrustworthy,⁷³ here the portrait of the queen as monstrous infanticide is belied both by her self-portrait and version of past events, and by the troubled and anxious figure who appears onstage.⁷⁴ The killing of her descendants is presented by her as motivated by a notion (misguided or other) of duty (l. 467), as well as by self-defense and a desire to avenge the killing of her brother and father (ll. 709–710, 723–726). It is, as Marie-Florine Bruneau points out, a simple application of the Judaic *loi du talion*—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth⁷⁵—and is certainly not motivated by a thirst for power. In addition, the defiant transgression of her visit to the temple becomes, in her account, the efforts of an anxious woman to ward off danger, motivated by fear and instinct. Furthermore, her past association with violence is juxtaposed with the fact that the only proposal that would break the cycle of violence, her proposal to bring Éliacin to live with her, comes from her.⁷⁶ As Helen Bates MacDermott puts it, “The Athalie we hear about, then, belongs to myth. Symbol of darkness and chaos, impurity, sacrilege, disorder, sterility, irrationality—all that which is opposed to the clean light of Reason and Divine Truth—she is the archetypal destructive mother of patriarchal mythology.”⁷⁷

The second principal difference is that she is recuperated by Racine into the paradigm of (less terrifying) tender maternity, anxious to “adopt” rather than kill Éliacin/Joas.⁷⁸ To what extent this re-awoken maternal instinct, this return to recognizable femininity—all the more ambiguous since Athalie is in fact the child's grandmother, not mother—is constructed as mutually incompatible with her ability to reign, is a point I will return to below. The third principal difference is that Athalie is

portrayed as an astute sovereign whose reign has brought peace and religious tolerance to the region. Given the success of her reign, her representation by Joad as usurper (l. 73), and hence potentially tyrant, is not one with which seventeenth-century political thought would have concurred.⁷⁹

However, lest we forget Athalie's explosive temperament, we are again presented with it in Act V. Racine returns here to the image of her as dagger-wielding (l. 1537), thirsting only for blood and destruction (“[elle] ne respire enfin que sang et que ruines,” l. 1540).⁸⁰ Furthermore, our sympathies for the queen could be mitigated by the fact that her attack on the temple appears to be motivated by greed—although it is debatable what importance should be attached to her greed, which, prior to Act V, merits one brief mention (l. 48)—and that her initial reaction to the revelation of Éliacin as Joas is to order her soldiers to kill him (l. 1730). It is an indication of the complexity of the character that we are continually forced to revise our opinion of the queen and to evaluate the interplay of the interlocking portraits of her as monster, mother, and sovereign.

A final mother figure worthy of consideration here is one responsible for symbolic castration of the heir to the throne rather than actual bloodshed. Améstris, in Pradon's tragedy *Pirame et Thisbé* (1674), while driven both by political ambition and sexual passion, is less fanatical than Rodogune and Laodice, at the outset, to the extent that she is not prone to infanticide, nor is she hated by her people. However, her crime is more recognizable, more real, and therefore arguably more worrying for a seventeenth-century spectator: she is not interested in killing her son but quite simply sidelining him from power. The verb *usurper* (absent from *Laodice*) is used repeatedly to underline her crime, and hence remind spectators that usurpation need not be by a dramatic *coup d'état* from foreign powers. On the contrary, it appears more insidious so close to home. Améstris is at the origin of disorder in the state quite simply since she has disrupted the divinely appointed monarchical lineage. Worse, in

the eyes of a seventeenth-century spectator, she has brought up Belus to be unfit for the throne; she has effeminized him (see I.i and II.ii). Her actions here have contravened God's order, and, given the importance of the queen mother/regent in the preparation of her son for the throne, constitute an abuse of her role.

Although the dilemma of lovers Pirame and Thisbé is ostensibly the central issue of the plot, it cedes in importance to the conflict between mother and son, Améstris and Bélus, a fact Pradon rather unsatisfactorily addresses in his preface. In the perennial interest accorded the representation of the relationship between royal sons and mothers (or queen regent/heir apparent), an awareness of the importance of that relationship in recent French history is reflected. All four negative portrayals of queens under consideration here deform and exaggerate the common topos of the pernicious influence of the queen mother, transforming it into one of physical or moral violence. It is also noteworthy that these four mothers are all in power because they are widows, hence examples of a figure whose autonomy and freedom from male tutelage traditionally provoked distrust and fear.⁸¹ The queen regent represents a doubly potent threat as both female ruler and widow.

The theme of usurpation is also central to Pousset de Montauban's *Séleucus* (1654) where Laodice, queen of Syria, and Olympie, queen of Epirus, refuse to step down from power to allow their sons to succeed to their respective thrones. The plot revolves around the sons' efforts (eventually successful if rather underhand) to force their mothers' abdication, an abdication that is furthermore in accordance with the wishes of the people. One of the play's novelties lies in Laodice's method of maintaining power: claiming that she is the sovereign until her late husband is buried, Laodice refuses to bury him on the basis that his mother had done likewise and that it is now customary. Olympie's situation is completely different since her late husband's will grants her the regency until she dies. Her son's

forcible assumption of power is therefore of dubious legality.⁸² To these mothers could be added the *furioso* consort Sira of Rotrou's *Cosroès* (1649) whose *libido dominandi* pushes her not to eliminate her son but rather to attempt to reign vicariously through him (see her ambiguous comments in ll. 428–432), in addition to the consort Arsinoé of Corneille's *Nicomède* (1651). The timespan involved here suggests an ongoing interest in the theme beyond Anne of Austria's regency. *Rodogune* was first performed and published during a felicitous period of the regency (1644/45 and 1647); both *Cosroès* and *Nicomède* were performed and published during the Fronde (1648/49 and 1651); *Laodice*, *Pirame*, and *Athalie* date from after the regent's death.⁸³

Hell Hath no Fury...

While political power is a central theme in plays featuring the mother figure, in most representations of the furious queen it is completely surpassed in importance by love. Frequently, the well-worn image of the spurned, jealous, vindictive fury dominates, and epithets of fury are included gratuitously by dramatists to describe characters who are given little depth.⁸⁴ In Chaulmer's *La Mort de Pompée* (1638), the negative image of Cleopâtre is set in place by her rival's description of her beauty (I.iv) in a lexicon of conquest and prey, and her reaction to her rejected love fits the common mold, as she trumpets her thirst for blood and carnage (III.vii and IV.iii). An unsavory image of another legendary female ruler is likewise propagated in Desfontaines's *La Véritable Semiramis* (1647). Although her execution of her husband and king Ninus is rendered in part comprehensible by his representation as a tyrant, usurper of her throne and murderer of her father (I.ii, III.ii), the play works in such a way to portray the famous Assyrian queen as a tyrant, who operates through threats, calumny, and *mauvaise foi*. Desfontaines's use of Justin as a source allows him to introduce the seemingly popular theme of incest, and her explosion of "rage" and "extrême fureur" (IV.v) at her rejection by

her beloved Melistrate takes on even more repellent overtones when the latter is revealed to be her son (V.ii).⁸⁵ Among multiple other examples, Abeille's *Argélie* (1678) stands out thirty years later. Here there is no mistaking the tone of impassioned lunacy that is set from the beginning of the play, as the eponymous queen of Thessalie, bereft of any moral scruples and essentially evil and consumed by jealousy of her sister Ismène, sadistically plots to trick her sister into indicating which of two suitors she loves, so that this unfortunate lover can be immediately killed (*Argélie*, I.i), and later is seen to delight in the macabre and fatal quality that makes of her love the seal of death (IV.iii). Here the mythic figure of the destructive "mauvaise mère" associated with devoration is transformed into that of the bloodthirsty vampire, better known through the character of Racine's Roxane⁸⁶—an example of how the figure of myth extends beyond actual mothers to embrace all women, underpinning the latent fear of women in power.⁸⁷

Within this assembly of lunatic lovers, Thomas Corneille's two heroines Laodice and Amalasonte are given more psychological depth than many of their counterparts. Here, as is common in Early Modern discourses and as was evident in the case of Elizabeth, sexual disorder is used to highlight political disorder. In the creation of Laodice, as mentioned above, Corneille adds an incestuous love into the cauldron of infanticidal vice. Not only is the queen anxious to stay in power, not only does a woman fifteen years a widow entertain thoughts of a second marriage,⁸⁸ not only does an older woman violate the *bienséances* by the open expression of sexual desire for a young man, but, horrifyingly, this man is her son. The potential to excite audience *frissons* is clear. The centrality of this desire to the characterization of the queen (and to the plot) is most apparent when, although gradually brought by the redemptive power of love to a willingness to renounce the throne, Laodice is not willing to renounce her love. Ultimately it is not her violence or her power-hungry ambitions that lead to her downfall: specifically,

it is her continued attempts to realize her erotic passion that brings everything crashing down around her. Female sexual desire (underpinned here by the numerous references to her *ardeur*, *feu* and *flamme*) spells disaster.⁸⁹ Her renewed offer to her son Oronte/Ariarate of her hand and her new Lycaonian throne, offered her by the Romans, leads to his revelation of his identity and her discovery of the nature of her love. There is a certain cruel pathos in the dramatic timing whereby the woman who appears in Act V as a changed, calmed creature is faced with the realization very quickly that her crimes are worse than she had ever imagined, that the redemptive love is in itself depraved.⁹⁰ The final image with which Corneille leaves us, as his deplorable queen flees the stage giving Ariarate in marriage to his beloved Axiane as she does so, is of a woman distraught in self-abhorrence. If she had not removed herself through suicide from the scenario for virtue to triumph, it is clear that the angry populace, furious at her machinations against the false Ariarate whom they believe to be her son, would have done so. Order is restored in both public and private spheres as the rightful (male) heir supplants the (female) usurper, simultaneously allowing the normative love of the hero and his very passive bride to triumph over the incestuous, erotic passion of a widow.

Four years later, with the despotic Amalasonte of *Théodat*, Thomas Corneille continues to represent female desire as problematic. From the opening of the play, the queen is associated with an unseemly physical desire, as an anxious Théodat relates his unease at the queen's thinly veiled ardor (ll. 32–33). His words firmly establish the queen's behavior in the realm of the inappropriate, even before her declaration of love in the following scene. As in *Laodice*, reference to the queen's latent sexual urges is used to underpin disorder in the public sphere. That her declaration is contrary to the *bienséances* is highlighted by the fact that it is given to the queen herself to regret—not her love, which she sees as involuntary (l. 1032)—but her expression

of it (ll. 1036, 1043–1048), an idea that would have appealed to the salon-going audience of this tragedy traditionally seen as *galante*.⁹¹ Her audience may also have appreciated her lucidity in love, a characteristic not all these queens are endowed with (see ll. 290–291 and 300–317). Dramatic tension builds throughout the play as the younger Corneille moves his heroine from the ranks of the (relatively calm) emotional tyrants—highlighted when Amalasonte’s very declaration of love in I.ii is marked by veiled threats (see ll. 217–219 and ll. 278–279)—to the ranks of the sadistic furies in Act V, when she thinks her plot to kill Théodat has worked (see, e.g., ll. 1541–1545).⁹² Here the confusion of personal and political is clear, whereby the rejection of her love is perceived as an insult to the throne, in the fusion in her speech of *amour/fureur/Trône/désordre*.⁹³

Despite changes in the conception of heroism from the 1630s and 1640s to the 1660s and 1670s, despite the move towards greater concern with gallantry, the choice by certain dramatists to put aggressive, power-hungry women on stage, in other words to continue to propagate the association of women and disorder, remains constant. If the *forme* changes, the *fond* doesn’t. While this in itself is unremarkable given the recurrence of this topos throughout Western literature, more significant is the indication that tyranny is not exclusively a male phenomenon. Women as well as men are accused of tyranny and represented as behaving as tyrants; women as well as men can corrupt royal power for their own ends; women as well as men use violent, cruel methods as a tool of political and emotional manipulation. Paradoxically, the very framing of female sovereigns as tyrants remains a reminder that they can and do occupy that space, even as they corrupt it. One could argue that what is most interesting here is not what is gendered in the treatment of female tyrants, although we will return to that below, but what is *ungendered*. In terms of the uncontrollable, passionate despot, men and women (superficially at least) share the same mold. If Elizabeth, for example, is a *furieuse* baroque

in Regnault, Herod is clearly a *furieux* in Tristan de L’Hermite’s *Marianne*.⁹⁴ The institution of sovereignty can be debased by a common human nature. However, this seeming parity is still underpinned by a latent code of sexual difference: male tyrants fail to manifest the virtues their sex has a propensity to, and slip towards “feminine” vices—an idea encapsulated in the recurrence of effeminacy as a topos in the discourse surrounding male tyranny⁹⁵—while female tyrants yield to their natural tendencies. (In fact, the emphasis on effeminacy in the characterization of male tyrants serves as a subliminal reminder of the unsuitability of women to rule, in plays where they never even feature).

The association of gynæcocracy with injustice and bloodshed, chaos and corruption, disorder and dissimulation hinges on a representation of these queens as doubly Other—both foreign and female.⁹⁶ Of course, as is the case with all representations of the Other, what is in fact thrown into relief is the specular reflection of the Self. Here, through what Christian Biet calls the “double jeu référentiel” central to the functioning of tragedy and to the reflective space it creates,⁹⁷ less light is thrown on a “despotic” Orient or a vice-ridden England than on “Salic Law” France, mined as it is with its latent fear of women in power.⁹⁸ And it is possibly to quell that fear that these plays, while presenting female authority as a threatening force, simultaneously present that model as a mere chimera.

The Mechanics of Elimination: Erasing the Threat of the Female Ruler

Essentialisms and the Affective Sphere

Three mechanisms seem to me to undermine the representation of female authority, *even as* a tyrannical force. Firstly, the association of women and disorder is framed in sexualized and essentialist terms in a fashion that is unheard of for men: where kings are kings, tyrants or otherwise, these queens

are *women*, framed within an age-old discourse concerning female weakness and vice. Situating them within a discourse of sexual identity rather than within a discourse of sovereignty (although problematic in terms of internal *vraisemblance*) automatically denigrates their role and authority. While the best-known example of an explicit gendered comment is probably Mathan's comment of Athalie, "Elle flotte, elle hésite, en un mot elle est femme" ("She wavers, she hesitates, in a word, she is a woman," l. 876), to which I will return below, it is certainly not the only one. Throughout Racine's play, Athalie is repeatedly referred to as a woman ("femme superbe," "femme insolente," "femme impie" / "proud woman," "shameless woman," "ungodly woman"), the most striking example being in the anaphora used to describe her entry into the temple (see ll. 398, 1548, 747, 395–396). The same applies to other queens. In *Théodat*, the queen's rival Ildegonde comments suspiciously of the queen:

La Reyne est outragée, elle souffre, elle est Femme, [...]
 Notre Sexe pour vaincre à l'art de reculer
 Et sa plus grande force est à dissimuler.

The queen is insulted, she is agitated, she is a woman, [...]
 Our sex knows how to retreat to conquer
 And its greatest strength is in dissimulation.

(*Théodat*, ll. 1400, 1405–1406, IV.viii)

Gilbert's Rhodogune is given to threaten: "Et mon Sexe offensé ne pardonne iamais" ("My offended sex never forgives," III. iv), while in Chaulmer's text, Cléopâtre's avowal of vengeance against Sexte is not only presented as typical of women (she acts as "une fille irritée"), but is given the weight of a universal *sentence*, typographically at least in the printed text, signaled by the inclusion of quotation marks (Chaulmer, *La Mort de Pompée*, IV.iv).⁹⁹ These explicit references to the behavior of *une fille*, *une femme*, or *le sexe* serve to remind us of the implicit discourse of gender constructions that underpins all of these plays, as they provide a vivid, if fictional, realization of the greatest fears

of the proponents of male-only power, those for whom female weakness is a danger in society at the best of times, and the concept of such weak vessels in positions of power terrifying.

If the sex (and gender) of these queens is at times explicitly evoked, it is mainly through their consistent alignment with the emotional sphere that it is tacitly underlined—the second mechanism by which their authority is deflated. Of course, male rulers are frequently associated with love also—many of the most memorable psychological conflicts on the seventeenth-century stage are played out by male characters torn between love and politics—but, in most cases, either they conquer their amorous inclinations to favor state concerns (like Racine's Titus), or, as evoked above, they are weak-willed and/or tyrannical figures who, lacking in the male prerequisite virtues, despite the alleged natural propensity of their sex to them, fail to measure up to their political responsibilities and the institution of kingship. In the case of queens, the balance is weighed in the other direction from the outset: since their propensity to love (not to mention lust) is perceived as natural, and their exercise of political virtue as unnatural, women are *by nature* more exposed to its vicissitudes and eminently less likely to be capable of, not to mention prioritize, political virtue. In the plays under consideration here, it is clear that the predominance of love over political concerns in the plays has a considerable influence on our appreciation of the characters. In some cases (as in plays such as *Argélie* and *La Mort de Pompée*) no attention is given to the political at all; ignoring the very issue of female governance, failing to even accord it an existence, is one way of refusing to accord it meaning. More commonly, it is given to the queen herself to reject her political power in favor of (an attempt at) emotional fulfilment. Frequently an obsession with love becomes synonymous with poor government: a victim of her own passions, buffeted by the turmoils of love in mind and body,¹⁰⁰ indecisive and vacillating, the queen (like the effeminate male tyrant) has no control over herself, let alone over

others. Authority and successful governance are recalled in the plays, only to be simultaneously deflated, either by framing them as no longer existent (a distant memory) or as motivated primarily by love. In *Astrate*, *Athalie*, *Pirame*, and the Elizabeth plays, portraits of able politicians are put in place only to be all the more effectively destroyed. In fact, more insidiously, the suggestion emerges that *even* when women can rule well, disaster still follows.

Needless to say, there is, of course, an aesthetic function to this focus on love, principal motor of much tragedy. Furthermore, internal psychological conflict is fundamental to the creation of dramatic interest: there is a perennial appeal in the revelation of the personal troubles behind the public face, in the portrayal, that is, of the queen torn between state and private concerns.¹⁰¹ Tears and handwringing have a tremendous ongoing appeal, albeit to varying degrees at different points in the century.¹⁰² In plays, such as *Théodat*, where *galanterie* dominates, love is the only barometer that the characters understand, and the only value code to which they attribute meaning. Rejected love, combined with the concomitant wounded pride and honor, sparks a set reaction and makes for a fixed formula, one that the audience had come to expect and enjoy. Finally, we could argue that portraying the queen as a lovelorn puppet has a favorable effect on the representation of a power-hungry queen in that it serves to attenuate and humanize the dark portraits of her as cruel Machiavellian.

These are only some of the aesthetic issues concerning the centrality of love in these tragedies, and they are indisputable. Nonetheless, it is equally indisputable that through the emphasis on the emotional sphere, a sphere that has no meaning in the patriarchal world of politics, the signals that resound from these plays result (consciously or unconsciously) in the deflation of the myth of the powerful female sovereign inherited from the sixteenth century. The fact that the characteristic traits of a world of *galanterie* can be explained by aesthetic convention

and contemporary taste should not blind us to the fact that a depiction of such a world facilitates the propagation of gender constructions.

The representations of Elizabeth Tudor, an enormous cultural symbol in her own right, whose powerful reign ended only in 1603, whose existence (seen as exceptional) had caused such difficulties for the French jurists who supported and validated “Salic Law,” are particularly important in this light.¹⁰³ In all three Essex plays, the spectators are led to reflect on Elizabeth’s transformation from powerful queen, the envy of Europe, to tearful vessel of frailty. The transformation is most explicit in Boyer’s text, where the defense of female sovereignty, which the queen herself is given to voice, contrasts significantly with her actions. As the queen rebukes Essex for his alleged sedition, she attributes it partly to the fact that she is a woman, before soundly refuting the idea that her sex provides any grounds for disobedience:

Respectant peu les loix que nostre sexe donne,
 Tu me croyois peut-estre indigne de regner.
 Ce sexe toutefois que tu veux dédaigner,
 A fait souvent honneur à la grandeur suprême.
 Sans porter une épée on porte un diadème,
 La vertu, la raison font la grandeur des Rois,
 Sans répandre du sang on peut donner des lois,
 L’art plustost que la force écarte la tempeste
 Et le bras sur le Thrône agit moins que la teste.

Since you respect so little the commands our sex gives,
 You thought me perhaps unworthy to reign.
 But nonetheless this sex that you disdain
 Has often occupied with honor the most supreme role.
 Without bearing a sword, one can bear a crown,
 Virtue and reason are what make kings great,
 Without spilling blood, one can make laws,
 Skill rather than force is what averts the storm
 And a throne is ruled more by one’s head than one’s hand.

(Boyer, *Essex*, ll. 190–198, I.vii)

The queen evokes the common notion that women are unworthy of ruling, before negating it on the basis of past examples. Military skill is not seen as a prerequisite for sovereignty, which hinges rather on moral virtue and the use of reason—an idea that relates to the ideas of princely virtue outlined earlier (vol. 1, ch. 1) and which we encounter in contemporaneous pro-woman discourse (vol. 1, ch. 2). Non-violence is privileged, and mental skill rather than physical force is prioritized. The debate is framed in clearly gendered terms. However, while that is all very well in theory (and it is not negligible as representative of a counter-discourse, which we will see largely exploited elsewhere), the reality is somewhat different. Not only does the representation of her bloody reign imply that Elizabeth fails to live up to her own principles (to the extent that retrospectively her speech appears grossly hypocritical) but love has eroded her power and authority. Coban (Lord Cobham) is given to marvel that he no longer recognizes this proud queen, who, with Europe at her feet, is jeopardizing her power for a mere subject (Boyer, *Essex*, I.ix).¹⁰⁴ In Corneille, the queen herself is given the sad realization that she is no longer the great and august queen she was (l. 1441), while in La Calprenède, references to her personal intelligence (e.g. l. 623) are overshadowed by references to its disappearance. Cécile (Cecil) is given to wonder:

Ah! Ciel! Qu'est devenu cet esprit de clairté,
Cet esprit plein de flamme et de vivacité,
Cette rare prudence, et la haute pratique
De la plus grande Reine et la plus politique
Qui jamais ait porté le diadème au front?

Ah, heavens! What has become of this mental clarity,
This brilliant and vivacious mind,
This rare prudence, and the fine-tuned experience
Of the greatest and the most political queen
Who has ever borne a crown?

(La Calprenède, *Essex*, ll. 335–339, II.i)¹⁰⁵

Paradoxically, comments that appear to remind spectators of Elizabeth's glorious past do so in such a fashion as to simultaneously deflate it.

A similar mechanism underpins *Pirame*. Here, the issue is not to compare past and present, but to reveal the appearance of political acumen as nothing but an illusion, or at least as founded on dubious motivations. In *Pirame*, Pradon's Améstris is more clearly a monarch than many of her counterparts, to the extent that the dramatist gives her (to some extent at least) an awareness of the mechanics of government. Early in the play, we are presented with a flattering self-portrait in which considerable space is given to an elaboration of her power and exploits, and in which the dramatist draws on an attenuated version of the topos of the androgynous female prince that we see in favorable representations of female governance elsewhere. According to Améstris herself, Babylonian monuments to her were erected to demonstrate that her heart was that of a hero, despite her weak sex ("Dans un Sexe si foible [mon cœur] eût l'ame d'un Héros," I.iv). Later in the play, in a speech aimed to dissuade her son Belus from his quest for the throne, a certain political astuteness is underlined as she highlights the negative aspects of monarchical power. While doubtless exaggerated for her listener's ears, and informed primarily by her obsessive desire for power, the speech nonetheless demonstrates a certain understanding of what she refers to as "la pesanteur du Sceptre" ("the weight of the scepter," III.iv). However, any impression that this woman can rule is quickly countered by her characterization elsewhere in the play, which reveals the self-portrait as a facade. Shortly after her proud self-description she reveals that, in fact, she is hopelessly in love, and that her political discourse is merely a screen behind which she can couch her love ("C'est un amour caché qui parle en politique," I.v). The queen's "androgyny" is not what it seemed. Returning to her earlier comment, Pradon categorically defines love as a female emotion, as his heroine, referring to herself, now modifies her

remark to: “malgré ta grandeur d’ame / Oüy, ton cœur de Héros est le cœur d’une Femme” (“despite the greatness of your soul / Yes, your hero’s heart is the heart of a woman,” I.v). Love is the defining hallmark of this woman after all and, by implication, true heroism is the prerogative of men.¹⁰⁶ By the end of Act I, the emphasis has moved well away from politics as, on learning that Pirame in fact loves Thisbé, Améstris becomes the familiar jealous, threatening figure.¹⁰⁷

The deflation of the portrait of a capable queen through love is even more glaring in *Astrate*. Here, the portrait of the stoic, lucid Machiavellian politician that is the usurper queen Élise belies the idea of female ineptitude. Amoral she may be, but not inept. Aware of the popular desire for a king (l. 219), her choice of husband has a clear political rationale. Agénor, to whom she was promised by her father, is related to her own family; in other words he is related to the usurpers and therefore is bound to irritate the populace (ll. 295–298). The young hero Astrate, on the other hand, has precisely the virtuous reputation that she needs to fortify her throne; marriage to him therefore amounts to the re-creation of what Truchet calls “a political virginity”¹⁰⁸ that will enable her to reign in peace. Her aim is very explicitly to procure “an illustrious and magnanimous husband” whose virtue will associate her with *gloire* and calm the seditious (*Astrate*, ll. 278, 299–303). The same political rationale marks the rare insight into the equivocal nature of usurpation that the dramatist gives her. Since Astrate has won back her country for her, following the siege and near-defeat by the Syriens, her relationship to the throne has changed. Hers is no longer a usurped throne, rooted in blood; it is a conqueror’s throne, purged of injustice by war (*Astrate*, ll. 262–265, 276).¹⁰⁹ A successful “usurpation” that leads to the development of the country and contributes to its well-being, can no longer be considered an usurpation. Political success has legitimized Élise’s rule. That the nuances dear to political theorists in this well-rehearsed question are given to a woman to articulate is not

negligible. Furthermore, Quinault gives her the neo-Stoic virtue of constancy, again dear to political theorists, as we saw, in the portrait of princely virtue, in the face of adversity (II.i),¹¹⁰ in addition to considerable understanding of the workings of court and of her role as “roi,” as she refers to herself (l. 435)—an understanding she demonstrates particularly in her ability to expose the motivations of the ambitious Agénor in Act III.¹¹¹

This characterization of a strong politician is, however, considerably nuanced with her revelation to her confidante in II.iii that she is love with Astrate, and that all her political machinations were orchestrated with him in mind. Her reason of state was merely a veil (“voile”) for her amorous crimes (*Astrate*, ll. 572–576). Her desire for “une virginité politique” cannot solely be seen in terms of political rationale since in fact it suits her love. In putting politics in the service of her love, she demonstrates her inability to separate the two spheres.¹¹²

The gendered nature of these deflations is most obvious in the case of Athalie where it is a configuration of maternity, as biological and social construction, which is represented as incompatible with an ability to reign well. Here, the juxtaposition between past and present is fundamental to the dynamic of the play. As we saw above, her enemies highlight the “fury” of the past; she, on the other hand, emphasizes her role as successful, capable sovereign in a passage that merits lengthy citation:

Je ne veux point ici rappeler le passé
 Ni vous rendre raison du sang que j'ai versé.
 Ce que j'ai fait, Abner, j'ai cru le devoir faire.
 Je ne prends point pour juge un peuple téméraire;
 Quoi que son insolence ait osé publier,
 Le Ciel même a pris soin de me justifier.
 Sur d'éclatants succès ma puissance établie
 A fait jusqu'aux deux Mers respecter Athalie.
 Par moi Jérusalem goûte un calme profond
 Le Jourdain ne voit plus d'Arabe vagabond
 Ni l'altier Philistin, par d'éternels ravages,
 Comme au temps de vos Rois, désoler ses rivages;

Le Syrien me traite et de Reine et de Sœur.
Enfin de ma Maison le perfide Oppresseur,
Qui devait jusqu'à moi pousser sa barbarie,
Jéhu, le fier Jéhu, tremble dans Samarie;
De toutes parts pressé par un puissant Voisin,
Que j'ai su soulever contre cet Assassin,
Il me laisse en ces lieux souveraine maîtresse.
Je jouissais en paix du fruit de ma sagesse.

I do not want to recall the past here
Nor to account for blood that I have spilt.
What I did, Abner, I believed I needed to do.
It is not for a reckless populace to judge me;
Whatever in its insolence it trumpets,
Heaven itself has justified me.
My power, based on resounding successes,
Has made Athaliah respected from sea to sea.
Thanks to me, Jerusalem is enjoying a widespread calm;
No longer does the Jordan see nomad Arabs or proud Philistines,
Devastate its banks with continual attacks,
As was the case in the time of your fathers;
The Syrians treat me as a queen and as a sister.
Last, the treacherous oppressor of my house
Who was to extend his barbarity to me
Jehu, proud Jehu, now trembles in Samaria.
Beset on every side by powerful neighbors
Whom I have been able to enlist against this assassin,
He has left me sovereign mistress in these parts.
I was peacefully enjoying the fruits of my statecraft.

(*Athalie*, ll. 465–484, II.v)

What emerges from Athalie's speech is the image of a successful recent reign, which she in turn interprets as divine justification of her actions, and hence proof of her legitimacy.¹¹³ References to the success, power, respect, calm, peace, wisdom of the queen are juxtaposed with the mention of the ravages of previous kings, a juxtaposition underlined by the subversion of the *roi/père* topos of patriarchal thought to *reine/sœur*.¹¹⁴ It is of further interest to note that this success is depicted as founded on political skill and ability: Athalie has created a situation politically, through the creation of a powerful alliance, which Jéhu

cannot change, and which protects her and her subjects from him. Later in the scene a certain political astuteness is once again hinted at, as she outlines what appears to be politically expedient tolerance in her treatment of the Jewish priests (ll. 593–597). Aware of the priests’ criticisms of her and her power, she turns a blind eye, prepared to allow different creeds within her kingdom in order to maintain stability. However, Athalie is not prepared to do so anymore if pushed to the limit, and is unafraid to exercise her authority and to ensure she is obeyed. As she declares to Abner, “Je puis, quand je voudrai, parler en Souveraine” (“I can, when I wish, speak as a sovereign,” l. 592). Significantly, her religious toleration is expressed in terms of *douceur*—“je sens que bientôt ma douceur est à bout” (“I feel that soon my *douceur* will be exhausted,” l. 598)—clearly, in the context, a reference to the sovereign virtue extolled by political theorists.¹¹⁵

Be that as it may, for the most part Athalie’s political skill is portrayed as an attribute of the past, to be implicitly contrasted with her political errors of the present.¹¹⁶ Her considered and swift judgment is now replaced by fatal indecision, an indecision all the more surprising since she is aware that Joad knows more about Joas’s origins than he pretends (ll. 909–910). While the metamorphosis is attributed initially to the influence of her dream, it is her encounter with Joas, his physical presence, that renders the greatest change in the queen, leaving her uncertain and irresolute in her course of action. As Mathan laments:

Ami, depuis deux jours je ne la connais plus.
 Ce n’est plus cette reine éclairée, intrépide,
 Elevée au-dessus de son sexe timide, [...].
 La peur d’un vain remords trouble cette grande âme.
 Elle flotte, elle hésite, en un mot: elle est femme.

My friend, I have been unable to recognize her for the
 last two days.

She is no longer that clear-sighted, daring queen
 Elevated above her timorous sex [...].

Fear of a vain remorse is agitating this great soul,
She wavers, she hesitates, in a word, she is a woman.

(*Athalie*, ll. 870–872, 875–876, III.iii)

While it is usual to interpret the idea of the queen as “*élevée au-dessus de son sexe timide*” to mean that she has been acting like a man,¹¹⁷ such a reading is in itself ideologically contained within a paradigm of binary sexual oppositions. Beyond one’s sex doesn’t automatically mean male: it seems to me that Racine’s portrait of the ideal monarch goes beyond those binarisms to suggest an androgynous “complete” monarch—prudent, politically astute, fearless, *douce*. Hers is “a great soul” (“*une grande âme*”) which has transcended sexual difference. However, where the *Athalie* of old was androgynous and able to rule, she is now generic *woman*, identifiable by her hesitancy and fear, and hence unable to rule. The key to this transformation is the reawakening of a maternal instinct (ll. 651–654), the smothering of which allowed her to reign in the first place (ll. 723–726). There is no place for tender maternity in the construction of the political sphere as a male domain. Androgynous political virtue does not extend to maternity.

A corollary of the representation of the female sovereign as lovelorn maiden or tender mother is the image of the queen as manipulated pawn, with *Élise* the exception that proves the rule. Since the role of the malevolent advisor is of longstanding tradition in Western theatre,¹¹⁸ this cannot in itself be seen as explicitly gendered, but the perception of woman as the weaker vessel, flawed by a greater propensity to flattery and poor advice, makes of it a gender issue. In Regnault’s *Marie Stuard*, Elizabeth is manipulated from the very beginning since the “evidence” provided against Norfolk is in fact of Kemt’s and Murray’s fabrication (I.iii). When twice she hesitates to send Norfolk and Marie to their deaths (II.iv and IV.i respectively), she is convinced back to her original resolve by her enemies. When she later regrets this (IV.i) and ultimately revokes the

decision, deciding instead to pardon Marie (V.i)—the only time in the play there is any mention of reason—it is too late. Her victim is dead, and she in turn is a victim of her “advisors.” Similarly, in Boursault’s text, while she is never fooled to the same extent, it is clear that she is influenced by flattery and once again plays into her enemies’ hands, appointing them as judges of her former favorite. In Corneille’s *Essex*, she is seduced by those who are “maistres de son esprit” (“masters of her mind,” ll. 61–64), and her realization that she has been fooled comes too late (V.iv). Worse, in a blatant flaunting of her authority, her favorite is put to death without her signing the death warrant (l. 1472). In Boyer, her portrayal as a manipulated puppet is set up very early in the play. As a delighted Raleg comments: “La Reine écoute tout & de la trahison / Son ame soubçonneuse avale le poison” (“The queen is listening to everything and her suspicious soul is swallowing the poison of betrayal,” ll. 25–26). Here also, her revocation of the death penalty is deliberately ignored by Coban (V.ix) and her authority therefore represented as meaningless. In both Boyer and Corneille, she is pathetic rather than powerful, anxious to save her favorite but unable to conquer her pride.

Elizabeth is not alone in her pathetic state as victim and pawn. As will be obvious from the above, her biblical and Ancient Near East counterparts are often equally caught up in the machinations of others. In the very opening scene of *Pirame*, for example, the queen’s advisor Arsace reveals how he plots to foster the queen’s love for Pirame (his son) for his own ends.¹¹⁹ It is also worth remembering that it was he who advised her to sideline her son—poor advice that her gullible power-hungry soul eagerly followed. In the case of *Athalie*, her return to so-called femininity is signaled not only by her maternal reaction to Joas, and her “trouble” or agitation, but also by her lack of wariness regarding Mathan. Referred to as “plus méchant qu’Athalie” (“more evil than Athaliah,” l. 36), it is he who has put it into her head in the first place that there is a treasure (ll.

49–50), whose plot is feared by Joad (l. 1097), whose lies to the queen incite her to take action (ll. 888–894), who has filled her heart “with bitterness and venom” (l. 877).

This misplaced trust and dependency on others, while not gender-exclusive, serves both to present to spectators the alleged propensity of female rulers to poor judgment, and to repeatedly imply that female government is weakened by a dynamic of power-sharing, be it with a beloved or with corrupt court officials. The opening lines of La Calprenède’s *Essex* read like a recipe for poor government (further emphasized by the veiled allusion at sexual promiscuity, ll. 8–9),¹²⁰ while the lament Corneille gives it to his Amalante to articulate could be applied to the flawed political strategies of many of these queens: “Ay-je, en l’élevant trop, cessé d’estre sa Reyne?” (“In elevating him too much, have I ceased to be his queen?”) (*Théodat*, l. 1135). In confusing personal and political spheres, these queens have been the ultimate instrument in the creation of their own downfall and the dissolution of their own authority—the perfect idea to assuage male anxieties concerning female rule.

Depoliticizing Cleopatra

A particularly striking example of the kind of elimination of authority in question here is evident in the representation of Cleopatra at the time. In addition to Chaulmer’s play evoked above, four other tragedies are devoted to the Egyptian queen in the seventeenth century, three of which—by Isaac de Benserade, Jean Mairet, and Jean de La Chapelle—merit inclusion in this chapter given the ways in which they collectively erase the history of the political power of the queen.¹²¹ Representations of Cleopatra can be particularly telling because of her extraordinary significance as a cultural signifier in Western culture,¹²² and one that, furthermore, “locates political power in a body that cannot be coded as male.”¹²³ All three plays concentrate on the last days of her life in August 30 BC (telescoped into

twenty-four hours), following her defeat with Antony at the Battle of Actium the previous year. References to any political ability, intelligence, or twenty-year-long successful reign are avoided, and focus is placed instead on the queen as lover or as wife, to varying degrees.

The most submissive of the three representations is undoubtedly Mairet's creation, possibly since the drama was written with Montdory's casting as Marc-Antony in mind.¹²⁴ Although some strength of character is seen in her stoic constancy in the face of Antoine's alleged defeat in I.iii (invented by him to put her love to the test), and in her courage in seeking death (hence proving ill-judged César's assumption that such a death is the prerogative of men—see lines 1723–1724), this strength is countered by her recurrent references to her *malheurs*, *afflictions*, *ennuis*, and *craintes* (her unhappiness, affliction, troubles, and fears), her feeble response to Antoine's unjustified and vociferous accusations of betrayal, and by her repeated pessimistic references to their “destins lamentables” (l. 229). Add to this the other regrets that she voices,¹²⁵ as well as her repeated insistence on her fidelity, her innocence and her love, and the resulting image is one of an honorable, submissive woman of newfound virtue, typical of the moralist idealizing axis of the Cleopatra myth.¹²⁶ Making of Cleopatra a virtuous moral exemplum, as Philip Tomlinson points out, involves representing a Cleopatra unruffled by any sexual passion, unperturbed by any moral dilemma, and blissfully unmindful of any political role... in sum, depoliticized and diminished.¹²⁷

Despite the general consensus by recent editors that Cleopatra is “rehabilitated”—a term that sounds a deeply ironic note in the context of the present study—in order to conform to the moralist tradition, it is worth remembering that that is not the only image with which spectators are presented. Repeated mentions are made to her past misdemeanors, not only by the Roman camp but by her own followers—her pride and insolence, her excessive revelries, and her openness to

flattery¹²⁸—while considerable space is also given to Antoine’s lengthy visceral castigation of her and her (alleged) betrayal of him.¹²⁹ These images nuance considerably the image of her as a virtuous figure, as the past and present of the play both feed into the creation of an understanding of her character. In any case, the two images (as moral exemplum or as excessive seductress) feed equally into traditional representations of *woman*, both of which disenable any appreciation of her as political agent.

The Cléopâtre of Benserade’s version, performed some months earlier than Mairet’s play (therefore in the early months of 1635) and written in the same moralist vein, provides the most spirited version of the character. Most notable differences from Mairet’s text are the absence from Alexandria of Octavia—as Benserade adheres to the historical truth—and the considerably earlier death of Antoine in Act III.v. Both differences facilitate the creation of a stronger Cléopâtre: her character is not diluted by its juxtaposition with the *femme forte* figure of Octavie, her constancy in the face of Antoine’s accusations of betrayal is marked initially by annoyed defiance rather than by the submissiveness of Mairet’s character (I.ii–iii), and a large portion of the last two acts is entirely devoted to her search for her liberation in death, a liberation that is framed as an explicit triumph over César (Octavius).¹³⁰ More is made of her royal status throughout: infidelity is seen as incompatible with her “âme royale” (“royal soul,” l. 166), she bemoans the loss of her states that love has provoked (see ll. 1269–1270), her staged death is a veritable *mise-en-scène* of regality and its associated pomp (ll. 1538ff), and she dies defiantly holding her scepter (V.v), her crown firmly set on her head (V.vii), a death duly deemed “généreuse, et belle” and “digne [...] de sa majesté” (“noble and fine,” “worthy of her majesty,” ll. 1851, 1814).

However, while the characterization might point to a glorification of the joys of monarchy over Imperial Rome,¹³¹ it is nonetheless far removed from a tribute to female government. Cléopâtre’s lamentations after Antoine’s death, which see her

renouncing all the trappings of power, although explicable as a dramatic set-piece, reinforce the disjunction between her and any political role (see the opening lines of her monologue in Act III.v). The repeated references to the signifiers of power merely highlight their lack of substance.¹³² Her would-be role as a conniving seductress, perceived as a dangerous influence on the unfortunate impassioned Antoine (I.ii, II.iii), is juxtaposed with the image of the loyal grief-stricken widow,¹³³ and is highlighted by her efforts to seduce César after Antoine's death, an idea Benserade borrowed from Dio Cassius.¹³⁴ The topos of the maleficent influence of female beauty surfaces: its threatening potential is underlined by the fact that César's resistance to it is seen as his greatest victory (ll. 1547–1552), while the failure of her attempted seduction allows the dramatist to present the queen as even more disempowered. This attempted seduction is also what leads to an ambiguity in her motivation for death and a resulting incoherence in the construction of a moral exemplum. Although it was Antoine who suggested earlier that she attempt to win over her captor César¹³⁵—an idea inserted presumably to attenuate any implications of infidelity—the fact remains that she herself sees her actions as a posthumous betrayal of him (ll. 1675–1690). The clear impression the text promotes (consciously or unconsciously) to spectators is that one of the greatest examples of female sovereignty was in fact a weepy, not entirely honorable queen, who relied primarily on her ephemeral beauty.

The third version of Cleopatra's story, that of La Chapelle, differs considerably in essence from the other two. Written forty-six years later, and first performed in December 1681, it is clear that the climate is no longer one of the *femme forte* or the moral exemplum, although the play does hark back to the earlier era, and particularly to Mairet's drama, with the inclusion of a highly virtuous and selfless Octavie. Here, Cléopâtre is cast very clearly in the tradition of the *grande amoureuse*. Emphasis is on the destructive power of love, which not only

is represented as having cost she and Antoine their states and ultimately their lives,¹³⁶ but which is powerfully rendered by the oscillation from mutual suspicion, pain, bitterness, and destruction to profound tenderness that marks their onstage appearances together.¹³⁷ In common with her predecessors, the heroine harbors a sense of just desserts, having braved the gods with past excesses and formidable pride (IV.iv), a sense of guilt for causing Antoine's death (V.v), and shares with Mairet's heroine a perception of *gloire* as encapsulated in her fidelity to Antoine (see II.v). The topos of Egypt as a "damned place," also prevalent in Mairet, resurfaces. Reference is made to the "climat barbare" ("cruel clime"), to these "déplorables lieux" ("lamentable places") (IV.vi); the Egyptian court is wretched, deadly, a place of weakness and pleasure, its air poisoned.¹³⁸ Even Cléopâtre's soldiers are lacking, "effeminés and mal instruits dans la guerre" ("effeminate and ill-versed in the art of war," IV.iii), while the queen herself is fearful and entirely ill-equipped for military conflict.¹³⁹

What is most striking however—and no doubt a sign of the times, reflecting certain discourses of the late seventeenth century concerning "orientalism" and alterity—is the emphasis on the Egyptian queen as Other Foreign Woman, and an object not only of Roman but of universal hatred. In the first act alone, Cléopâtre is referred to as a foreign queen, a proud queen, a treacherous beauty, an odious queen (I.ii); a woman, a cruel woman, an ungrateful woman, an odious woman (I.iv); a woman "Que le destin accable et que Rome déteste" ("Whom fate torments and whom Rome detests," I.ii). She is the "sacrifice," the "sang" ("blood") that the Roman Senate wants to punish. She is

Cléopâtre en un mot, qu'à tous les Souverains
Cent raisons font haïr, aussi bien qu'aux Romains.

Cleopatra in a word, who all sovereigns
Like the Romans, have a hundred reasons to hate.

(La Chapelle, *Cleopatre*, I.v)

The queen's hedonistic behavior is set up as diametrically opposed to the Roman code of values, in sum quintessentially Other (II.iii). Paradoxically, of course, it is in these impassioned attacks on this woman of "foreign blood" (III. ii) that her power can be detected. The frequency and nature of these disparaging epithets in the opening act betray a fear of Cléopâtre, and highlight the extent to which that fear is here based on her dual alterity, as woman and as foreigner.¹⁴⁰ The danger she represents is reinforced by her representation as a transgressive presence. She is outside the structures of legitimacy, the *amante* to Octavie's *femme* (II.iii). When Octavie's entreaty to her to "return" Antoine to his homeland falls on deaf ears, she is given to cry "Vous parlez en Amante, et moi j'agis en Femme" ("You speak as a lover, I act as a wife," II.iii). Throughout the play, the characterization of Cléopâtre as Other is particularly offset by the presence of this legitimate, heroic, virtuous, and selfless Octavie as a normative measure. This dichotomy is further offset by the opposition between (normative) monogamy and (transgressive) bigamy that the two women represent—a complex triangulation highlighted throughout the play, particularly in Act IV, which sees both women express their concern for their spouse ("époux"), within nine lines of each other (IV. ii and IV.iii). Having come between Antoine and his wife, his children and his country, Cléopâtre is destructive of the sacred conjugal unit that is marriage, destructive of parental bonds, and destructive of patriotic zeal: she is therefore an explicit threat to the blessed trinity of patriarchal structures: marriage, the family, and the state.¹⁴¹ So, while Cléopâtre is clearly not a tyrant or an unhinged fury, she is as dangerous a presence as any of the examples of the latter, a symbol of a powerful threat that needs to be contained in the collective consciousness. These seventeenth-century dramas play their part in that containment.

The Necessity of Death, or Where Poetics Meets Ideology

Of course, the ultimate way in which the threat of female authority is eliminated is by the removal of the incarnation of it in the *dénouement*, usually by death. Elizabeth, too well-known to be fictionally killed off, is devoured by remorse in all five plays in which she is a principal protagonist;¹⁴² in Corneille's and La Calprenède's texts she immediately contemplates death, while in Regnault's *Marie Stuard*, she goes temporarily mad. Likewise, Chaulmer's Cléopâtre, alerted to Ptolemy's decision to condemn Pompey to death, is beset by regrets as passionate as her earlier murderous resolve. Here, Hermione-style, she blames Theodote for obeying what she decries as her capricious fury and furious hatred (her "furieux caprices" and the "fureur [de sa] haine")—all the more powerful a condemnation since coming from herself—and invites universal censure, as she cries: "Rends mon nom odieux à toute la nature" ("May my name be hated by all the world," V.i). In Mairet, Cleopâtre's suicide is not in any sense portrayed as a defiance of the Romans, a search for *gloire*, but rather an unwitting thwarting of César. Despite her manifest interest in her honor (see ll. 1571, 1600), the dramatist gives it to her to categorically deny any political motivation in her *stances* and to present her death as the only option for a distraught widow, motivated by love and duty (l. 1674).¹⁴³ In Benserade's play, the heroine initially maintains that death would save her *gloire* in avoiding a Roman triumph (l. 1664), but this heroic aspiration (indeed, a standard male one) is immediately nuanced when Benserade gives it to her, rather incoherently, to bemoan the loss of her *gloire* and honor in having set her sights on a new love-object and a second marriage. Her last speeches, therefore, add the inglorious element of fear and shame to her desire for death, despite the staged spectacular deathbed scene. In La Chapelle, the heroine stumbles onstage in the last scene as guilt-ridden widow, seeking only to share the same tomb as Antoine.

For many others, their queenship also ends in suicide. Élise poisons herself, as does the Cléopâtre of *Rodogune*, the latter in a scenario not devoid of echoes of the Electra matricidal myth.¹⁴⁴ Laodice (successfully) stabs herself, while Améstris of *Pirame et Thisbé* is less successful and is thwarted in her efforts by the captain of the guards. In *Théodat*, Amalasonte is killed in the popular disorder with which the play ends, although it is unclear, even to those present, whether it is by accident or design, and whether it is by her own hand or that of her enemy Theudis (ll. 1782–1791). No such ambiguity surrounds Argélie who is assassinated by her people, her body pierced by their arrows (V.vii), nor Athalie whose “execution” resembles a sacrifice. Both plays end then with tyrannicide, and, in the case of *Athalie*, one with matricidal connotations (see ll. 1780–1784). Crucially, for the most part and with the exception of Élise, there is nothing heroic about these deaths, as there is for others (see chapters 2 and 3), although Athalie, Argélie, and *Rodogune*’s Cléopâtre are given a certain dignity in their defiant lack of repentance in the face of death.¹⁴⁵ Gilbert’s tragicomic Rhodogune is happy to bask in the fact that she has been proven innocent of the unnatural and unmaternal act of filicide. All are recuperated back into the patriarchy in one form or another, eliminated or silenced.

So, why do they die? Apart from the obvious (and insufficient) reason that historically they did die—an idea that fails to take account of invented queens such as Élise, or of the liberties dramatists took with their sources—it is evident that the didactic requirements of the Horatian maxim *utile dulci* (necessitating the punishment of vice), and the aesthetic requirements of the tragic genre, here coincide with the maintenance of the ideological tenets of patriarchy.¹⁴⁶ Although there is nothing specifically gendered in the condemnation of vice through the *dénouement*, it is noteworthy that in these cases, allowing poetic justice to triumph (which is far from a universal phenomenon in Early Modern tragedy)¹⁴⁷ and ensuring that the evil of a

Cléopâtre (*Rodogune*) or an Athalie or an Argélie is punished,¹⁴⁸ also involves the removal of a threat to the patriarchy, a woman in power.¹⁴⁹ In the case of Thomas Corneille's Amalassonte and Laodice, it also involves the removal of two lascivious women, one of them a widow bowed by an incestuous love. In the case of Améstris, her failure to die has more to do with the characterization of her son than of her. Bélus's refusal to kill her—despite her repeated pleas to be allowed “mourir en Reine” (V.ii) having lost the throne—and his successful thwarting of her suicide, result in her failure to “die as a queen” and force her to live as a subject. His virtuous behavior also throws into relief her “unnatural” activity by highlighting his continued respect for his mother and nature, a noteworthy comment on the royal mother-son relationship.

Although one cannot reduce the meaning of any play to the *dénouement* (and we will see in chapter 2 plays that applaud female rule, despite the fact that they are also removed from power as the curtain falls),¹⁵⁰ it is clear that the silencing of women, the recuperation into the patriarchy, provides resounding support for the status quo, albeit one that is to be expected within the dominant patriarchal paradigm of the time. What is perhaps more intriguing is when the removal of the “troublesome” element at the center of power does *not* result in the restoration of order or leaves an uneasy silence. In the case of *Rodogune*'s Cléopâtre, whose curse hangs in the air after her demise, the potential danger of a woman in power seems all the more terrifying precisely because it cannot be eradicated with her disappearance. However, to the extent that Corneille draws the audience to his demonic creation, spectators could also be led by her death to question the gender-biased status quo that relegates her to the margins of power, and against which she so vehemently struggles.¹⁵¹ Even more ambiguous is the potential reaction to queens Athalie and Élise, for whom the dramatists have contrived openly to evoke audience sympathy. In these plays, the issue of legitimacy is fundamental to the unease with

which they end. The similarities between the so-called illegitimate order, represented by the female ruler, and the legitimate order (in the persons of Joad and Sichée) call into question the validity of the hierarchy between the two.¹⁵² To the extent that both women have been presented as able rulers, and that their deaths are gratuitous and pointless—Athalie, since the régime for which she is sacrificed turns out to be disastrous, Élise, since her suicide is unnecessary¹⁵³—the *dénouements* can be seen to function in such a way as to paradoxically question the tenets of patriarchy that they appear to uphold.¹⁵⁴ At the very least, a highly ambiguous note is sounded.

Le vrai et le vraisemblable: Historical Reality
and Verisimilitude

If the demands of poetics and ideology can coincide in the *dénouements*, it raises the question of a similar coincidence between dramaturgy and ideology elsewhere. The crux of the matter here is that, frequently, the representations of these queens as the *furieuse* and/or *grande amoureuse* depend on considerable contortions to historical truth. It is insufficient to argue that history for the most part is merely a backdrop in these plays, and that historical truth is clearly sublimated to the importance of creating “un beau poème.”¹⁵⁵ In fact, when we recall that “un beau poème” for d’Aubignac, at least, is a *vraisemblable* one, a key issue emerges: namely the fashion in which efforts to adhere to *vraisemblance*, or on a different level, efforts to appeal to audience taste, facilitate the propagation of gender constructions. The question arises then as to the extent to which dramaturgical convention itself can play a role in the maintenance of power relations, and make of theatre a bastion of conservatism. Some of the more obvious examples of modifications to history should serve to illustrate the principle.¹⁵⁶

In the case of Elizabeth I, a sovereign whose self-representation hinged largely on the sublimation of her physical body to her political body and the exploitation of her celibacy as a

political tool, the transformation of celibate virgin to lovesick passionate woman of dubious chastity is striking.¹⁵⁷ Although all three authors of the Essex plays indicate in their prefatory remarks their concern with historical truth, it is, in fact, generally accepted that the Essex story was more myth than history — myth that, moreover, only took root after Elizabeth's death.¹⁵⁸ The queen of England was sixty-eight years of age at the time of the Essex rebellion, a fact that the three authors here ignore, textually, almost entirely.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Corneille manages to further obscure the issue by having the septuagenarian queen played by the dynamic thirty-six-year-old Marie Desmares, known as La Champmeslé. The inclusion of the ring episode in Boyer and La Calprenède, which makes of the queen an unwise and imprudent ruler, is more reminiscent of the latter's *romanesque* tendencies than of any historical truth, and is omitted by Corneille for that very reason. (That Boyer, in his epistle to the reader, justifies its inclusion on the basis that the story was widely believed by the English illustrates the point precisely: it is sufficient for an idea to be widely received, no matter how historically dubious, for theatre to be justified in its propagation). As regards the relationship between Elizabeth and her people, it is worth remembering that the queen was in general beloved by her people, and that Essex had considerable difficulty in raising popular support. The representation, therefore, of the people as reveling in the opportunity to rebel against the tyrannical and detested queen is entirely fictional.¹⁶⁰ Popular rebellion and civil unrest being a staple of received ideas concerning gynæcocracy, they appear here as accepted elements in that construction (underpinned by the additional element, in the case of the later Elizabeth plays, of the shadow of the regicide of Charles I). In the case of the Marie Stuard plays, the primary modification to history that concerns us here is the inclusion of the idea that Elizabeth was in love with Norfolk or that she had a physical relationship with him, which radically influences the interpretation of her political

motivations. Furthermore, in Regnault, her representation as manipulated pawn or devastated lover hinges on a number of key inventions: the telescoping of the events of seventeen years into twenty-four hours, the placing of Mourray's death before Norfolk's, the story of the false plot, her temporary madness. While all of these changes undeniably make for better theatre, they also contribute to the circulation of a particular construction of the queen in the public theatre-going consciousness.

With regard to Chaulmer's tragedy *La Mort de Pompée*, the playwright is on the whole faithful to his sources (Plutarch and Lucan), in his portrayal of the Romans and Ptolemy, but is wildly inventive in his depiction of Cleopatra.¹⁶¹ Where in Corneille's later play (see chapter 3 in this volume), the dramatist adheres to historical veracity to the extent that Cléopâtre is horrified by her brother's designs to execute Pompey rather than help him, in Chaulmer's version she, on the contrary, seeks to destroy the Romans since she is rejected in her love of Sexte, Pompey's son.¹⁶² Furthermore, the role of the (historical) pernicious advisor Photin, who influenced the king's advisor Theodote to urge the king not to spare the Romans, is here transferred to her. In other words, the role history attributes to her as friend of the Romans is here completely reversed to make of her a deadly foe. In the case of the plays that focus on her death, the entire depoliticization of the queen's character outlined above hinges on the suppression of significant historical evidence, and the prioritization of certain elements of the Cleopatra myth.¹⁶³ Finally the historical figure of Amalasantha, sixth-century Ostrogothic regent and queen, is viewed favorably by Thomas Corneille's probable sources, Procopius, Jordanes, and Cassiodorus (and indeed is regarded by modern historians as an intelligent, capable ruler, unlawfully exiled and later murdered, probably at the instigation of her cousin Theodahad, an ineffectual and selfish tyrant).¹⁶⁴ Corneille's presentation, therefore, in *Théodat* of a bloodthirsty, murderous, amorous fury might seem, at first glance, somewhat surprising.¹⁶⁵

So, why would dramatists take a historically politically successful female ruler and make of her an egotistical lovelorn fool? Why alter history? Or put another way, what is the primary criterion of *inventio*, whether in adapting history or in inventing subjects, largely or entirely (such as Élise, Argélie, and Améstris here)? Leaving aside possible ideological motivations, from a dramaturgical point of view it is commonly accepted that alterations to sources, like any other element of the play's genesis, were increasingly aimed at fulfilling the primary aim of pleasing one's spectators (or as Boileau later put it, to please and to move, *plaire et toucher*), while simultaneously paying greater or lesser attention to the debates of the time concerning both dramaturgical convention and the didactic aim of theatre.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, in the eyes of some theorists, only in adhering to the conventions of *bienséance* and *vraisemblance* could one appeal to the audience. Since our focus here is on the behavior and characterization of the queens, the convention that most interests us is the verisimilitude of character or *la vraisemblance interne*.

Key to the verisimilitude of character is the idea that characters behave in accordance with *bienséance*—the oft-debated ambiguous term that incorporates the notion of being “fitting” and of being socially appropriate. According to most critics, what is regarded as *bienséant* is that which corresponds to the cultural and moral expectations of the audience. According to Hélène Baby, internal verisimilitude or *bienséances* can only be established as a function of the spectators' mental expectations (“attentes intellectuelles”).¹⁶⁷ However, as John Lyons points out, verisimilitude is “not an empirical study of what audiences really expected but a model of expectations created for the audience.”¹⁶⁸ In other words, verisimilar theatre does not reflect expectations: it creates them. This performative role of theatre also underpins the idea central to *la vraisemblance externe* (or the verisimilar subject), upheld by d'Aubignac and opposed by Corneille, that theatre should represent history not as it was but as it should have been.¹⁶⁹ Verisimilar theatre, as has often

been remarked upon, presents, and hence creates, a version of events that, in the eyes of the *doctes* at least, is morally correct.

The significance of this for the representation of these queens is fundamental. Not only are received ideas concerning women *vraisemblable* (a fact that is unsurprising in itself), but more importantly the criterion of *vraisemblance* encourages and warrants (indeed, necessitates) the propagation of these received ideas. The adherence to and emphasis on these inherited codes of dramatic convention should not blind us to the ideological structures and hence power dynamics that underpin them.¹⁷⁰

For the most part, in these particular plays, we have little indication in the paratextual material as to why particular changes were made to historical evidence concerning the queens in question: the increasing, if tacit, acceptance of the superior importance of *inventio* over historical truth may have made justifications redundant.¹⁷¹ However, a key commentary can be found in the preface to Thomas Corneille's *Théodat*, which merits lengthy quotation:

Théodat fut associé à l'Empire des Gots par Amalante, & traita cette malheureuse Princesse avec tant d'indignité, qu'un peu après qu'elle l'eut élevé au Trône, il eut la bassesse de l'exiler. Quelques-uns adjoustent qu'il donna ordre qu'on l'emprisonnast dans une Isle où il l'avoist releguée. Ce caractere d'ingratitude m'a paru avoir quelque chose de trop odieux pour pouvoir estre souffert au Theatre. Ainsi j'ay tasché de conserver ce qui regarde la disgrace d'Amalante, sans en rendre Théodat coupable, & je me suis conformé pour le genre de sa mort, à ce qu'en écrit Blondus. Il nous apprend dans le troisième Livre de la premiere Décade, que Théodat consentit que les Enfans de quelques seigneurs Gots, à qui cette Reyne avoit fait couper la teste, vangeassent le Sang de leurs Peres en la faisant périr elle-même dans le lieu de son exil. Je ne sçay si en la peignant vindicative dans tout cet Ouvrage, j'ay affoibly les grandes qualitez que les Historiens luy donnent, mais il semble assez naturel qu'une Reyne à qui une illustre naissance a deû donner beaucoup de fierté, ne se puisse voir méprisée d'un Sujet [...] sans s'en faire outrage d'autant plus sensible qu'après l'avoir fait arrester inutilement, elle connoist qu'elle ne sçaroit

plus esperer d'autorité qu'autant qu'il luy en voudra souffrir. Ce sont des Crimes que les Maximes d'Etat ne permettent point de pardonner, & peut-estre Amalasonthe eust-elle été condamnable, si ne se voyant plus Reyne que de nom, elle eust fait scrupule de chercher sa seureté par la perte de celuy qui estoit la seule cause de son infortune.

Theodahad was given a share of the empire of the Goths by Amalasantha, but he treated this unfortunate princess so shamefully that shortly after she raised him to the throne, he had the vile idea of exiling her. According to some, he ordered that she be imprisoned on an island he had banished her to. This type of ingratitude, it seemed to me, was too heinous to be tolerated in the theatre. So, I tried to maintain Amalasantha's misfortune without making Theodahad guilty of it, and for the nature of her death, I adhered to Blondus' version. He tells us, in the third book of the first Decade [Flavio Biondo's *Decades of History from the Deterioration of the Roman Empire*] that Theodahad agreed that the children of several Gothic nobles, whom the queen had had executed, avenge the blood of their fathers by having her assassinated in her place of exile. Perhaps, in portraying her as vindictive in this play, I have diminished the fine qualities the historians attribute to her, but it seems natural enough that a queen, proud by her illustrious birth, would not be able to tolerate rejection by a subject [...] without being insulted, all the more acutely since having had him arrested to no purpose, she knew that she could only hope for whatever authority he allowed her. These are crimes which maxims of state cannot forgive, and perhaps Amalasantha would have been blameworthy if, realising that she was no longer queen but in name, she had tried to secure her position by assassinating the person who had caused her misfortune.

These remarks indicate that in the creation of the excessive character who is at the root of “trouble, désordre, horreur” (l. 1545) in her kingdom, Corneille has radically (and wittingly) altered historical reality. The historical roles of his two main characters have been categorically reversed, whereby the queen becomes the proud maniac and Theodahad her unfortunate victim. The queen's murder becomes her just dessert for a tyrannical regime rather than a crime against her (not to mind a regicide) and Theodahad is simultaneously whitewashed at her

expense. Most significantly, this hypothetical version of events is based on his understanding of how queens, proud by birth (a generalization in itself), *naturally* behave. In other words, while history may have provided him with a capable queen (*le vrai*), received ideas concerning women in power would tend to make the vengeful, vindictive ruler the more *vraisemblable* option.¹⁷²

Or would it? According to what set of criteria? *Vraisemblable* as woman or *vraisemblable* as (female) sovereign? Thomas Corneille's comments highlight the extent to which the representation of female sovereignty constitutes in many respects a veritable challenge for seventeenth-century dramatists, as the *mise-en-scène* of the very institution of gynæcocracy hinges on a paradox. In attempting to adhere to the criterion of character verisimilitude, in itself a prescriptive ideological construction aimed at defining (not reflecting) codes of behavior, dramatists need to choose which code of behavior they are interested in: that of *woman* or that of female prince. The two rarely coincide. In fact, one, paradoxically, tends to exclude the other. In sum, the dramatist needs to decide which of the queen's two bodies will dominate the representation: the (weak, female) individual or the (unshakeable, sacred) office.

A brief look at La Mesnardière's remarks highlights the problem, even allowing for the potential distance between his theories and dominant contemporary dramaturgical praxis. In his comments concerning the *vraisemblance* required by social status ("condition de vie") and by sex, the distance between what is required for kings and queens is considerable, and between kings and women apparently irreconcilable. All three descriptions reinforce a patriarchal discourse: the ideal humanist prince, the virtuous queen (consort, presumably), the angelic-demonic woman. A king, he stipulates, should be courageous, prudent, generous (*libéral*), and good (*bon*); queens should be "chaste, modest, serious, magnificent, calm and noble" ("chastes, pudiques, graves, magnifiques, tranquilles, & généreuses"); while *vraisemblable* women (meriting a great

deal more space) should be underhand, weak, modest, impulsive, passionate, suspicious, jealous, and so on, as the usual litany of essentialist generalizations is outlined. While stressing that his ideas on sexual difference are in line with those of the philosophers—the reference to temperament (“les divers tempéramens”) would suggest an allusion to the theory of the humors—he nonetheless does allow for exceptions:

Si l'Avanture est fondée sur la prudence d'une femme [...] il faut que laissant en arriere les foiblesses ordinaires de ce Sexe [...] il fasse agir cette Héroïne comme une excellente femme, incapable des defauts qui se treuvent en plusieurs autres.

If the plot is centered on the prudence of a woman, [...] [the playwright] must leave aside the usual weaknesses of this sex and allow this heroine to act with excellence, incapable of the faults which are found in many other women.¹⁷³

Notwithstanding this allowance for exceptions, however, the difficulty presented in creating a character who is both woman and queen, or, worse again, woman and prince, is highlighted by the overall thrust of the argument, together with the radical oppositions implicit in the categorizations.

How do dramatists try to resolve this problem, or try to meet the conflicting demands of these two codes of behavior? One obvious way might be to make them behave like La Mesnardière's exceptions, who rise above the “usual weaknesses of their sex” and behave with the sovereign virtue of the prince: that indeed is the model proposed at times by Corneille and du Ryer (see chapter 3 in this volume). Another option might be to allow them at least the dignity and sense of rank fitting for a queen, albeit without any sense of authority: this is what we find in Mairet's, Benserade's and La Chapelle's representations of Cleopatra, whose characterization is usually perceived by critics as *convenable*.¹⁷⁴ For the most part, however, in the plays examined in this chapter, the queens tend to behave in a fashion that aligns them with the cultural category of “woman”

rather than that of “queen,” not to mind “prince.” As *women*, these rulers are entirely *vraisemblable*, and remain coherent dramatic constructions for the most part.¹⁷⁵ However, as rulers, they fail radically to embody any of the ethos of sovereignty.

That some dramatists are aware of this conflict, and are uneasy with the representation of a verisimilar *woman* but an entirely *invraisemblable* (female) sovereign, manifests itself in the discourse of lucidity lent to certain queens. When female sovereigns acknowledge that they are not behaving as queens, they acknowledge the existence of a code of behavior that they do not exemplify; they are given an awareness of the unsuitability of their behavior to their rank, which in turn highlights that unsuitability. In Corneille’s *Essex*, Élisabeth is given a vague awareness of how she should behave, only to fail miserably to live up to it. Her prioritization of love over her duty and her *gloire* is evident in her oscillations from exhortations such as: “il est temps d’avoir soin de ma gloire / [...] Il faut paroistre Reyne” (“It is time to be solicitous of my *gloire* / [...] I should appear as a queen,” ll. 770, 778) to “Laisse, laisse ma gloire, et dy-luy que je l’aime, / [...] Presse, prie, offre tout, pour fléchir son courage” (“Forget my *gloire*, and tell him that I love him / [...] Urge, beg, offer everything in order to sway his courage,” ll. 849, 853). (It is noteworthy that *paraître* rather than *être* is used, as if the most that could be expected is that she appear a queen, rather than actually embody any queenly qualities). As her open declarations of love to Essex underline, her behavior does not resemble anything like a queen’s. “Fay qu’à ma passion je m’abandonne entiere” (“Let me abandon myself entirely to my passion,” l. 601) does not have the ring of sovereign discourse to it.¹⁷⁶ In fact, amorous confessions throughout these plays highlight a widespread capacity to forget or ignore the demands of rank and hence a general unsuitability to reign. In *Laodice*, the queen sees her love as degrading and shameful, long before she is aware of its incestuous nature. It is a punishment from the gods, apparently, for her excessive pride,

a sentiment unsuitable for queens, and unsuitable for women of her age (*Laodice*, ll. 489–497). Améstris is also given a certain shame regarding her love and is anxious to justify it as politically motivated (*Pirame*, V.iii). Expressions of guilt and shame by these queens imply a modicum of an awareness of the imperatives of their rank, even as they fail to meet them, an awareness that the private sphere should not enter into the public sphere, and simultaneously remind the audience (if such as reminder were needed) of their failure to measure up to the demands of their office.

If their love is unsuitable for their rank, so too are their frequent outbursts of fury and vengeance. As the eponymous hero laments in *Théodat* to the princess Ildegonde, “Quelle fureur, Madame, & d’un projet semblable / Qui croiroit qu’une Reyne auroit esté capable?” (“What fury, Madame; of such a plan / Who would have thought a queen capable?” ll. 1727–1728).¹⁷⁷ A diametrically opposed implication can be found in *Argélie* where the queen herself is given an understanding of “reine” as uncontrollable tyrant. According to herself, her behavior is precisely what one would expect from a queen. As she cries in her fury, when her plans appear to be going awry: “Reyne jusqu’au bout / Renverse, accable, tuë, assassine, pers tout” (“Queen to the end / Overturn, overthrow, kill, assassinate, destroy everything,” IV.viii), a particularly significant comment since it implies that the ethos of a queen regnant hinges on destruction and chaos. However, these examples of an explicit reference to rank are relatively rare. In the majority of cases, the dramatists appear to ignore the conflict between the prescribed codes of behavior for women and for sovereigns, and continue to define women in power by their sex, in a way which is not the case for their weak/tyrannical male counterparts. The two cultural constructions of female-ness and sovereignty remain distinct. Not only that, but those categories are presented as incompatible. In other words, the way the categories are represented in the plays *reinforces* them as separate. These plays are therefore

performative in the construction of gender and in the production of discourses concerning female rule.

To recap, the emphasis on *bienséances*/internal verisimilitude can facilitate, and therefore contribute towards, the propagation of gender constructions and of received ideas concerning gynæcocracy. Dramatic theory of the period holds that dramatic creations should conform to the dominant code of *mœurs* and to audience taste in order to succeed. However, the relationship between theatre as a cultural institution and audience *mœurs* and taste is not static but dynamic: theatre does not simply reflect current *mœurs* and taste but influences and shapes them. Just as these plays provide the lovelorn and/or furious queen for audience consumption, they simultaneously create a model of gynæcocracy, frequently at odds with historical truth, as chaotic and corrupt. In the model of queen regnant presented above, the creative choices made by dramatists reinforce a perceived incompatibility of women to rule, by refusing to perceive of them outside the boundaries of sex and gender, associated with the emotional and personal sphere that has no meaning in a patriarchal paradigm. Here, the personal is political not only in the sense that the queens conflate the two spheres, but in the sense that in the emphasis on the personal, the dramatists are committing a political act. In this fashion, theatre strives to manage the cultural anxiety produced by female rule and facilitate the diminution of the uneasy cultural reality it represents.¹⁷⁸

However, the issue is not always that simple, and it is precisely because of the dynamic nature of theatre, as art form, that its functioning cannot be reduced to the simple transmission of a single message. Thus there are times in these plays, not in all of them and not frequently, but times nonetheless where we are led to question the model of the inept female prince, and where we catch glimpses of another model, be it, as in the case of Elizabeth, Élise, Athalie, Améstris, and Cléopâtre (of *Rodogune*) where “the general assumption that

women are biologically unfit to rule is revealed by [their] political successes to be nothing other than a self-serving patriarchal fantasy,”¹⁷⁹ or be it, as in the case of *Athalie* and *Élise*, where their ultimate demise raises more questions than it answers, as suggested above, leaving an uneasy doubt, where the *dénouement* cannot ensure that the spectators leave as Corneille would have it, with their minds at rest (“l’esprit en repos”).¹⁸⁰ It is precisely in the exploitation of the potential of those other models and discourses, where government by women is celebrated, as we will see below, that we are reminded of the role of theatre, not solely in upholding the status quo, but in questioning it.



CHAPTER 2

THE DRAMA OF GENDER STRUGGLE: ANDROGYNY AND FEMALE GOVERNMENT

Between 1646 and 1662, a time period coinciding with much of Anne of Austria's regency, seven plays appeared in which defenses of female sovereignty are explored. From portraits of the patriotic warrior queen to the maligned deposed victim, collectively these dramas can be seen to investigate the interplay between gender identity and power dynamics prevalent in the society of the time, and to suggest alternative constructions of gender relations to those upheld by the normative discourses of sexual difference. This is not to say that we are presented with seven coherent celebrations of gynæcocracy. On the contrary, these plays are at times inconsistent and ambiguous, as concrete characterization conflicts with abstract ideas articulated. They thus point to the deep-rooted tensions that undercut the contemporary conflictual attitudes towards women rulers.

Ambivalent Approvals

An early example of these tensions can be found in Gillet de la Tessonerie's *Sigismond, duc de Varsau*, published in 1646, some three years into Anne of Austria's regency, probably performed (according to Lancaster) late in 1645.¹ Dedicated to the queen regent, it focuses on the eighth-century Queen Vanda of Poland, whose virtues, so the dedication tells us, had led her country to "faire justice à son sexe" ("do justice to her sex"),

by changing from hereditary to elective monarchy in order to allow her to reign.² The play sets out clearly to celebrate Venda, albeit in overtly male terms: her brief reign, we are told, provides an example of how a woman can harbor a truly male and noble heart (“un cœur véritablement masle et genereux”).

A succinct résumé of the feminist and specifically pro-gynæcocratic ideas in circulation at the time is given to Sifroy, the queen’s minister of state, to voice, as he defends the queen’s ability to rule. Firstly, as we saw in *Le Moyne’s Gallerie* (see Volume 1), *douceur* and beauty are framed as the physical manifestations of majesty and power, pointing not only to the peculiar mix of neo-Platonist ideas and gallantry typical of pro-woman literature of the time, but also to the prevalent belief in physiognomics, whereby physical beauty and gentleness become, in and of themselves, legitimizing markers of royal status. Secondly, in a reversal of traditionally received ideas concerning gender and virtue typical of the pro-woman literature of the time, women are here represented as embodying greater self-control, dispassionate emotion, and calm reason than men, qualities that by implication make them suitable for government. Thirdly, the idea that men have deliberately excluded women from education is evoked, and represented as fruitless, given their (apparently) innate intuitive intelligence. These various arguments culminate in a compelling defense of sexual equality, similar to that voiced at the same time by Du Bosc et al., based on the Augustinian topos of the ungendered soul:

Aussi nous confessons que de pareilles flammes
 Composent les Esprits des Hommes & des Femmes,
 Qu’un mesme Dieu forma les nostres & les leurs
 Sans qu’il ait fait les uns plus foibles ou meilleurs.
 Oüy l’Ame, ce rayon de la grandeur Suprême,
 Par sa propre vertu fait son genre elle-mesme,
 Elle n’a point de Sexe, ou n’est masle qu’alors
 Que la Gloire la porte à de nobles efforts.

So we must recognize that the same light
 Constitutes the minds of both men and women,

That the same God created theirs and ours
Without making one weaker or better than the other;
Yes, the soul, this ray of supreme greatness
Decides its kind by its own virtue.
It has no sex, or is only male when
Gloire inspires it to noble efforts.

(Gillet de la Tessonerie, *Sigismond*, V.i).

Only military action (“de nobles efforts”) is seen as a male prerogative.

In terms of characterization, the queen does indeed testify to a certain amount of political awareness in the first three acts of the play, guided on the whole by reason, liberal in recompense of the worthy Sigismond, although happy to leave much of the actual governance to him (III.i). Subjugating her desires to “maxims of State,” she prides herself on her self-mastery, despite a growing attraction to Sigismond (see her comments in II.iv and III.ii). Echoing the concerns of political theorists of the period, it is clear that the hallmark of fitness to govern is seen as self-control, and it is precisely in the mastery of her personal desires that the queen maintains she demonstrates “qu’avec raison nostre sexe à ses droits, / Et ses pretentions sur le trône des Roys” (“it is right that our sex has rights / And claims to the throne of kings,” III.ii). Furthermore, her rejection of any exogamous union and her emphasis on her rank and honor point to an awareness of the implications of that rank, lacking to the furious *amoureuses* examined above. However, the well-worn model of the female fury is perhaps too powerful (and too popular) for the dramatist to resist, and Act IV provides a familiar image, albeit clearly diluted, of the angry queen figure misguidedly seeking vengeance against the innocent hero. The play ends with what has been read as an abdication, triggered apparently by the queen’s realization that her council and people are calling for a king (another familiar topos); even if the queen continues to nominally share the throne with her new husband (as Sifroy suggests she should), she has at any rate handed over all authority to him.³ In sum, the character appears

rather incoherent, a fact which is in itself interesting. It is hard to resist the impression that despite the intentions outlined in the dedication, and the extolling of the merits of gynæcocracy in Sifroy's speech, the dramatist struggles to sustain the figure of a noble female prince he had announced in the dedication. Nonetheless, given the prevalence of the lovelorn fury as model, examined above, this struggle and the resultant portrait are in themselves not negligible.

A second example of a dramatic voice upholding female sovereignty can be found ten years later in Magnon's *Jeanne de Naples* (1656).⁴ Despite the poor quality of the play, it manages to convey some of the ambivalence with which the character of Joanna of Naples was associated, given the discrepancy between the heroine's own words and actions, and the way in which others perceive her.⁵ Here, the queen is represented as the only bastion of virtue in a depraved world of murder and deceit, an innocent victim of tyrannical kings and ambitious suitors, wrongfully accused of murder, adultery, and lasciviousness.⁶ Despite all the threats and accusations against her (discredited for the reader-spectator since those voicing them are themselves blithely plotting murders willy-nilly), the queen defiantly upholds her position. As her husband rails against his nominal power as consort, the queen opposes his *libido domi-nandi* by reminding him:

Je suis & Femme & Reyne, & par ce double titre
De tous nos diferends je me rendray l'arbitre.

I am both woman and queen, and by this dual title
I will arbitrate over all our disputes.

(Magnon, *Jeanne de Naples*, II.iii)

While the queen's power in a gynæcocracy is self-evident, the reference to a female prerogative to arbitrate in disputes is more unusual—perhaps a nod to the political role that women did play historically in that regard (to which Gournay et al. refer), or to the increasing cultural power of women (particularly within

the *salon* movement) as arbitrators of behavior. At any rate, the most interesting speech in the play is a forceful defense of hereditary divine-right monarchy (which merits quotation in full) addressed to the king of Poland. Here, Magnon gives it to his heroine to ardently uphold her own authority, and by extension female sovereignty, in terms traditionally associated with (male) kingship:

De la Divinité j'ay la toute-puissance:
Je puis vous témoigner que je regne en ce lieu,
Et de mes actions ne rends compte qu'à Dieu.
Je n'ay pour Souverain que ce Maistre du monde,
C'est là la seule base où mon Trône se fonde.
Les plus grands Potentats, tous ces fameux Rivaux,
Quelques puissans qu'ils soient, ne sont que mes égaux;
Encore en ces Estats, dont ils sont les Monarques,
Ils ont en dépendance, & leur titre, & leurs marques.
Les Electeurs, les Grands, les Milords, les Bassas,
Satrapes, Palatins, tous ces chefs des Estats,
Nous montrent que leurs Rois sont de vaines Idoles,
A qui des Conseillers limitent leurs paroles; [...]
Naples, dans sa grandeur, se regle sur la France;
L'un & l'autre Royaume est dans l'indépendance.
Pour le vostre [la Pologne] son droict est assez bien borné,
Et c'est un peuple enfin qui vous a couronné. [...]
Je suis Reyne par moy, vous un Roy par suffrage.

I have a divine omnipotence:
Let me remind you that I reign here
And that I am only accountable to God.
The Master of the world is my only sovereign
That is the only base on which my throne is founded.
All the greatest monarchs, all my well-known rivals,
No matter how powerful they are, are only my equals.
Moreover in these states where they are monarchs
Their title and their trappings are not autonomous.
Electors, grandees, lords, bassas,
Satraps, palatines, all these chiefs of states
Are proof that their kings are vain idols
Whose word is limited by their counsellors. [...]
Naples, in its greatness, models itself on France;
Both kingdoms are independent.

In yours [Poland], the rights of the king are limited,
 It is your people, in fact, who crowned you. [...]
 I am a queen in my own right, you are a king by election.
 (Magnon, *Jeanne de Naples*, IV.iii).

In this unmistakable celebration of a centralized power (which would have had particular resonance for a post-Fronde audience), the nature and origins of authority as absolute and hereditary take supreme precedence over any other unmentioned criterion (namely that of sex).⁷ Sovereignty is divinely granted and inherently ungendered; the queen is the equal of any of her neighboring (male) monarchs. The irony of the comparison between Naples and France serves to reinforce the dismissal of sex as a criterion for authority: gynæcocratic Naples can model itself on Salic Law France because biological sex is entirely discounted as a factor for government when compared with the fundamental importance of hereditary succession.

This tension between biological sex and rank or blood line is given its most powerful expression in Claude Boyer's tragedy-comedy *Fédéric* (1660), which provides a rare dramatic example of a woman cross-dressed as a king in a country where women are excluded from the throne, and in which a third defense of female sovereignty can be found.⁸ Noteworthy for this politically inspired transvestism, the play is particularly interesting for its exploration of the conflict between the hereditary principle of royal succession and the patriarchal principle of male governance, in sum between biological sex and blood line. Yoland, princess of Sicily, has been brought up as a boy by her father in order to retain the throne within the royal family, in the absence of a male heir, and to avoid the usurpation of his heritage by neighboring Aragonese rulers. The primary premise of the play is therefore based on the subversion of a legal equivalent to "Salic Law" (although it is unclear whether references to this law are to a specific written law or to unwritten customary law—see, for example, lines 33–38, 209–210), and hinges on the dual transgression of legal norms and gender

vestimentary norms. Although, in typical tragicomic fashion, the love intrigues and rivalries of the characters tend to dominate, compounded by the transvestism of the “king,” nonetheless love and politics are interwoven in such a way that spectators are repeatedly confronted with the issue of female sovereignty and its implications. The very disguise mechanism on which the plot hinges, and the inherent *être/paraître* opposition, raises the issue of the plasticity both of gender and of sovereignty. Within the fiction of the play, we as spectators are meant to believe that a woman brought up as a man can behave as a man; a woman dressed as a king can *be* a king, in practice if not in “essence.” Biological sex can be subjugated to social and cultural gender (although the heroine’s own comments on her disguise and sex belie this).⁹ For the admiral Frédéric, the most ardent defender of female rule in the play (and who, as the late king’s right-hand man, has been privy to the disguise since Yoland’s birth), it is not sufficient that the people accept the appearances of a male king; it is necessary that they accept a female heir to the throne and hence female governance. His intention is to orchestrate the overruling of the “vieille Loy” (“long-standing law,” l. 203) that excludes her, and for Yoland to abandon her disguise and rule as a woman (l. 302). For the first two acts of the play, Frédéric’s enthusiasm and optimism for this great event (“grand événement,” l. 393) works in such a way as to convince the spectators as to the feasibility of this project. The atmosphere created is one of great hope for the assured success of this great day (ll. 206, 270, 271). The centrality of the theme of female sovereignty is also underpinned by the presence at court of the refugee queen of Naples, Camille, whose primary concern is her throne (l. 1254) and being returned to it (l. 474), as she impatiently awaits military support from Sicily.

A key paradox of the play hinges on the fact that while the cross-dressing of the female heir was initiated to avoid dynastic usurpation, the disguised female heir views herself as a usurper—a usurper of male power, despite her legitimate rank.

She is legitimate by birth, an impostor by sex (ll. 29, 108, 238). The three arguments Fédéric raises to convince her otherwise are all redolent of contemporary political debates. In reply to her objection that her reign would be founded on tyranny, if the customary law were changed only by military force, Boyer gives it to the admiral to voice the common notion that power established by force can be legitimized if the subsequent reign is successful and just (ll. 244–245). The counterargument to her objection that only male governance is legitimate is one of meritocracy: “Mais vous en estes digne, & cela doit suffire” (“But you are worthy [of government], and that should suffice,” l. 250). Finally, in the conflict between the hereditary principle and male government, lineage is seen (by Fédéric at least) as more important than biological sex, as he prepares himself to persuade the people to opt for “a throne without a king, but of the blood of our kings” (“un Trône sans Roy, du seul sang de nos Roys,” l. 438).¹⁰ More familiar pro-gynæocratic arguments are later raised by Fédéric’s son, Valère: authority is *aimable* when exercised by both virtue and beauty (a reminder of the alleged female aptitude for government in their ability to inspire subjects’ love); skill and intellect are more important in government than physical strength, an argument Boyer later uses, almost verbatim, in his *Essex*, as we saw above (“L’adresse, non la force, évite la tempeste / Et le bras sur le Trône agit moins que la teste” / “Skill, not force, averts the tempest / And the throne is ruled more by one’s head than one’s hand,” ll. 1461–1462). While government is still perceived as a male prerogative, the fluidity of gender puts it within women’s reach. This is implicit in the momentary sovereign illumination, more common in serious treatments of the theme,¹¹ which Boyer gives Yoland at the abandonment of her disguise. Hampered by the disguise up until then, the abandoning of the signifiers of masculine identity paradoxically allows her to behave as a man, and to assume the role of king:

Mais me voyant sans feinte au rang de Souveraine
 Tout mon cœur se remplit de sentimens de Reyne; [...]

Du beau feu de regner mon ame est embrasée,
J'étois Fille en effet en Prince déguisée,
Mais renversant en moy tous ces déguisemens,
Il me vient maintenant de mâles sentimens;
Et quand mon foible Sexe est forcé de parestre,
Je me sens devenir ce que je cesse d'estre.

Seeing myself without disguise in the rank of a sovereign
My heart is filled with the sentiments of a queen; [...]
My soul is fired with the noble desire to reign;
I was indeed a girl disguised as a prince,
But as I abandon all this disguise,
I am now filled with male sentiments;
And now that my weak sex is forced to appear
I find myself becoming what I have ceased to be.

(*Fédéric*, IV.viii)

The treatment of female sovereignty nonetheless remains ambivalent. The *dénouement*, for example, does little to support gynæcocracy, as Boyer gives it the people to reject the hereditary principle in favor of male rulership only (l. 1440). While Yoland does end up on the throne at the end, it is as the elected king's son's consort.¹² Yet, to the extent that the elective monarchy that is unexpectedly put in place would have been judged with considerable disfavor in the prevalent discourse of the time, it seems unlikely that Boyer is making a political comment on its desirability, or on the undesirability of gynæcocracy. Rather, in the final act, his concern is no doubt to tie up, rather rapidly, all the tragicomic ends, orchestrate the prerequisite double-marriage, and above all continue the heroization of the eponymous *Fédéric*. A more significant factor of ambivalence is the characterization of the heroine, and the treatment of her cross-dressing. It is unusual to find the device of cross-dressing in a drama that treats of serious political themes, and both Lancaster and Forestier imply that the two don't marry well.¹³ However that "jarring" is in itself significant, and should not be dismissed as merely poor dramaturgy. Since the heroine is in male dress for the entire duration of the play, we can assume the issue is of some significance for the dramatist. As

Jean Howard demonstrates, a fruitful line of enquiry can be followed in investigating the role theatre can play a role in effectively co-opting the transgression of the sex-gender system, potentially implicit in cross-dressing, “by transforming it into fictions that depoliticized the practice.”¹⁴ Cross-dressing is particularly significant here, since it involves the appropriation of the ultimate position of (typically male) authority, through the adoption of the signifiers of male identity, and its implications are equivocal. On the one hand, the appropriation of a system of masculine signifiers, potentially threatening to the patriarchal order, is rendered eminently less threatening by the fact that the heroine never demonstrates any interest in or ability to rule, apart from at one short-lived moment, as quoted above; she is aligned in sum with the love plot rather than the political plot of the play. Moreover, the sex of the “prince” is never concealed from the audience; and she seeks throughout the play to be liberated from her male disguise, which opposes her “true” nature. Hers is what Jean Howard would call “a properly feminine subjectivity.”¹⁵ The enormous significance of *actual* cross-dressing as a site of gender struggle in society—one that was being constantly played out across all levels, from the servant classes to the ruling classes, as exemplified by Christina of Sweden—is diminished, as her characterization clearly contravenes any transgression that cross-dressing might suggest. On the other hand, despite her unhappiness, Yoland has convincingly played the role of the male king for all and sundry at court for many years, and has ruled successfully for the previous month. Her very predicament highlights the fragility of codes of gender identity, since she has adopted the signifiers of male identity with ease, if not with joy. The spectators therefore, although no doubt far more interested in the love intrigue and entertained by the equivocal situations the cross-dressing provokes than in politics, have nonetheless been confronted with the idea that a woman could play the role of the (male) prince, literally and metaphorically . . . if she wanted to.¹⁶ When

combined with the political alternatives raised by Fédéric, and the powerful dismissal of sex as a criterion for rule, the play works not only to suggest a challenge to the sex-gender system, and to the naturalness of the category of gender, but also to invite reflection on the exclusion of women from the throne.¹⁷

Warrior Queens in Tragedy

Considerably less equivocal in their defense of female sovereignty are the four plays that approach the topic through the dramatization of three of the same warrior queens who figure in the feminist galleries examined in Volume I, namely Zenobia, Semiramis, and Tomyris.¹⁸ In d'Aubignac's *Zénobie* (1647), Magnon's versification of the same play *Zénobie* (1660), Gilbert's *Semiramis* (1647), and Rosidor's *La Mort du Grand Cyrus* (1662), issues of androgyny, of rank, of virtue, and of female ability are explored, as articulated defenses of female ability coincide with the characterization and actions of the heroines, and assumptions concerning gender identity are disrupted. Significantly, the issue of the cross-dressing that warfare requires—a persistent criticism of warrior women elsewhere, highlighting as it does the instability of binary gender systems—is given little space here. In the two plays concerning Zenobia, the heroine is criticized by her antagonists as cross-dressed but the disapproval is countered by the larger favorable context. This is not because cross-dressing for protective rather than sartorial purposes somehow exonerates the warrior woman. As we saw earlier, the adoption of male dress, that is, male military armor, was precisely one of the harshest criticisms levelled at women who bore arms.¹⁹ But these plays in fact appear to present a tacit acceptance of precisely that gender instability, even as they struggle with it.

One of the most specific airings of the conflicting attitudes towards female military activity, and by explicit extension female government, can be found in d'Aubignac's *Zénobie*, in a verbal duel between the queen of Palmyra and the conquering

Roman emperor Aurélian (IV.iii), where the gender struggle that underpins the play is made explicit.²⁰ To the accusation that waging war is unnatural for women, Zénobie is categorical in her retort:

M'estoit-il défendu de conserver le tiltre d'Auguste à mon Fils comme son heritage? Je l'ay fait: par les armes, il est vray, mais cette autorité que les hommes s'attribuent de faire la guerre, est-ce un droict de la Nature ou bien une vieille Usurpation? La Souveraineté des Femmes est d'autant plus juste que la nature leur en a donné les caracteres sur le visage, & les commencemens dans le respect de tous les hommes. La valeur seule est le tiltre pour commander, & si vous n'en avez point fait de loix, nous en avons fait des exemples.

Was it forbidden for me to preserve the title Augustus for my son as his heritage? I did so, with arms, it is true, but this authority to wage war that men attribute to themselves, is it a right of nature or a long-standing usurpation? The sovereignty of women is all the more just since nature has ensured that they bear its characteristics on their countenances, and has given them its foundation in the respect all men accord them. By valor alone is one entitled to rule, and while you have not made a law to state this, we have given you examples of it.

(d'Aubignac, *Zénobie*, IV.iii)

The arguments raised by Zénobie in defending her military activity first present an attenuating or normalizing factor, by framing her actions as inspired by a desire to preserve her son's heritage, an eminently praiseworthy and *bienséant* motivation, before questioning the general principle at stake: namely the naturalness of a code of gender-specific behaviors, and by extension, characteristics. In sum, Zénobie questions the category of gender itself. For the queen, the definition of warfare as an exclusively male activity is a form of usurpation, as examples have shown. In the justification of female government, d'Aubignac has the queen voice the familiar physiognomics argument we have seen elsewhere, particularly explicit here with the reference to *caractères*. By implication, internal virtue

required for government manifests itself in external facial traits, beauty reflects goodness. Crucially, the train of Zénobie's argument, as she slips directly from the issue of military activity to government, serves as a useful reminder of the inextricable link between the two in the dominant discourse of the time. In fact, there is a veritable fusion of the two here, as the choice of verb *commander* highlights, implying both the commanding of troops and of a people, in a valorization of a particular understanding of sovereignty, that of the warrior-king, for which valor and military strength take precedence over the intellectual and moral virtues prioritized elsewhere.²¹

The normative discourse voiced by the Roman emperor also raises some familiar *topoi*:

Vous alleguez inutilement ces raisons & ces exemples: vous n'avez pas seulement attenté contre l'Empire des Romains, mais vous avez offensé leur gloire. Une femme qui leur fait la guerre est digne de risée, mais celle qui les a vaincus est coupable de leur honte. Ce sont nos Loix. Et pour la Vertu, souffre-t-elle une femme travestie vivre toujours dans la licence de la guerre & de la nuit? faire des meurtres avec joye, & porter continuellement la fureur dans les yeux? Ce sont des actions toutes criminelles & dont vous avez outragé la pudeur de vostre sexe autant que la dignité des Romains.

You are advancing these reasons and examples in vain; not only have you attacked the empire of the Romans, but you have insulted their *gloire*. A woman who wages war on them is risible, but she who conquers them is guilty of shaming them. These are our laws. And as regards virtue, is it acceptable for a cross-dressed woman to live the life of license of war and of night? Joyfully commit murders, and bear fury constantly in her eyes? These are criminal actions, and by them you have offended the decency of your sex as much as the dignity of the Romans.

(d'Aubignac, *Zénobie*, IV.iii)

In sum, female military activity runs contrary to conventional notions of female virtue; military disguise permits unsanctioned behavior (by implication, sexual, particularly given the common association between sexual and military ardor, and

the reference to *pudeur*); women should limit themselves to amorous conquests only. It is noteworthy how in the discourse of sexual ethics that underlines these comments, heroism for men becomes sadistic homicide for women. So far, so familiar. The reference to the outraged “dignity” of the Romans, however, points to something else. As Aurélian struggles to articulate why female military activity is against the law, what is repeatedly alluded to is the fact that Zénobie has shamed the Romans: it becomes apparent that that is her greatest crime.²² Not only does the queen represent a political threat as a foreign enemy, but as a woman she represents an embarrassment and irritation to their male *gloire*. The law she contravenes is the unwritten law of male domination. To the extent that Rome represents the archetypal patriarchy, Zénobie can be seen as a threat to the patriarchal order, the symptom of a disorder that her cross-dressing (as *femme travestie*) highlights. The emphasis in Aurélian’s and Marcellin’s argument on the nebulous notion of shame, rather than on any rational legal or political principle, points to the precarious foundation of the anti-feminist stance, which would limit female activity to that of amorous conquests. Furthermore, since Zénobie’s next reply highlights the earlier arrangement that had been in place under the Emperor Claudius and which was of mutual benefit to both Romans and to herself,²³ we are presented with an alternative possibility, a reminder that the “law,” even Roman law, is not immutable, and that a model which accords space to women can work.

To the extent that Zénobie’s courage, military skill, and military successes are repeatedly alluded to throughout the play, and given particular color in the account of her combat against the Roman general Marcellin in Act IV.ii—bearing her general Timagène’s arms, Zénobie is initially mistaken for him, a *quiproquo* that allows the dramatist to underline her extraordinary valor (IV.ii)—the character provides a concrete example of the challenge to gender codes that she voices. Her words and actions cohere, unlike some of her counterparts examined

in the first part of this chapter (although considerable importance is attached to the role of her generals also in her victories). Furthermore, in the emphasis on her patriotism, she is represented as a devoted sovereign: she has repeatedly fought for her people, and is ready to die for them (“Que le sang d’une Reyne coule pour son people” / “Let the blood of a queen flow for her people,” II.ii).²⁴ It is worth noting that although she is clearly an object of desire for her male entourage, there is little emphasis on her beauty (it is given three brief mentions), nor indeed of her chastity, both of which are specifically mentioned in the historical account, and which Le Moyne had included in his version.²⁵ Zénobie becomes, quite simply, an example of the fluidity of a sovereignty that necessitates military virtue. She represents the non-alignment of the categories of sex and gender, as is made explicit in the play: “il ne faut pas considerer le Sexe de son Ennemy, mais la valeur,” Aurélian admits; “elle avait un cœur, & faisait des actions d’homme” (“One should not consider the sex of one’s enemy but their valour; she was courageous and behaved like a man,” IV.vi). While courage is still being defined as male, the very validity of a code of sexual difference that defines virtue(s) in gendered terms is simultaneously called into question.

Twenty odd years later, in his versification of this play *Zénobie* (1660), Jean Magnon continues to play with the idea of behavioristic androgyny, and has the heroine characterize the illustrious women (warrior) rulers of the past as “De femmes par leur sexe, hommes par leur vertu” (“Women by their sex, men by their virtues,” II.iii).²⁶ Magnon’s choice of dedicatee is not arbitrary: as a widow, Christine de France had governed Savoie as regent officially from 1637 to 1648, and unofficially until her death in 1663. Praised in the dedicatory epistle for her *douceur*, majesty, intelligence, prudence, she is depicted as the embodiment of Magnon’s “perfect government,” a regent who, unlike Zénobie, managed to retain her states—a reference no doubt to Christine’s successful waging of the Piedmontese

Civil War. The role of the queen as warrior is given more attention, possibly a nod to the recent *frondeuses*, and the description of her in action in the present of the play is presented earlier to the spectator. The short third-person description of her combat with Marcellin in d'Aubignac's Act IV.ii—a combat in which she engages while in flight to seek reinforcements, and which she ultimately loses—here becomes an elaborate first-person account of a battle she ultimately wins, in Act II.ii, as her embodiment of a military ethic is implicitly celebrated. In the verbal duel with Aurélian (IV.iv), the principal elements of the prose version are maintained (although less space is given to the shame of the Romans): on the one hand, the impudicity implicit in cross-dressing, the unsuitability of arms for the fair sex; on the other, the non-gendered nature of valor, the automatic respect women command, Zénobie's role as a bulwark for the Romans. The association of military activity and government is here framed in terms of *gloire* and *empire*: “La gloire est de tout sexe, & j'ose encor vous dire / Que malgré vous, le mien estoit né pour l'Empire” (“*Gloire* is for both sexes, and I can tell you / That despite you, mine was born to rule,” IV.iv), this latter remark reminiscent of the arguments raised in the literature that argues for female superiority. In the context of the previous lines, *gloire* refers to military *gloire*, and yet the word has sufficient ambiguity to allow it to simultaneously imply the androgynous *gloire* of rulership, particularly in the context of the following line.

Rosidor's *La Mort du Grand Cyrus* (1662) sees another warrior queen, this time Tomiris, choosing widowhood over remarriage, as she vehemently rejects offers of marriage from her enemy Cyrus, and (somewhat less vehemently) from her ally Pyraxé, the king of Bactria.²⁷ Less space is devoted to accounts of her rule and military involvement than in the Zenobia plays, but we are nonetheless left in no doubt as to the nature of that role, and in fact are presented with the only example in these four plays of the queen bearing arms onstage, when she appears

“armée, l’épée nuë en la main” (“armed, an unsheathed sword in her hand”). Tomiris casts herself as a living proof of female capabilities and an exemplary model to be imitated:

A ce tyran fatal de la terre et de l’onde
Une Femme fait tête & defend le Monde:
Soyons un grand exemple, & par moy faisons voir
Jusqu’où peut nôtre Sexe étendre son pouvoir,
Qu’il commande en la paix qu’il commande en la guerre
Peut regner sur les cœurs, & gouverner la terre.

Against this tyrant [Cyrus], deadly on land and on sea,
A woman stands tall and defends the world.
Let us be a great example, and through me let it be seen
How far our sex can extend its power,
That it commands in times both of peace and of war,
That it can reign in hearts, and govern the earth.

(Rosidor, *La Mort du Grand Cyrus*, II.i)

The novel element here is that of the queen as defender of other peoples beyond her own. She is the rampart which the world pits against Cyrus’s conquering rampage (“le rampart qu’oppose l’Univers,” II.i), a divine agent who proves that the heavens are using a queen to avenge numerous kings, as well as her own desecrated army (“Le Ciel porte une Reyne à vanger tant de roys,” IV.iv). The legitimizing framework that casts the Amazon figure as state-savior, common in the galleries of illustrious women of the time,²⁸ here takes on even greater proportions, as she is framed as the savior of states beyond her own. The final execution of Cyrus — for which she had to temporarily suspend (*suspendre*) her virtue (V.ii) — is portrayed not only as an act of vengeance for her dead son, but also of all these others: as she cries, “J’ay vengé tout le monde” (“I have avenged everyone,” V.iv). Principled and courageous, Tomiris is above all eminently maternal. Her deep-rooted love for her son, her “only love” (“seul Amour”) for whom she guards the throne (II.i), is her defining characteristic, and the conflict between her principles and maternal tenderness is well sketched. While

it may seem contradictory to harbor high-minded principles and simultaneously seek vengeance, it is worth remembering that her vengeance is given little space overall, and is seen as largely altruistic. At the very least, Rosidor's Tomiris, this "Mere, non plus Mere" ("a mother, no longer a mother") as she laments twice (V.ii and V.iv), provides both an example of undisputed female sovereignty, together with undisputed military ability, and a counter-model to the furious infanticides of Laodice et al., examined above.²⁹

A final variation can be found in Gabriel Gilbert's *Semiramis* (1647),³⁰ a play in which the favorable treatment of female sovereignty is more in line with the dramatist's *Panegyrique des Dames* (1650), and his odes to Anne of Austria (1643) and Christina of Sweden (1651?), than with his earlier *Rhodogune*. In his lengthy dedication to his patron (and possibly employer) the duchess of Rohan, Marguerite de Béthune, the latter is represented as an embodiment of a moral androgyny, as his heroine will be, possessing "all the delicacy of your sex and the strength of ours" ("toute la délicatesse de vostre sexe & toute la force du nostre"), in other words, "la générosité & la douceur." The play sets out specifically to sketch a portrait of the duchess (providing "un crayon de [sa] vie"), just as the contemporaneous galleries provide indirect portraits of their dedicatees. Given this aim, and Marguerite de Béthune's military and political role in the religious conflicts of the 1620s, documented in her husband Henri de Rohan's memoirs,³¹ it is easy to see why Gilbert was drawn to the subject of *Semiramis*: the legendary Amazon figure provides an appropriate specular image of Gilbert's real-life warrior patron.³² Unlike the *Zenobia* plays, no opposing voice here mars the representation of her extensive military skills and boundless courage,³³ there is no mention of the prerequisite cross-dressing, and any taint of alleged inappropriate behavior is erased by ascribing her motivation to patriotism and uxorial fidelity.

Although Semiramis only appears as queen regnant in the final act, in full regal attire having persuaded Ninus to allow her rule for five days as Diodorus recounts,³⁴ Gilbert uses the opportunity to present a favorable portrait of her potential rule in two ways. Firstly, a desire for equity is emphasized in her presentation to the satraps of the case for their judgment.³⁵ Since Ninus is presented as a despot throughout, “a tyrant of kings” harboring “criminal passions,” who killed husbands in order to rape their wives (“Qui tua des maris pour violer leurs femmes,” V.iii), her desire for his execution is presented as a justifiable desire to rid the country of a tyrant.³⁶ Secondly, and most significantly, the populace clamor to have Semiramis proclaimed queen. As the new female sovereign is hailed with *zèle* and *fidélité*, the play ends with her declared intention to show them that a throne is worthily occupied by a woman (“Qu’un trône est dignement remply par une femme,” V.iv). Semiramis triumphs at the end in life and not in death, as will the female princes examined in chapter 3 of this volume. Interestingly, Gilbert embellishes Diodorus’s account of Semiramis’s military role in the conflict against the Bactrians, and invents entirely the idea of the people calling for her rule: the historical source is therefore modified to enhance the portrait of the heroine. Since, as Pellet puts it, “the role of queen and ruler is easily and naturally assumed,”³⁷ the dramatist strives, it would seem, to present female regnancy as an eminently feasible, indeed desirable, form of government.³⁸

These four warrior woman dramas each provide a powerful example of the use of the Amazon figure as an emblem of good government, an androgynous synthesis of “male” *générosité* and “female” sexual continence, this latter quality highlighted in the persistent rejection by all four characters of a second marriage (although this tends to be explicable more by an aversion for their warmongering suitors than an innate desire to retain their chastity, on which little explicit

comment is made).³⁹ In the case of Zénobie and Tomiris, both also represent the fusion of maternal affection and patriotism, a vital combination for the queen figure responsible for both the government of the state and the continuation of the dynasty. The portrayals are not unambivalent celebrations of perfection: there are moments when Tomiris is vengeful, Zénobie dependent, Semiramis coldly calculating. But the plays work as a whole to minimize these elements in the production of an overall favorable portrayal. The largely acceptant attitude towards their military activity, as their critics are discredited, points once again to the importance of rank as a deciding factor in constructions of appropriate behavior. Military action is the prerogative of the noble and ruling classes; hence the emphasis by these queens themselves on their rank and status (another reason for their aversion to any thought of an exogamous union with jumped-up self-made conquerors, as Aurélian and Cyrus are depicted) exonerates them from criticism. The dedications to Christine de France and Marguerite de Béthune, which point precisely to this synthesis of virtues and draw explicit parallels with Zenobia and Semiramis respectively, serve as crucial reminders that these Amazon figures cannot be dismissed as mere flights of male fancy, but have flesh-and-blood counterparts in reality. Their portraits provide further evidence of the ongoing challenge to a prescriptive code of sexual ethics that would limit the sphere of female activity, extending that activity in this case to the highest political echelons.

“Un roi sur deux est une reine”: The *Roi* as Epicene

While representations of moral androgyny are crucial in highlighting the gender struggle that is being played out in the society of the period, not least in the exclusion of women from the throne, that struggle is further thrown into relief by what we might term a case of linguistic androgyny. A final point needs to be made then concerning this type of androgyny, which is

relevant throughout this study but which it is fitting to examine here.

In the area of gender and language studies, one of the most contentious examples of phallogocentrism, to use Derrida's neologism, is the widespread use of masculine nouns and pronouns to refer to both men and women. This use of the generic masculine as the unmarked gender, both grammatically and semantically, reflects and propagates a hierarchical gender belief system and fosters the general invisibility of women. A particularly contested issue is the generic use in many languages of the noun for *man* to designate both the human species and the male of the species. For Romance languages like French, as is well known, the evolution of the Latin word *homo* meaning human being, and corollary sidelining of the Latin *vir*, meaning the male, has led to the fundamentally problematic use of the word *homme* as a noun that is both inclusive and exclusive of women.⁴⁰

However, an interesting counterexample is apparent in the use of the word *roi* in the politico-literary discourses under examination here. Quite simply, across all genres, the noun *roi* is at times used to refer to queens. Where *l'homme*, meaning humankind and supposedly inclusive of women, is at times used exclusively, conversely the word *roi*, in appearance so clearly exclusive of women, is at times used inclusively. In linguistic terms, we might say that although the grammatical gender of *roi* is masculine and its lexical gender is male, the referential gender is at times female. While this is not always the case (which is precisely what makes it significant), as a usage it is common enough to merit attention. Since it would be neither practicable nor useful to list every such occurrence, and since a considerable number of instances are signaled elsewhere in this study as they have appeared, a few examples from the dramatic literature should suffice to illustrate the point.

Many of the most striking examples can be found in the plays concerning Elizabeth I. In Elizabeth's defense of her role

in Boyer's *Essex*, she claims in reference to herself, as we saw earlier, that it is virtue and reason that make kings great (“[qui] font la grandeur des Rois,” l. 195), while in Regnault's *Marie Stuard*, Nolfoc warns Elizabeth that her behavior will damage her reputation since kings are looked upon as on a stage, all the more visible since elevated (Regnault, *Marie Stuard*, II.ii), the use of *guillemets* highlighting the status of the warning as a *sentence*. Similarly in La Calprenède's *Le Comte d'Essex*, Soubtantonne (Southampton) undermines Essex's conviction of Élisabeth's continued favor, by evoking the capricious power of monarchs, warning him that “La puissance des Rois ne peut être bornée” (“The power of kings is without limits”) (La Calprenède, *Essex*, l.245). In the same play, one of the queen's *demoiselles* tries to comfort her by lamenting, “C'est un fâcheux destin que le destin des Princes” (“The destiny of princes is an unfortunate one”) (La Calprenède, *Essex*, l. 1413), while in Thomas Corneille's version, Salisbury exhorts Élisabeth in desperation to remember that clemency is “la vertu la plus digne des Rois” (“the most worthy virtue of kings”) (Th. Corneille, *Le Comte d'Essex*, ll. 887–888). La Calprenède's Northbelant (Northumberland), when urging the eponymous Jeanne to talk to her people in order to win back their favor, appeals to the fact that “Les visages des Roys ont un éclat auguste” (“The countenance of kings has an august brilliance”), which keeps their subjects in check (*Jeanne, reyne d'Angleterre*, I.iii). In the same play, Gilfort (Guildford) maintains that Queen Marie (Mary Tudor) is trying to charm Jeanne as *le prince* would “his” subjects at the beginning of a reign (III.ii). Later, it is given to Marie herself to occupy the linguistic space of *roy*:

Et je croy que le Ciel soumet un peuple à nous,
 Pour recevoir des Roys un traitement plus doux
 And I believe that God subjects a people to us,
 That they may receive a more gentle treatment at the
 hands of kings.

(La Calprenède, *Jeanne, reyne d'Angleterre*, IV.i)

The royal plural “nous,” with which (the female) Marie alludes to herself, conflicts lexically with the *roys* emphasized by its place on the caesura of the following line. A particularly striking example of gender conflict can be found in Boursault’s *Marie Stuard*, as Norfolk greets in horror Elisabeth’s announcement of the heroine’s fate:

Condamnée! Eh Madame [...]

Ce mot injurieux n’est point fait pour les Rois.

Dans la gloire suprême où le ciel les fait naître,

Maîtres de tout le monde ils n’ont que Dieu pour Maître.

La Reine qu’on opprime, et dont il est l’appui,

De tout ce qu’elle a fait n’est comptable qu’à lui.

Condemned! Oh, Madame [...]

This offensive word is not for kings.

In the supreme glory which the heavens bequeath them,

Masters of the world, they only have God for a master.

The queen who is being oppressed, and whom He upholds,

Is only answerable to Him in all that she does.

(Boursault, *Marie Stuard*, ll. 1152–1157, IV.iv)

The grammatical feminine of *condamnée*, *reine*, and *elle* conflicts markedly with the masculine *rois*, *maîtres*, and *ils*: here, the *condamnée*, the *reine*, is a *roi* and a *maître*.⁴¹

Instances of this linguistic usage are not limited to representations of Elizabeth. Scudéry’s Andromire, conscious of “la majesté des Rois” (I.iv) that she embodies, signals her sense of kingship in her decision to release a captive: since “kings are made in the image of God,” she sets out to imitate them (I.v). It is later given to an ambitious prince to further remind her that a king’s word should be inviolable (“La parole des Roys doit estre inviolable,” IV.iv). Venda is an example of how kings can mete out both good and evil (“les Roys [sont] dispensateurs, & du mal & du bien” (*Sigismond*, I.iv). du Ryer’s Vashti, queen of Persia, sees herself as an example of “kings” for whom the only alternative to the throne is the grave (du Ryer, *Esther*, ll. 375–379); Thomas Corneille’s Cléomène reminds the queen of Argos that “a good king” is responsible for “his” subjects’ blood

(*Timocrate*, ll. 275–276). As a true king (“roi véritable”), du Ryer’s *Dynamis* appreciates sound advice (*Dynamis*, ll. 173 and 1288); she is an example of “les Rois, seuls Juges souverains” (“kings, sole sovereign judges,” l. 939), while Nitocris in her actions is conscious that “chacun.../ Se plaît aveuglément à censurer les Rois” (“everyone...blindly revels in criticizing kings,” ll. 391–392).⁴² In all of these cases, the words *roi* or *prince* are used to denote a woman. Put another way, one could argue that the referents *roi* and *prince*, deeply entrenched in traditional usage as lexical signifiers of male power, are in fact used as epicene nouns, that is, nouns that without changing their grammatical gender can refer to either sex—in sum, nouns of androgyny.

That this usage cannot be taken for granted is highlighted by the instances when the word *roi* clearly refers to a generic male king. In the passage cited in chapter 1 from Boursault’s *Marie Stuard*, a distinct opposition is set up between *femme* and *roi*: “Le règne d’une femme est un règne odieux /... Un sceptre ne sied bien que dans la main des Rois” (I.iii). A similar opposition is explicit in Quinault’s *Astrate*, when Sichée insists: “Un roi sied mieux enfin au trône qu’une femme” (“A king is more suited to a throne than a woman is”).⁴³ Boyer’s *Fédéric*, in the passage cited above, wants the Sicilian people to opt for “un Trône sans Roy [i.e., male king], du seul sang de nos Roys [i.e., royal dynasty]” (*Fédéric*, l. 438). If Venda is anxious to prove that “nostre sexe à ses droits, / Et ses pretentions sur le trône des Roys,” the implication is that *nostre sexe* and *Roys* are naturally opposed (*Sigismond*, III.ii). Here, exemplifying the type of binary linguistic paradigm that supports hierarchies of difference, sexual or other, the word *roi* is used to connote everything that woman is not. In the rhetoric of exclusion, it remains the basic building block, a powerful linguistic tool that appears to automatically disqualify women.

However, just as binary hierarchical codes of gender differentiation or sexual ethics can be seen to falter in the politico-moral conceptualization of sovereignty, so too here does the

hierarchical linguistic code falter, as the space of the *roi* is occupied by women. The decision in these instances to avoid the term *reine* is a reminder not only of its ambivalence—meaning both king’s wife and female ruler—but also quite simply of the fact that it doesn’t carry the political clout of the referent *roi*.⁴⁴ In these pronouncements concerning rulership and government—these *sentences*, pseudo-*sentences*, or assertions concerning the role, duties, qualities, fate of the monarch—women, while invisible, are no less present. The generic class of *rois* is used inclusively. This use of the masculine as a site of inclusion of the feminine, or what Zoberman might call this “shifting nature” of the signifier *roi*, points to the way in which *roi* can be seen as a “[site] of conceptual shifts.”⁴⁵ The fluidity of gender inherent in the conceptualization of sovereignty, repeatedly discernible in the material examined in this study, becomes apparent in the very appropriation of the basic linguistic referent. This is not to say that any of these writers are deliberately subverting the language at their disposition, or consciously exploiting its limitations (although some may be), but it is revelatory of an awareness, perhaps a tacit acceptance that, at times, queens can be kings.



CHAPTER 3

DRAMATIZING THE FEMALE PRINCE: VIRTUE, STATECRAFT, AND VIRGINAL WIVES

While representations of the warrior queen go a certain way towards challenging the construction of government and power as exclusively male prerogatives, the most radical challenge to that construction can be found in plays where the emphasis is on government as an androgynous moral and intellectual activity. Between 1644 and 1689, seven plays dramatize the reality of a female capacity to rule with intelligence and patriotism: Racine's *Alexandre le Grand* (1666), Bernard's *Laodamie* (1689), Corneille's *La Mort de Pompée* (1644), *Sertorius* (1662), *Pulchérie* (1673), and du Ryer's tragicomedies *Dynamis* (1653) and *Nitocris* (1650).¹ When viewed collectively, it is clear that not all of the queens concerned are given the same degree or type of virtue or political skill—a panoply of qualities are highlighted, from the moral virtues of rulership to a capacity for reason of state politicking to dogged patriotism—but through a *mise-en-scène* of capable self-determined female monarchs, juxtaposed in some cases with an exploration of the dilemma that marriage represents for the queen regnant, all these plays dramatize the exercise of political virtue by women and explode the myth of gender-differentiated sexual ethics.

Statecraft, Politics, and Sovereign Virtue

The first issue of note is that, in this small group of plays, the legitimacy of the queen figure is an accepted and unquestioned

fact. At times, this legitimacy is underlined by explicit reference—as in Laodamie’s divinely bequeathed throne (l. 153), her sacred rights (l. 1314, see also l. 1360), Nitocris’s “divine spirit” (l. 147), or the fact that Nature has bestowed on Dynamis “the supreme power” (ll. 997–998), this last a particularly ironical comment given the traditional emphasis on the *unnatural* quality of gynæcocracy. For the most part, however, it is underlined by the role and behavior of the characters. Cléopâtre (*Pompée*), Viriate, Pulchérie, Axiane, Laodamie, Dynamis, and Nitocris behave as queens, characterized by a sense of rank and *gloire* on the one hand, and an ability to act as political agents on the other.²

With du Ryer’s two mid-Fronde creations, spectators get a very concrete sense of the nuts and bolts of government. Since the plot of *Dynamis* centers around the queen weaving her way through a minefield of conspiracy, the very fact that she survives at all, not to mention that she finishes in a position of strength, is in itself significant.³ Both queens are given a considerable political acumen that sets them up as capable rulers. In the case of Dynamis, the first myth that du Ryer explodes is the idea that women make poor rulers since they have a propensity to flattery. Dynamis’s imperviousness to plotting is highlighted in her first angry appearance onstage, when, framing herself as a true king (“Roi véritable,” l. 173), she foils her half-brother’s attempts to corrupt her council by promptly dismissing her vile counsellors (“conseillers odieux,” l. 171), indicates a willingness to disown the same brother for his attempt to paint the pernicious Arcas in a favorable light (ll. 279–284), and rails against flattery in general (ll. 225–226).⁴ However, although dismissive of poor advice, Dynamis approves of consultation as good political practice. The issue is raised following the deputation of the grandees to the queen (IV.iv). While Trasile views such a deputation as an insult to royal authority and upholds the idea that everything is permitted for kings in the defense of that authority (“tout est permis aux Rois,” l. 1312), Dynamis is quick

to point out the dangers of an unlimited power (“un pouvoir sans limites”), including the curbing of free speech, which she maintains merely fosters flattery. Where Taxile indicts the “criminal audacity,” “temerity,” and “insolence” of the grantees, and urges her to punish them, the queen sees the course of action he recommends as that of a tyrant (see their respective speeches in ll. 1293–1328).⁵ So that advice can be evaluated, good government requires discernment, a quality that she maintains she has, as she highlights her ability to distinguish between an outspokenness that demonstrates zeal for the sovereign and one that demonstrates self-interested audacity (ll. 1321–1322). To ignore advice, she insists, is to be unfit to reign (“Et qui fuit les conseils, & les veut dedaigner / Se declare luy-mesme indigne de régner,” ll. 1323–1324).⁶ Consultation is key also in du Ryer’s *Nitocris*, where the queen’s strategy of interviewing all four of the main protagonists concerning her marriage choice can be read as indicative of either a genuine willingness to seek advice or the political shrewdness of a monarch anxious to maximize loyalty from all quarters (see ll. 925–932).⁷

Given the interest du Ryer gives his queens in welcoming counsel, it is fitting that he also gives them an appreciation of the “ungovernable monster” (“monstre indomptable”), which is public opinion,⁸ in addition to an awareness of the dangers of calumny, and of the centrality of a good reputation to the exercise of power. The attention, for example, Dynamis accords her *gloire* and reputation is not solely due to her pride, but also to her belief that it is the basis on which the strength of her reign is predicated; her reputation (“cette renommée”) is more powerful a tool of good government than any armed force (ll. 249–250). It is because of this that calumny of the monarch (in this case, the idea that Dynamis is conspiring with Arcas) justifies drastic measures (ll. 189–192). In the case of Nitocris, it is calumny of her champion that she is determined to punish, if it is revealed to be such, as she sets herself up as a model other monarchs would do well to imitate

(ll. 1207–1212). Other indications of a considered statecraft are not lacking: Dynamis is given a belief in the necessity of dissimulation (l. 230), is party to the idea that the fear of punishment is no substitute for being faced with it (ll. 653–656), believes that the presence of the monarch can quench rebellion (l. 594), sees the establishment of stability and peace (“le repos & la paix”) as the role of the perfect monarch (ll. 622–623), and maintains her own goal will always be the good of her subjects (l. 1292). Nitocris’s political thinking is revealed in her readiness to use intelligence networks (l. 1252), in her healthy suspicion of ambitious courtiers (l. 1232), in her appreciation of the value of recompense (l. 270), and in her belief in the symbiotic interdependency of monarch and “champion”: to harm Cléodate, the “support of the state,” is to harm her (ll. 1235–1238).⁹ The prioritization of state concerns is also evident in her investigation of the rumors of conspiracy concerning the same Cléodate: to rule well, it is as important to guard against those whom one loves as much as those whom one hates (ll. 1287–1288; see also ll. 1291–1292). Finally, her political acumen manifests itself in her exploitation of celibacy as a power-broking tool. In a fashion not only similar to Elizabeth I (who used her own celibacy as a political tool) but also of Catherine de Médicis (who used the celibacy of others as a political tool), Nitocris is anxious to keep Axiane at court in order that neighboring princes might continue to vie for the latter’s affections—a situation that would prevent both the establishment of any real peace between the rivals, and also the development of any hostilities towards the court of Nitocris (ll. 197–204).¹⁰ This strategy is perceived as reason of state by Cléodate (l. 252), who later advises a similar tactic to the queen as regards her own marriage plans. Celibacy is therefore the sign under which the play hangs, since its use in diplomatic relations is indirectly what makes Cléodate seek to leave the court in the first place. This early nod to its importance in dynastic politicking prefigures the *dénouement*.

The topicality of these ideas is self-evident. The condemnation of flattery, the importance of reputation, the necessity of the presence of the monarch are all common themes that surface throughout the century in political writings that otherwise diverge in stance, and on which there is little dispute.¹¹ Even more central are the two debates on which political theorists are not unanimous, namely the advantages and disadvantages of punishment and recompense, often linked to discussions of the royal virtues of clemency and liberality,¹² and the debate concerning the role of the royal council, the monarch's advisors, and the importance of consultation in general.¹³ Dissimulation is widely accepted as key to court politics and explicitly advocated repeatedly in the *Bréviaire des politiciens* attributed to Mazarin, chief minister of course at the time of du Ryer's writing.¹⁴ Intelligence networks were, and continue to be, part and parcel of political power struggles. The question here is not whether du Ryer has created two heroines in the fashion of a Richelieu, or how he was influenced by a humanist tradition, a reason of state philosophy, or ideas of mixed prudence—although the fusion of political traditions that the queens appear to represent is in itself noteworthy. The question is not even what resonances these ideas, particularly those concerning the role of the *grandees* and royal council, would have had during the Fronde.¹⁵ My point is quite simply that du Ryer makes political players of his two heroines, as shrewd and as aware of the mechanics of government as any competent dramatic male monarch.¹⁶

The actions of the queens throughout these plays serve to underline the extent to which their discourse of statecraft translates into action. Following Proxène's revelations regarding Trasile, Dynamis organizes immediately for the arrest of people who, by implication, are Trasile's accomplices (ll. 1175–1178). She has Trasile himself locked up (ll. 1384ff), after her suspicions of his treachery are confirmed (l. 1366), and organizes to put Proxène's testimony to the test in a confrontation between

her and Trasile (V.ii), before the latter's escape clearly illustrates his guilt. Furthermore, although she finds out about the conspiracy because of Proxène's jealous confession, rather than because of any statecraft of her own, and although it is clearly no strategic masterplan of hers that brings about the convenient *dénouement*, but rather the weakness of the opposition, it must be remembered that du Ryer gives her a certain role to play in this, since it is she who sows the discord between Arcas and Trasile in order to weaken the enemy side—a plan she sees as divinely inspired. As she comments, in another example of astute statecraft:

Car quand les ennemis ont un corps si puissant,
On commence à les vaincre en les desunissant.

When one's enemies form such a powerful body
It is in disuniting them that one begins to defeat them.

(*Dynamis*, ll. 1835–1836)¹⁷

The victory therefore is in many ways hers, as Poliante acknowledges (l. 1837). While ruthless when she believes it is required (see l. 1873), *Dynamis* is nonetheless understanding, although unforgiving, of her enemies. She is not surprised that the illegitimate Trasile would want the throne, aware that it would be difficult to be descended from a monarch without wanting to bear its hallmark on one's brow (l. 1186). Rather what infuriates her is the fact that he is trying to ruin her name in the process. Similarly, while she greets Trasile's death with a cold pragmatism, conscious of how his fate might deter other usurping *traîtres* (ll. 1971–1976), she is also moved to pity by his fate (ll. 1957–1964).¹⁸

This tactical maneuvering by the queens, frequently linked to a political prudence, is accompanied by other sovereign virtues, particularly in the case of Nitocris. The entire play revolves around the queen's efforts to achieve complete self-mastery by conquering her love for her champion Cléodate,

partly because such an exogamous passion for a subject is inappropriate to her rank (ll. 329–332)—a common topos at the time—and partly because marriage might diminish her political power (ll. 349–360), a point I will return to later. Setting herself the aim of “mastering herself” (“[se] dompter [elle]-mesme,” l. 366), in the monologue that opens Act II, the queen treads a troubled path, at times losing sight of her goal, before ultimately triumphing. It is noteworthy that her struggle is presented precisely in the terms common to political discourse of the time.¹⁹ Du Ryer depicts the queen in the grip of a wide range of emotions, in order to highlight the extent of the battle she is living and to highlight the importance of the victory. She is indecisive regarding Cléodate’s request to leave court (she refuses him permission to leave (I.iii), grants it (III.i), and then revokes her decision once more (III.ii)), is jealous following her beloved’s confession of love for resident princess Axiane (IV. vii), frustrated both with her paradoxical impotence (ll. 1415–1418), and with the fact that it is precisely her promotion of Cléodate that encouraged him to offer his heart to Axiane (ll. 1431–1434), and is even briefly led to consider a betrayal of all her principles by punishing Cléodate for conspiracy without any proof (ll. 1445–1448). However, in finally renouncing her desire for Cléodate and accepting his love for Axiane, Nitocris demonstrates a magnanimity that signals her achievement of self-mastery (albeit a self-mastery fueled in part by her desire to rule alone):

Pour gagner sur soy mesme un pouvoir souverain
 Il faut estre long-temps à soy mesme inhumain,
 Comme les autres biens d’une valeur extreme
 On n’a jamais pour rien l’empire de soy-mesme.

To gain a sovereign power over oneself
 One has to be hard on oneself for a long time,
 Like anything else which is extremely precious
 Self-mastery does not come without effort.

(*Nitocris*, ll. 1629–1632)²⁰

It is fitting for a queen engaged in a quest for sovereign self-mastery that her *modus operandi* be based on that crucially important of princely virtues, justice. This is particularly apparent in the last two acts.²¹ As she arrests Araxe, three times in fifteen lines she stresses that he will be treated fairly (ll. 1202, 1206, 1217)—although, as we later learn, she already has sufficient proof of his treachery (ll. 1275–1284)—just as she later stresses her ardent opposition to abuse of her power (ll. 1229–1230) and to tyrannical behavior (ll. 1338–1340).²² Du Ryer ensures furthermore that these are not empty words: in V.iii, we see her actions corroborate her words as she invites Araxe to confess his crime. In this rare *mise-en-scène* of a queen as judge (discounting the scenes concerning Essex and a love-lorn Elizabeth), Nitocris skillfully treads a fine line between a discourse of clemency (repeating her offer of grace three times) and one of political pragmatism and rigor, manifesting considerable diplomatic skill that eventually pays off. Her innate sense of justice meets a policy of clemency that is revealed to be politically efficient.

While Dynamis does not share the same virtues of justice and clemency as her counterpart Nitocris,²³ it is significant that du Ryer nonetheless gives her the quality of self-control, and even more significant that the quality is framed specifically within a political context. In the opening lines of II.i, we receive a detailed description of her past as monarch, as she herself portrays it to Poliante:

J'ay veu d'un œil constant & d'un cœur invincible,
 Tout ce que la fortune avoit de plus horrible:
 J'ay veu sans me troubler tout mon Estat troublé,
 J'ay veu trembler mon Throsne, & ie n'ay pas tremblé.
 Ny le Royaume en feu, ny le Royaume en cendre
 D'un si noble degré ne m'a point fait descendre:
 J'ay tousiours esté Reine, & l'on m'a veu par tout
 Sur le debris d'un Throne & constante & debout.

I have seen with a firm eye and an invincible heart
 The greatest adversities of fortune.

I have seen without turmoil my state in turmoil,
 I have seen my throne tremble, and I have not trembled.
 Neither the kingdom in flames nor the kingdom in ashes
 Has seen me descend from my noble position.
 I have always been a queen, and I have always been seen
 Both constant and upright on the ruins of my throne.

(*Dynamis*, ll. 353–360)

To this stoicism and calm in the face of all adversity, she adds courage and constancy in her self-portrait, in a clear evocation of key qualities for good government in the neo-Stoic construction of the ideal prince.

Driven by “the love of honour” (l. 562), *Dynamis* also has an acute sense of rank and *gloire*, although at one point the two are presented as conflictual. Plagued by court intrigue, and thwarted in her attempts to send her beloved Poliante back to his own country, *Dynamis* decides (Act II.iv) to abdicate, a move that she sees as sacrificing her rank to her *gloire* (ll. 705–706). Two scenes later, however, in Act III.ii, away from the pressure of Poliante’s refusal to leave and Trasile’s scheming, those reasons seem to have lost their validity, and *Dynamis* reconsiders her dilemma in a lengthy monologue that provides an insight into her appreciation of her royal position. Her decision to stay hinges primarily on the idea that it is shameful to give up her birthright (ll. 841–848), cowardly to flee (ll. 870–874), and that it is nonsensical to abandon the one means of vengeance at her disposal, which in turn will contribute to her *gloire* (ll. 875–886).²⁴ Interest in maintaining her throne, however, does not entail unconditional greed for power. On the contrary, it is only tenable if her personal *gloire* and adherence to her own moral standards are not compromised. It is for this reason that the mere thought of Arcas on the throne, in other words the maintenance of her power by dishonorable means, was earlier unthinkable (ll. 241, 244). Despite some ambiguity therefore, *Dynamis* can be aligned with Nitocris as a worthy, formidable, and astute sovereign.

Perhaps the best example of the simultaneous embodiment of political acumen and sovereign virtue is Corneille's *Pulchérie*. Elected empress by the Senate, and in theory free to choose her own husband, the Byzantine ruler is immediately aware of the impossibility of choosing her beloved (but very young and inexperienced) Léon.²⁵ While her desire to reign facilitates her decision and while, like Nitocris, Corneille gives it to her to wonder at the wisdom of any marriage (a point I will return to later), there is still no doubt that she loves Léon and that the subjugation of this love to her political role requires strength. Through her opening declaration "Je vous aime, Léon, et n'en fais point mystère" ("I love you, Léon, and I make no secret of it," l. 1), her insistence that Léon alone is her joy and desire ("Léon seul est ma joie, il est mon seul désir," l. 847), a situation that only death can alter (l. 851), and the evocation of her prioritization of politics over love as a sacrifice (ll. 1224 and 1662), Corneille paints a character who knows what love is but who finds the strength to turn her back on it, in a subordination of personal to political concerns consistently lauded by political theorists. Her election to empress casts her in a new sphere. As she insists twice, "Je suis Impératrice, et j'étais Pulchérie" ("I was Pulcheria, I am now the empress," ll. 754 and 794), and self-mastery is required. To affirm her supreme power over all, she will start by affirming it over herself (ll. 761–762).²⁶

Throughout the play, women's capabilities to rule are clearly not an issue and the political ability of the empress is underlined in two ways. Firstly, it is framed as an accepted fact, since she has already successfully ruled on behalf of her brother Théodose for the previous fifteen years.²⁷ Hers is the omnipotence ("toute-puissance," l. 230), and she has the ability, according to Martian, to once again rule for two (l. 552). Secondly, her political acumen is foregrounded in her immediate understanding of the Senate's power-games and the political significance of her choice. As she recognizes, for the senators to grant her the authority to choose her own husband

is merely for them to cover themselves from potential criticism: if her choice proves unsuccessful or unpopular, she alone will be blamed and she alone will be left to calm the chaos (ll. 731–744).²⁸ Furthermore, Corneille gives her a shrewd perception, as she tries to explain to a tearful Léon (III.iii) and later to his sister Irène (IV.ii), of the potential rivalries and hence unrest and rebellion that the choice of Léon could provoke. It is also significant, in this game of political table tennis, not only that Pulchérie refuses (initially) to make a decision and plays the Senate at its own game in deferring to its authority, but that when she does so, she does so on her own terms, requesting them not to name anyone, but specifically to name Léon or to let her rule alone (ll. 1029–1031). When this strategy fails, the empress continues to demonstrate an ability to think and act quickly, as she rapidly devises another solution that allows her to maintain her authority and fulfil her desire to reign, namely marriage to Martian. (Again, the speed of her decision can be seen as indicative of a type of divine grace, which now that she is sovereign, inspires her). In the final act, Corneille presents her as the quintessential empress, deciding her own fate and that of Martian, Aspar, Irène, Justine, and Léon in successive scenes as they appear before her, expecting and exacting obedience from all, in a discourse punctuated primarily by imperatives.²⁹

If Nitocris, Dynamis, and Pulchérie behave as queens, the original of the species dates from 1643 to 1644. With the Cléopâtre of *Pompée*, Corneille is the first to break from the model of the passionate, lovelorn or furious queen, although, as we saw above, others continued to propagate it after him.³⁰ In this play, regarded by his contemporaries as one of his greatest masterpieces, Corneille focuses on a politically active moment in the Egyptian queen's career in 48 BC, like Chaulmer, rather than the events leading to her death that interested Benserade, Mairat, and La Chapelle. Unlike Chaulmer, he is largely faithful to his historical sources in the representation of the queen

as friend of the Romans, and he uses his focus on this period in her life to paint the portrait of a sovereign-in-the-making.

The first reference to Cléopâtre in the play hints at her ambition and her eagerness to gain access to the half of the throne that is her due (ll. 216–220). Certainly, ambition is one of the dominant characteristics of the queen: it is the only passion worthy of a princess according to her (ll. 431–434), and love is clearly in its service (ll. 425–430, 957–963). The assessment later given by Corneille in his *Examen* where he describes his Cleopatra as politically ambitious rather than as the lascivious and lovelorn character of historical myth would seem to be borne out.³¹ However, Corneille does not entirely do justice to his creation. Ambitious as she may be, Cléopâtre is not blindly so.³² Ambition is only entertained to the extent that it is in harmony with, and fosters, her *gloire*. Any ignominious routes to the throne are rejected, as the thought of gaining power by any means less than honorable is inconceivable (ll. 435–438). It becomes apparent that it is honor, *gloire*, and sense of rank that characterize her most. She is, according to her equerry: “une Reine / Qui soutient avec cœur et magnanimité / L’honneur de sa naissance et de sa Dignité” (“a queen / Who upholds with courage and magnanimity / The honor of her birth and of her position,” ll. 726–728). It follows then that love, ancillary to her ambition, is in turn ancillary to her sense of *gloire*. In reply to her lady-of-honour Charmion’s comment that love has little hold over her (l. 369), she answers that for rulers (“les princes”) because of their noble birth and blood (an interesting reminder of the ideas concerning the physiological distinctions of the nobility), virtues rule over passion (ll. 370–373). The princely virtue of self-control, the mastery of passion, central to the image of the ideal sovereign, is here given to a queen whom popular myth represents as one of the most passionate of history; her embodiment of it is highlighted by the use of the signifier “prince” to refer to herself, as we saw in the case of other female rulers above. (See also line 617 where she refers

to herself and Ptolomée as “rois l’un et l’autre.”) Furthermore, these are not empty words. It is clear that despite her love for César, she would defend Pompée if she could (ll. 357–364): marked by a moral probity, her love will always be “exempt of infamy.” She therefore could theoretically be simultaneously César’s “amante” and “ennemie” (l. 381)—a common dilemma for Corneille’s heroines.

An acute sense of moral integrity is likewise central to Cléopâtre’s political agency. In her opposition to the male figures of the play, including César, she gives voice to an ethic of justice and clemency that contrasts radically with theirs, attempting to rekindle in her brother a sense of sovereign virtue that his advisors have smothered within him (the “haute vertu” of their rank—ll. 272–276), unprepared to accept crimes justified in the name of the state, flatly objecting to Ptolomée’s discourse of tyranny,³³ and to César’s ethic of conquest (see l. 1336). Just as Livie intervenes to Auguste in *Cinna*, it is Cléopâtre who pleads with César for the lives of the very advisors she detested, Achilles and Photin, asking him not to bloody (“ensanglanter”) the crown that his favor and support have won back for her from her brother (ll. 1344–1345). To pardon Pompée’s killers (and by implication to favor a nonviolent ethic), she maintains, would indicate that she had regained her place as sovereign (ll. 1345–1346). Not only is a discourse of sovereign clemency given here to a queen but a nonviolent reason is portrayed by Corneille as acting in women.³⁴ Furthermore, a level of political reflection is highlighted in her comments on the unsuitability of certain advisors for their role, as they struggle under the weight of their power (ll. 1193–1200), while the only reflection on the vanity and fragility of power in the play is given to her to articulate (ll. 573–588), as Pompée’s ignoble fate permits her to reflect on “ce que nous sommes” (“what we are,” l. 574).

Ambitious, astute, virtuous, morally superior to her male counterparts, the portrait that emerges of Cléopâtre is one of an upright, ethical, and reflective queen.³⁵ According to Michel

Prigent, “Cléopâtre incarnates monarchical legitimacy, heroic authenticity, and a rejection of Machiavellianism”; she represents “the politics of greatness” (“la politique de la grandeur”).³⁶ Certainly, Corneille does not hesitate to celebrate her succession to the throne, as a sole and unmarried monarch, at the close of the play, a celebration marked by the reaction of her people who clamor to see her, and regret she has only come to power now. She is a gift to her people, “un bien si précieux” (ll. 1797–1800). Government by women then is represented not only as an acceptable reality, but as an eminently desirable one.

It is worth noting that within this framework of sovereign virtue, in her case, beauty is nonetheless given a crucial role. Throughout the play, and even before the action of the play itself, Cleopatra’s power is entirely encapsulated in her beauty. It is because of her beauty, and the love it inspires, that César used his influence to return lands to her father, and lent him support (ll. 297–312). It is on César’s love and his arrival that her power hinges.³⁷ There is less emphasis, then, on the fact that the throne is hers by hereditary claim, rather than on César’s role in empowering her, in the past and in the present (see l. 1289, for example). Ptolomé’s fearful comment is revelatory in this respect: “Otons-lui les moyens de plaire et de régner” (“Let us take away from her the means of pleasing and ruling,” l. 660). It would seem that *plaire* and *régner* are synonymous in this case; to please César is to reign, since he will return her crown to her. The idea that Cleopatra’s power stemmed explicitly from her seductive beauty is as much part of historical myth as is the idea that she was lascivious and dissolute. It might seem, then, that Corneille’s portrayal of Cléopâtre ultimately only reinforces a stereotype of her as the beautiful seductress—a common construction for the woman in power—who is somewhat dependent on the patriarchal figure of César.³⁸ However, that idea does not withstand examination since Corneille gives his heroine so many of the qualities of a good ruler, and paints a more complex character than one who solely depends on her

beauty. Furthermore, it is worth noting that her beauty is at times perceived as an exterior manifestation of sovereign virtue (“une majesté douce”), in keeping with the political discourse of the time (see ll. 948–950). Ultimately we are left with the striking portrait of a female prince who takes her place at the helm of the state, with moral and legal legitimacy—a portrait all the more striking precisely because, as is frequently noted, the future queen is not indispensable to the plot.

Politically active in a very different way from Cléopâtre, and the fifth example of a capable female prince, is Racine’s Axiane, an Indian queen in his second play *Alexandre le Grand* (1666), a drama that (like *Sertorius*) enjoyed a resounding success at the time of its creation, although neglected by posterity.³⁹ Axiane, like Élise (*Astrate*) and Viriate (*Sertorius*) before her, is an invented queen. While dramaturgical necessity can explain her invention,⁴⁰ in itself unremarkable, it cannot explain why Racine decided to give her almost a quarter of the lines of the play, the only monologue of any length, and the only direct confrontation with the ambiguous hero Alexandre.⁴¹ That he did so is no doubt due in part to a desire to create a striking role for Marquise-Thérèse Du Parc.⁴² However, numerous strong dramatically intense roles could have been created for the character of Axiane without necessarily giving her the characteristics she is given.

Although Axiane is not given the same kind of sovereign virtue as Nitocris, Pulchérie, or Cléopâtre, or the same political acumen as Dynamis, she merits inclusion here because of her passionate defense of her country. Like du Ryer’s heroines and Viriate before her, Racine’s depiction is not of a warrior woman, but rather of a leader interested in defending her states through the conventional means of the agency of her male allies and army. By implication one of the *princes* referred to by Taxile at the outset (l. 13), who have rallied together to defend their provinces from Alexandre’s all-conquering advances, she embodies an ethic of fierce independence and resistance, determined not

to surrender (ll. 75, 653) and anxious to rally military support from all quarters (ll. 73–76, 651–652). Her *gloire* and her sense of rank are particularly apparent in her outright rejection of the idea that her throne could become a gift from her enemies and that her reign would hinge on an obligation to Alexandre: it becomes clear that she would rather not reign at all, than reign under those conditions (ll. 807–810, 815–824; III.iii). While her fiery temperament could lead one to perceive her as an arrogant hothead,⁴³ it is worth remembering that Racine initially portrays her as a calming influence on Porus, anxious to try her powers of persuasion on Taxile (ll. 276–277 and II.iv); it is only on Porus’s alleged capture that she upbraids Taxile for his failure to serve country and state (ll. 781–784). Her persuasive techniques extend to Taxile’s own men whom she convinces, most unusually, to oppose their king, for the greater good of the provinces (ll. 667, 1289–1290). It is ironic that while subsequently prevented, to her extreme annoyance, from joining her troops on the battlefield and confined in Taxile’s camp during the battle (ll. 703–710)—in a telling demonstration of the perceived need to enclose and control the female, and reminiscent of the enclosure of Sabine and Camille in Act III of Corneille’s *Horace*—she already subverts that enclosure by rallying support for her cause.⁴⁴

Axiane’s alignment with a military ethic could be seen as unfavorable in a play that harbors a veiled criticism of war-mongering (paradoxically, in a work ostensibly aimed at the glorification of Alexander the Great/Louis XIV⁴⁵), if it were not for the fact that her military ambitions are framed in terms of defense rather than conquest. From I.iii to IV.iii, it is to a role of *défenseur* that she tries to incite Taxile (ll. 311, 1227). In this she differs from Alexandre, whose thirst for conquest is indicted by all of the main characters,⁴⁶ and indeed from Porus whose bellicose patriotism is tinged by an obsessive desire to demonstrate himself as strong a military force as Alexandre.⁴⁷ This distinction is given its greatest airing

in her confrontation with Alexandre in Act IV.ii, where she explicitly juxtaposes her lack of military ambition with the Macedonian's policy of conquest. Attributing this lack of ambition (perhaps somewhat naïvely) to Porus also, the comparison becomes one between they who are content with their states, and he who behaves as a tyrant (see ll. 1102–1122).⁴⁸ Although one could argue that her *gloire* is misguided,⁴⁹ and that her passion places her at a far remove from any theory of the ideal sovereign, on the other hand, her reaction in defending her states from the threat of attack is entirely commendable and very much in keeping with those political theories that treat of war as a necessary evil.⁵⁰

From the cardinal political virtues of prudence and justice, to self-mastery, political astuteness, or passionate patriotism, the evidence of these plays points to the capacity of women to embody the moral and intellectual virtues associated with good government, and hence to undermine the construction of the unruly woman in power by presenting an alternative model—a model borne out in reality across the Europe of the period, we must continue to remember, as the numerous recent studies on queens have underlined.

The Politics of Marriage and Celibacy

In parallel with this representation of sovereign virtue in women is the second element of the challenge to the construction of authority as male-only, namely the treatment of marriage for marriageable queens—a key theme in these plays, the recurrence of which reflects an awareness of the dominance of the marital model of government in political thought. Collectively these plays can be seen to examine a range of scenarios, including the most radical where, when faced with the perceived incompatibility between gynæcocracy and the patriarchal institution of marriage, it is given to queens to consider not that they shouldn't rule, but rather that they shouldn't marry (and/or don't want to marry), suggesting a route all the more

innovative when one recalls the ambivalence with which voluntary female celibacy was traditionally treated (by men).⁵¹

One situation envisaged, and perhaps the most atypical, is that of a categorical rejection by a queen of marriage as a political game. In the case of Axiane, Racine gives his heroine a powerful self-determination quite simply by allowing her to refuse to marry a man she does not love. Her fear of this scenario, as articulated in Act I.iii, comes to fruition in Act V, when Alexandre (with condescending reference to her “vain sorrows” (“*inutiles douleurs*”) at the loss of Porus), while inviting her to continue reigning (ll. 1166–1169), also invites her to reassure her states by choosing a husband (i.e., Taxile). In her unequivocal refusal of Taxile can be read an uncompromising refusal to conform to the dictates and expectations and traditions of a patriarchal order.⁵² Even when Taxile is finally provoked by her insults to threateningly remind her that her fate and indeed states are essentially in his hands (ll. 1237–1240), it falls on deaf ears. She continues her defiance until the very end, clearly preferring death to subjugation (ll. 1251–1252), still railing against her confinement in the camp (l. 1397), challenging Alexandre (ll. 1448–1450, 1461–1464), and refusing to be used as an object of barter or exchange, even if it means sacrificing Porus to Alexandre. Even after Taxile’s death, Axiane is prepared to die, proclaiming her love for Porus (ll. 1543–1546). Her autonomy as a person transcends her role as sovereign, and as a young unmarried woman she can be read here, in the same fashion as Anne M. Menke has read the seventeenth-century widow, as “a site of resistance to the political and sexual economies.”⁵³

What makes this refusal even more remarkable is that it affects everyone. One of the criticisms aimed at Racine when this play appeared, and to which the dramatist replied in his preface, was the idea that Alexandre was depicted as of lesser heroic stature than Porus.⁵⁴ The central character of the play has usually been seen to be one of these two or, more unusually, Cléofile.⁵⁵ However, it is arguable that the one character

who is really holding the threads of power is Axiane. Not only does she exert a large influence over Taxile and Porus and their respective fates, but most interestingly Cléofile and Alexandre are also implicated in her actions: Axiane's decision concerning Taxile indirectly affects the possibility of Alexandre's marriage to Cléofile. As Alexandre comments, regarding Taxile:

Et puisque mon repos doit dépendre du sien
Achevons son bonheur pour établir le mien.

And since my peace of mind depends on hers,
Let us grant his happiness in order to guarantee mine.

(Alexandre le Grand, ll. 983–984)

If Alexandre can persuade (or force) Axiane to marry Taxile, the latter would be more likely to favor the union between Alexandre and his sister.⁵⁶ Cléofile, who initially persuaded Taxile not to fight Alexandre, and feels responsible on this account for the fact that her brother incurred Axiane's scorn, is equally aware of the potential consequences of Axiane's refusal on her own fate (see, e.g., ll. 1333–1336). Twice Alexandre appears to grant Taxile power over Axiane (ll. 869 and 1418–1420), but it becomes clear that it is an empty power (just as Alexandre's own power is consistently thwarted by Axiane since he insists on channeling it through Taxile). Potentially bereft of her states, a virtual prisoner, Axiane is nonetheless empowered by her refusal. It is she who, at the center of this chain reaction, is the controlling mechanism. That Axiane would seem to be aware of this is highlighted by her defiant cry to Cléofile: "Vous me craignez enfin" ("In fact you fear me," l. 1457). It is in fact only Taxile's death—the elimination of the element that Axiane refused to accept—which finally restores Alexandre's power to him in the final scene. The dynamics of power then shift, as Alexandre decides the fate of Axiane and Porus. While one could argue that such a refusal of marriage is politically imprudent and that Axiane puts her states at risk, the play makes no mention of this nor does it lead to an

unhappy conclusion. The curtain falls on political and personal fulfilment for Axiane as she marries her beloved and will go on to reign with him.⁵⁷ What is particularly interesting about this fictional universe is that Racine allows this young rebellious queen to triumph alive. That this triumph is a necessary corollary of the dramatist's insistence that the real subject-matter of the play is the *générosité* of Alexandre⁵⁸ cannot entirely deprive it of significance. The portrait remains of this central figure as a defiant and independent queen, an agent of her own destiny and to a large extent that of others, who insists on her autonomy as an individual as any male hero would.

While Axiane is allowed the freedom to refuse a suitor, her situation is rare. More common throughout much tragedy and tragicomedy of the period is the topos of the "enforced" dynastic marriage, perceived as part of the condition of queenship. Corneille elaborates on the issue in *Don Sanche d'Aragon* (1650), where, although the chief interest lies in questions of legitimacy and the nature of sovereignty (particularly topical during the Fronde), the plot is used to highlight the particular political difficulties faced by marriageable queens D. Isabelle and D. Elvire. Despite their legitimacy, a male monarch is perceived as necessary for the stability of the state. Bound by the obligations of *raison d'état*, these queens have little freedom: their rank necessitates the sacrifice of any personal desires.⁵⁹ Among the plays under examination here, Catherine Bernard's *Laodamie, reine d'Épire* comes closest to this model, albeit with a twist. Initially, despite her love for exiled prince Gélon, Laodamie is obliged by her late father's will and testament to marry the neighboring prince Attale, precisely because of the military strength that a male consort represents: "mon sceptre demande / Que le bras d'un époux l'appuie et le défende" ("my scepter requires / That a husband's arm support and defend it," ll. 17–18). The queen's sacrifice of the personal to the political is summed up in her lament at the very opening of the play: "Je m'immole" ("I am offering

myself as a sacrifice," l. 27). An atmosphere of urgency and fear is created from the opening scenes by references to her crown as "tremblante" and civil unrest as rife (l. 97). Marriage is necessitated by reason of state (l. 96). However, the queen clearly does not see the evaporation of her own authority as a corollary of marriage or of male military support. When Gélon expresses his fear that important decisions would be made by Attale, and not her, after their marriage, the queen bristles at the implication that a change in her private status would in any way encroach on a change in her public status (ll. 163–165). This emphasis on the necessity of a male monarch persists throughout the play and is used by Bernard to chart the evolving conflicts of the queen. For the death of Attale, while appearing to release the queen from her angst, only in fact changes its nature. Bernard's twist in the model of enforced dynastic marriages takes the form of a shift in the well-worn conflict between love and duty. Here, love and duty are aligned (to the extent that both are calling Gélon to the throne) in opposition to the more novel element of *amitié* for her sister, since Gélon is in fact in love with the latter.⁶⁰

Crucial to the representation of this need for a male king is the voice and role given to the people. With increasing intensity throughout the play, the populace clamor specifically for Gélon to take the throne. While this popular will is initially expressed by the intimidating minister Phénix (see, e.g., lines 514, 523, 537)—whose word is questionable given his self-interest—it translates into a palpable pressure after the declaration of war (l. 755), as allusions to the unrest of the people and their need for protection increase in number and intensity. As the play unfolds, and the state is increasingly threatened, Laodamie moves to prioritize the state (and her erstwhile love) over her cherished sister, favoring *devoir* (duty) over *amitié* (friendship) in a fashion lauded by moralists at the time.⁶¹ Faced with both a personal and political rejection by Gélon, for whom the crisis at hand seems irrelevant, and deeply resentful now of him, Laodamie swallows personal pride in favor of political

stability: “L’État est le plus fort, je veux vous faire roi” (“The state is the stronger, I want to make you king,” l. 1269).

The irony of this insistence by the people on a male monarch in the case of this upright, honorable female prince (an insistence that ultimately costs them her life) is highlighted by the description Bernard gives of the queen’s meeting with her people. In sum, Laodamie’s appearance before her subjects is explicitly represented in terms of the quasi-mystical effect that the monarch’s presence was perceived by the political theorists of the time to entail. Nothing, Guez de Balzac argues, can resist the presence of the king.⁶² The people, Bossuet would say, revel in the sight of the prince, who can therefore engender in them a deep love.⁶³ Bernard gives an awareness of this dynamic to the queen who sets out deliberately to show herself to her subjects in order to reestablish order (“Allons, et nous montrons à des sujets ingrats” / “Let us go and show ourselves to these ungrateful subjects,” l. 1337). The result is all that she could have hoped for:

Aussitôt que la reine a paru dans la place,
 Le respect naturel que lui doivent les cœurs
 A dissipé l’orage, a calmé les rumeurs.
 Cette crainte qu’en nous le juste Ciel imprime,
 Pour ceux qu’il fait régner par un droit légitime
 Impose le silence aux plus séditieux. [...]
 La reine parle au peuple, et se fait écouter,
 Quelques-uns à ses pieds vont enfin se jeter.

As soon as the queen appeared in the square,
 The natural respect which all hearts owe her
 Dispelled the storm and calmed the rumblings.
 This awe, which heaven justly instils in us
 Of those it sets on the throne with legitimate right,
 Imposes silence on the most seditious souls. [...]
 The queen spoke to her people, and was listened to,
 A few at last went to kneel at her feet.

(*Laodamie*, ll.1356–1361, 1369–1370)

As the legitimate embodiment of sovereign authority, the queen’s very presence dissipates disorder in a powerful manifestation of

the non-gendered nature of the office of sovereign. That this moment of encounter between subjects and sovereign provides, in fact, the platform for the queen's accidental murder, as the treacherous assassin Sostrate appears, is symptomatic of the general disorder that haunts the play, and that is the hallmark of Bernard's troubled universe. With disturbing simplicity, in an explosion of mob violence, the legitimate female prince is removed, sacrificed to the dominant will of a patriarchal militarist society that cannot accommodate her, as the people get their sought-after king. Although Nérée (as morally upright and patriotic an individual as her sister) is immediately proclaimed queen on Laodamie's death, and so the play ends with a queen as monarch, the popular demands throughout the play imply that it is Gélon as her husband who will in fact rule. Crucially, the same Gélon, although an able warrior, is cast as entirely disinterested in government. Bernard's dramatization of gynæcocracy ends with an implicit enquiry as to the judiciousness of replacing a woman deeply marked by a sense of duty to the state with a man who can cry to his beloved Nérée, "Hé! que m'importe à moi de la paix, de la guerre, / De ce peuple indocile, et de toute la terre?" ("What do I care for peace or war / For this unruly people, for all the world?" ll. 965–966).⁶⁴ Ultimately, this dramatization of the conflict between gynæcocracy and patriarchy ends on a very somber and unsettling note—a striking example of the frequent imbalance between *dénouement* and expectations.

A third model in the representation of the dynamic between gynæcocracy and marriage, and one that allows precious autonomy to the queens concerned, is suggested in the depiction of the celibate, or at least virginal, queen. Here the most striking examples are *Sertorius*, *Pulchérie*, and *Nitocris*.

Nearly twenty years after the appearance of his Cléopâtre in *La Mort de Pompée*, Corneille created one of his most striking representations of queenship with the character of Viriate, queen of Lusitania, in the highly successful *Sertorius* (1662).⁶⁵ The limited critical attention accorded Viriate has frequently

tended to view her as primarily ambitious or love-struck.⁶⁶ The queen is indeed both of these things, but she is also much more. Key to her characterization, and not unlike that of Racine's Axiane, is her representation as a stateswoman, committed to her country's defense and future.⁶⁷ It is precisely her position as a political figure that Corneille points to in the preface to the play: obliged to invent female characters, since none was provided by history, he imagines a granddaughter or great-granddaughter of the Spanish leader Viriathus, and underpins the extent to which she embodies the same resistance to Roman domination as the earlier hero by giving her a feminized version of his name. Where Plutarch indicates that Lusitanian ambassadors called for Sertorius's aid against the Romans, Corneille gives it to a woman to have the political discernment, lacking to her vanquished neighboring kings, to seek the general's assistance (ll. 1581–1582). Throughout the play, the proud Viriate—who evokes her ancestry in her first appearance (ll. 435ff), and whose speech is peppered with references to her throne, crown, birth, rank, people, and country—sets herself up as a more worthy ruler than her (male) neighbors. She is scathing of their ineptitude to withstand Rome (ll. 419–420, 451–453, 1584), or more generally to rule (ll. 528, 1896–1897), and criticizes their lack of political lucidity in failing to see that they are subjects, not allies, of the empire (ll. 427–428). Her political aspirations are far from modest; having strengthened her throne through Sertorius, she now entertains a dream of building with him, the only worthy suitor (l. 1596), a strong and united Iberian peninsula. Her marriage is a key element of her political hopes not only because of the continued support of her throne that Sertorius would offer, but also because of the cultural integration that would follow, as the union would lead to intermarriages and eventual unity between her people and his fugitive Roman followers (ll. 182–188).⁶⁸ Marriage to Sertorius (in whose success Viriate sees herself as fundamental—see lines 1595–1597) is a tool in her plans to strengthen her position on

the throne (l. 392), to uphold her crown (l. 618), and to fulfil her great plan to reign (l. 1307).

In making the queen the driving force behind her marriage, the topos of the enforced dynastic marriage is treated in such a way as to grant her autonomy and self-determination. Where others feel forced into political marriages by the demands of their subjects, Viriate has decided that her subjects merit a king of good stock (ll. 1599–1600).⁶⁹ The supreme irony of this comment, however, points to Viriate's Achilles' heel, namely the refusal or inability to see the insurmountable clash between her monarchical values and Sertorius's Roman ones.⁷⁰ Sertorius is not, and never can be, a blue-blooded monarch. Nor is he a Roman who could turn his back on Rome. Determined to consolidate and extend her power with her chosen husband, Viriate ignores the ideological and political differences that separate her royal self from her sought-after Roman general, focusing uniquely on marrying a suitor with merit, in the absence of one with both merit and title (ll. 534–536).

Viriate's attitude towards her marriage is also colored by the fact that she has clearly grown to love Sertorius more than she explicitly acknowledges. Whether her love is founded solely on esteem for the merit, *virtu*, and military prowess of the much older general as she maintains (ll. 401–404), or whether her words mask a passionate desire, as some critics have argued, her political and emotional aspirations coincide.⁷¹ Furthermore, unlike Bernard's Laodamie, her love is reciprocated. Unsurprisingly then, far from bemoaning the prospect of this political match, Viriate relishes it.

Throughout the play, the queen resolutely and single-mindedly sets about shaping her political and emotional fate through that match, by turns cajoling, reasoning, arguing, threatening. She enlists Perpenna to drive her perceived rival Aristie from Spain (ll. 705–709), provokes Sertorius's jealousy in order to elicit a declaration of love, and threatens to negotiate with Sylla's and Sertorius's enemies if she cannot marry the general

(l. 1504). While her various arguments and methods may not always be pretty, at one point, prior to the assassination, it seems that she will succeed in her aim (l. 1561), and control her destiny. This sense of self-determination is further underlined by the fact that, although originally dependent on Sertorius for his military force, the queen appears to feel no need for him to help her in the actual ruling of the country: it is his reputation and name that count. Even were he to die soon then, her throne would have been secured, and she would be protected by the splendor of his shade and of his name (“la splendeur de son Ombre, et l’éclat de son nom,” l. 468).⁷² This comment implies, as will be the case with Pulchérie, that appearances are of more importance than reality: marriage to Sertorius will allow Viriate to maintain her authority while appearing to conform to the social dictates that queens should marry and should continue the royal line.

If all Viriate’s actions are marked by her single-minded desire to uphold the honor of her birth (“remplir l’honneur de sa naissance,” l. 533), her reaction to the collapse of her Utopian project is that of a sovereign. In fact, interestingly, it is when Sertorius is dead that she achieves complete self-mastery. In his portrayal of her as calm and stoical in the face of Sertorius’s assassination, and fearlessly acceptant of her resultant precarious position, Corneille gives Viriate both the crucial quality of sovereign self-control (ll. 1682–1686), and an inviolable sense of self:

Je sais ce que je suis, et le serai toujours,
N’eussé-je que le ciel et moi pour mon secours.

I know what I am, and I will always be true to that,
Even if I only have heaven and myself to help me.

(*Sertorius*, ll. 1695–1696)

What Allentuch says of all Cornelian heroines here rings particularly true of Viriate: “All these women insist upon embodying that intimate and irreducible element within the

self, stressed by stoic humanists and modern existentialists, that puts them beyond the reach of external authority.”⁷³ It is as if in recognition of that untouchable quality that Corneille quickly removes the issue of any would-be threat to the queen: Pompée’s arrival brings peace rather than war, as his first words to the “grande reine” indicate. Furthermore, Viriate’s acceptance of the proposed peace is, significantly, on her own terms, in a passage that is frequently truncated by scholars and that merits quotation in full:

[Ma perte] est irréparable; et, comme je ne vois
Ni chefs dignes de vous, ni rois dignes de moi,
Je renonce à la guerre ainsi qu’à l’hyménée;
Mais j’aime encor l’honneur du trône où je suis née,
D’une juste amitié je sais garder les lois,
Et ne sais point régner comme règnent nos rois,
S’il faut que sous votre ordre ainsi qu’eux je domine,
Je m’ensevelirai sous ma propre ruine:
Mais, si je puis régner sans honte et sans époux,
Je ne veux d’héritiers que votre Rome, ou vous;
Vous choisirez, seigneur; ou, si votre alliance
Ne peut voir mes États sous ma seule puissance,
Vous n’avez qu’à garder cette place en vos mains,
Et je m’y tiens déjà captive des Romains.

[My loss] is irreparable; and as I see
No leaders worthy of you, nor kings of my hand,
I shall renounce both war and marriage.
But I value still the honor of the throne which I was bequeathed.
I know how to abide by the laws of a just friendship,
And I do not reign as our kings reign.
If you command that I must rule like them,
I will bury myself in my own ruined kingdom;
But if I may reign alone and without shame,
I wish only for Rome or you as heirs.
Choose, my lord; or if as your ally
You cannot allow me to rule my realm myself,
You need only keep this place now in your hands,
And I stand here already a prisoner of the Romans.

(*Sertorius*, ll. 1891–1904)

While there is no doubt that Viriate keenly feels the loss of Sertorius, she immediately envisages an alternative political future without him, evident in her request to rule alone and absolutely.⁷⁴ In fact, with the disappearance of the man she calls her “Maître” (however ironically, l. 658), and the removal of the military threat, the queen achieves full autonomy; any ambiguity surrounding her exercise of power throughout the play, seen as contingent on him because of the military struggle, evaporates. In giving it to Pompée to grant to Viriate what the Athenian senate will later refuse Pulchérie, namely the authority to rule “sans époux,” Corneille presents an example of autonomous female sovereign authority in the celibate queen and explodes the idea that government is an exclusively male prerogative. In fact, the female Viriate is presented as superior to her male neighbors in her desire to rule “sans honte,” in other words unsubmitive to the dominant Rome. There remains the issue of her descendance: if one of her aims in marrying Sertorius was to guarantee the continuation of a bloodline of good stock (l. 1292), that aim is now abandoned: “Je ne veux d’héritiers que votre Rome, ou vous” (l. 1900). However, rather than seeing this as the abandonment of legitimacy,⁷⁵ it is possible to read it as another example of a theme Corneille makes explicit elsewhere, namely the refusal to produce unworthy heirs.⁷⁶ In the absence of any suitable suitors (l. 1892), Viriate prefers to abandon the bloodline. The only worthy successors will be Pompée and Rome. While her dream of a powerful Spain is shattered, she herself is left with dignity and authority.

Pulchérie is another of Corneille’s heroines who distinguishes between love and marriage but who, unlike Viriate but like Nitocris, is concerned about the loss of autonomy that marriage might entail. Despite the clear indications of her love for Léon, it is evident that this love is, and will always be, secondary to her desire to rule. Accustomed to rule (l. 15), from

the very beginning Pulchérie acknowledges to Léon that it is only if he is elected emperor that she will marry him (l. 40). Elected empress herself, it is her marriage that comes to represent, symbolically and concretely, the battle of wills between her and the Senate. The fact that she is capable of ruling alone does not mean, in the eyes of the Senate, that it is acceptable for her to do so. On the one hand, the power and authority are hers: she is the “arbitrator of the empire” (“arbitre de l’Empire,” l. 1413), hers is the “supreme power” (l. 1181); having given her full authority, the Senate will not prescribe her husband for her (l. 1466). Paradoxically, of course, because of their insistence nonetheless on her marriage (allegedly to strengthen her authority, l. 1472), she remains the slave of those who honor her (l. 1248).⁷⁷ Where Corneille rescues her from the common dilemma of lamenting marriageable princesses is in giving her, not only an awareness of her rank and her duty to it, but also a possessiveness of her authority and a niggling doubt concerning the incompatibility of marriage and love. While the latter has figured in her reflections since the beginning (see ll. 78–83), it joins forces with the former argument at the opening of Act V:

Je crains de n’avoir plus une amour si parfaite,
Et que si de Léon on me fait un époux,
Un bien si désiré ne me soit plus si doux.
Je ne sais si le rang m’auroit fait changer d’âme;
Mais je tremble à penser que je serais sa femme,
Et qu’on n’épouse point l’amant le plus chéri
Qu’on ne se fasse un maître aussitôt qu’un mari.
J’aîmerais à régner avec l’indépendance
Que des vrais souverains s’assure la prudence.

I fear that I would no longer have such a perfect love
And that if Léon were to become my husband
Such a desired good would no longer be so sweet.
I do not know if it is my rank which has changed my mind;
But I tremble at the thought of being his wife,

Marriage with even the most dearly beloved,
 Means giving oneself a master as well as a husband.
 I would like to reign with independence,
 Which the prudence of true sovereigns guarantees.

(*Pulchérie*, ll. 1438–1446)

There are two strands to Pulchérie’s reasoning. Firstly, she is given the fundamentally *précieux* idea that marriage would sound the death knell for her love (l. 1440). Secondly, it is clear that marriage for Pulchérie automatically entails the acceptance of a domestic submissive state (submission to a “maître”) that runs contrary to her public political ambitions. (Both of these arguments nuance considerably the idea, expressed earlier (l. 1224), that she is sacrificing her happiness to that of the state.) Interestingly, widows Zenobia and Semiramis are evoked as objects of envy for Pulchérie precisely because they reigned alone, “without a husband” (l. 1456), a reminder of the autonomy associated with widowhood. Corneille, however, designs another option for Pulchérie so that she can both keep her word to Léon (ll. 1021–1022) and keep her independence within marriage—that of a union in name only, without physical relations. By implication, if Pulchérie’s husband is not her “maître” in the sexual sense, then he is not her “maître” at all. While traditionally Pulchérie’s vow of celibacy is seen as religiously motivated, here Corneille gives his heroine a secular, *précieux*, and political motivation that allows him to explore the evolving dynamic between personal and public concerns.⁷⁸

Two issues are at stake in her choice of perpetual virginity, traditionally perceived by critics in a negative light: firstly, the alleged “sacrifice” of a physical relationship, and secondly the “sacrifice” of the possibility of a direct heir.⁷⁹ However, Pulchérie’s vow is not seen to entail a “sacrifice” in either sense here but rather is a means towards autonomy and self-affirmation. In the first instance, by giving the queen attitudes towards love and marriage typical of *préciosité*, which fortuitously coincide with her desire to reign independently, Corneille provides

a double motivation for the empress to view virginity as a favorable option. Essentially, Pulchérie wants a helpmeet, “une ombre” (l. 1545), or

Un mari, qui content d'être au-dessus des Rois
 Me donne ses clartés, et dispense mes lois,
 Qui, n'étant en effet que mon premier ministre
 Pare ce que sous moi l'on craindrait de sinistre,
 Et pour tenir en bride un peuple sans raison
 Paraisse mon époux, et n'en ait que le nom.

A husband, who, satisfied with being above kings,
 Will give me good advice and enforce my laws,
 Who, being really only my prime minister,
 Will ward off any dangers which might be feared in my realm
 And in order to control the unthinking populace,
 Appears my husband, yet is such but in name.

(*Pulchérie*, ll. 1547–1552)⁸⁰

Secondly, and crucially, the fact that her family line will end with her “celibate marriage” to Martian is also seen as an advantage, since the line is apparently already degenerating, and her descendants would dishonor her: despite the number of illustrious princesses, the line is only producing weak princes (l. 1538). Paradoxically, being true to her rank and line involves presiding over its extinction: she will end the line with dignity, honorably (“dignement,” l. 1531). Furthermore, it is worth remembering that the absence of any potential biological heir allows her to put in place (and continue to groom) an heir of her choice, by marrying Léon to Martian’s daughter Justine. On the one hand then, while it could be said that she has to yield to the patriarchy and is subsumed into it the way other heroines are, on the other hand, it could be said that she subverts the system, keeps the people happy by appearances (l. 1555), fulfils her desire to reign (in a fashion entirely in keeping with Corneille’s political doctrine), and in reality remains a free agent.⁸¹ Through her acceptance of marriage, yet insistence on virginity, Pulchérie refuses her role in the sexual economy, validates her role in

the political economy, and carves a new space for the female prince.⁸²

Returning to du Ryer, here the dramatist gives it to both Dynamis and Nitocris to raise the possibility and desirability of a celibate reign. For Dynamis, not only is her love for Poliante clearly secondary to her own sense of *grandeur*, not only has she transcended her sex through her sovereignty (l. 329—on which, more later), but marriage in itself is perceived as incompatible with her continuing to reign all-powerfully. Within the binds of wedlock, Dynamis implies, she would no longer be her own “première sujet.”⁸³ While Dynamis does ultimately marry the man she loves, it is not seen as a necessity throughout the play,⁸⁴ nor is it the only option she envisages for herself. Similarly, Nitocris articulates an awareness that within marriage lies a potential threat to her own authority and ambition. In her first monologue (II.i), she initially laments the incompatibility between her rank and her love, before turning to the reverse side of the coin and the reality that marriage might involve:

{...} Ou bien que veux-tu faire?
 Veux-tu te rendre esclave? ou Reyne tributaire?
 Mais pense tu regner en te donnant un Roy?
 Tu l'aymes maintenant qu'il est en ta puissance
 De l'élever au rang où te mit ta naissance:
 Mais penses-tu l'aymer lors que tu deviendras
 Jalouse du pouvoir que tu luy donneras?

{...} But what do you want to do?
 Do you want to enslave yourself? Or become a dependent queen?
 Do you think you are ruling by giving yourself a king?
 You love him now while it is in your power
 To elevate him to the rank you were born into.
 But do you think you will love him when you become
 Jealous of the power which you will have given him?

(*Nitocris*, ll. 349–356)⁸⁵

A certain ambiguity surrounds her attitude towards marriage: while her monologues imply that she is torn between a desire

to marry in order to be united with the man she loves and a fear that marriage will diminish her power, in public she implies that she has decided to marry since the throne is too great a burden for her (ll. 421–422, 917–922), or that she is tired of absolute power and anxious to share it (ll. 568–570). At any rate, it is significant that there is no sense of her people demanding a male ruler: she is loved and feared by her people and her consideration of marriage is her own choice.

Through the four different answers provided by the four interested parties concerning Nitocris's marriage choice, du Ryer provides insight into four different types of courtier. While Axiane's and Alcine's self-interested replies provide a platform for the common debate between merit or birth as a suitable criterion for marriage, Araxe (clearly not wanting to recommend his rival, nor to reveal his ambition by recommending himself) provides an example of the sycophant who says what he thinks the queen wants to hear. But it is through the honorable Cléodate, whose sincerity is underlined throughout Act III.vi and Act IV.v, that du Ryer voices the option of remaining unmarried. The reasons offered are threefold: firstly, he maintains that since she inspires respect and fear everywhere, taking a husband (and therefore by implication a "master") would not enhance her *gloire* (ll. 967–968). The moment to marry, if she had had to, would have been when her country was in a precarious state, and her people thought she as a woman could not rectify the situation (ll. 969–976). The implication of this statement is that they have now been proved wrong, since her throne is now unshakeable ("inébranlable," l. 978). Cléodate's second reason is founded on received ideas of relations between the sexes and hence is fundamentally gendered: while Nitocris reigns alone, neighboring kings who may be tempted to conspire against her would refrain from doing so because she is a woman and, on this pretext, would instead protect her (ll. 985–988). Finally, Cléodate raises a similar type of argument to that which was attributed to Nitocris herself earlier regarding

Axiane's celibacy: while it would be advantageous to keep hope of a marriage alive in these princes, so that they would serve her all the more, marriage to one would soon arouse jealousy and enmity in all the others (ll. 989–996). Sharing the power (“empire”), according to Cléodate, would in fact make it more of a burden (ll. 1014–1016).

It is interesting to examine to what extent these fictitious arguments correspond to genuine concerns raised during gynæcocratic regimes. The clearest historical example is, of course, Elizabeth I, but comparison is difficult since arguments raised against (and in favor of) the Virgin Queen's various marriage prospects were complex and diverse, and encompassed domestic politics, international diplomacy, and religious considerations, in addition to the age (and hence fertility) of the queen at the time. However, there is no doubt that the final reason raised by Cléofile, referred to earlier as Nitocris's *raison d'État*, namely that the prospect of marriage could be more useful than the marriage itself, was clearly in circulation.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the argument that taking a king would not enhance the queen's *gloire* is underpinned by a similar reasoning to the argument that marriage would render Elizabeth “but Queen of England” as opposed to both king and queen.⁸⁷

It becomes apparent later that this political reasoning has hit a chord with the queen (ll. 1090–1091, 1095–1096), but crucially her final decision, and the resolution of her conflict, is framed in terms of her possessiveness of her authority. This is the idea she returns to with her confidante in the penultimate scene. The extraction of a half-confession from Araxe serves to remind her that, if married, she might not be able to exert the same authority, or as she puts it, the desired union would in fact damage her power (“l'hymen souhaité blesseroit mon pouvoir,” l. 1624). While renouncing her love for Cléodate and magnanimously handing him over to Axiane is the action by which she achieves self-mastery, du Ryer ensures that this self-mastery coincides here with her prioritizing of her rank and birthright,

and her avoidance of any submission to masculine power. The close of the play marks a new era for the queen as her own mistress emotionally, politically, and domestically:

Demeure donc au rang où le Ciel te fait naistre,
 Ne connoy que le Ciel pour arbitre et pour Maistre
 Et sans nous exposer à recevoir des lois
 Régions enfin sur ceux que nous ferions nos Rois.

Remain, therefore, in the rank which God bequeathed you,
 Where you need only know God as arbitrator and master
 And without leaving ourselves open to obeying the
 commands of others

Let us reign over those whom we considered making our kings.
 (*Nitocris*, ll. 1667–1670)⁸⁸

No mention of future heirs, or any other would-be disadvantages to celibacy, mars her triumphant embracing of her role. In this demonstration of a possessiveness of royal authority—another quality lauded in contemporary discourse⁸⁹—the play ends fittingly on a celebration of political virtue that has been foregrounded throughout.

While it is difficult, and foolhardy, to generalize about these seven different plays, it is clear that collectively they repeatedly underline that political virtue is not gender-specific and that marriage need not present an obstacle to gynæcocracy. Axiane and Dynamis go on to reign as co-sovereigns (as do Villedieu's *Nérée* and Scudéry's *Andromire*);⁹⁰ Pulchérie will reign alone although married; Viriate, Nitocris, and Cléopâtre will reign alone as independent sovereigns. This is not to say that the plays constitute a wholly unequivocal celebration of gynæcocracy or that their representation of women is entirely novel. References to Cléopâtre's beauty, for example, Viriate's ambiguous protestations of servitude to Sertorius (her "maître"), Laodamie's overpowering love, serve to remind readers of the more traditional representations of women. Nonetheless, collectively they contribute to the production of an alternative

knowledge to that of the dominant patriarchal model—an alternative vision of government that presents it, and re-represents it, as fundamentally androgynous. In suggesting an alternative way of envisaging the power dynamics of society, and in compelling spectators to reflect on those dynamics, they constitute “a theater of the political.”⁹¹

In these portraits of women who are clearly female princes, two characteristics—perhaps not unrelated—are striking. With the exception of Cleopatra, most of these queens are either explicitly invented (Viriate and Axiane) or so obscure that they might as well be invented (Laodamie, Nitocris, and Dynamis).⁹² Pulcheria qualifies, according to Georges Couton, as a typically Cornelian subject: historical, but obscure enough for her character to be developed at will.⁹³ This is perhaps mere coincidence, and there are various reasons that might explain in each individual case the decision to create, or to focus on, a particular queen figure. Nonetheless it should perhaps give us pause. On the one hand, the choice of a subject such as Pulcheria shows how history could provide examples of stable gynæcocracy, women’s ability to rule, and political virtue in women. On the other hand, it is clear that choosing obscure material, or inventing it, allows dramatists to circumvent both the constraints concerning the treatment of historical sources and any received ideas concerning queens and queenship (even models that are favorable, but ideologically laden, such as that of the warrior queen). It is noteworthy that in the case of Cleopatra, Corneille indicates that he is going against received ideas concerning the Egyptian queen (“la réputation qu’elle a laissée”) and justifies his characterization of her. In all cases, the image of the female prince that emerges is one that is entirely *vraisemblable*.⁹⁴

The second striking characteristic provides compelling support for our argument regarding the fluidity of sovereignty: in over 12,000 lines of poetry, there are *two* explicit references to the fact that these monarchs are women. While both are

worthy of comment, the principal issue is that the mention of sex is so rare. The first is the comment that du Ryer gives Dynamis that, in her rank, she is “more than a woman” (“plus que femme,” l. 329). That her rank has made her transcend her sex should not be taken to mean that she therefore operates as a man, but rather as a nod to the androgyny and gender-inclusivity that monarchical sovereignty involves. The second is the explicitly gendered lament that Corneille gives to Pulchérie, as she articulates, with acute irony, her recognition of societal expectations and of the covert workings of patriarchy that she then proceeds to subvert:

Sexe, ton sort en moi ne peut se démentir,
 Pour être Souveraine, il faut m'assujettir,
 En montant sur le trône entrer dans l'esclavage,
 Et recevoir des lois de qui me rend hommage.

My destiny is inextricably linked to my sex,
 In order to rule, I must enslave myself,
 As I mount the throne, enter into bondage,
 And take commands from those who pay me homage.

(*Pulchérie*, ll. 1475–1478)

In conjunction with this lack of explicit reference to sexual identity, there is a decided lack of implicit references to the sex of these queens—with the exception of Cléopâtre—through, for example, persistent references to beauty or other allegedly female characteristics. These heroines exemplify none of the qualities common in exclusionist argumentation, nor are they portrayed as exceptional, as “male” heroines, ruling through some “vertu mâle” or indeed through *douceur*. As we saw, the virtues they rule by, while categorized as exclusively male elsewhere, are here associated with a common human androgynous morality. This leads to a paradox: while on the one hand the emphasis on marriage implies that their characterization is gendered, that they are very much products of their time, very much framed within a patriarchal framework, on the other hand, as sovereigns they transcend these considerations. The

defining characteristic of these queens is their rank, not their sex: they are rulers, princes, who happen to be female, and who are faced with conflicts as troubling as any of their male counterparts.⁹⁵ Where they differ from the latter is with respect to the limitations that society imposes, the parameters within which they have to operate, and, at times, the nature of the conflict with which they are faced. I say at times, since it is important not to overestimate that difference, neglecting the extreme limitations placed on male rulers as regards marriage, for example, and the conflicts between public and private duty that kings are given in drama.⁹⁶ It is precisely because of this transcendence of gender issues, precisely because of the very absence of any explicit discussion concerning female capacity to rule, that these plays can be seen to incorporate the most radical enquiry concerning the exclusion of women from power, of any within the corpus of this study. Possibilities, alternative realities, are performed, not explained.



CONCLUSION

Women's history concerns not merely half of mankind, but all of it.¹

Thanks to the considerable body of recent research concerning female sovereignty in the Early Modern period, we have a much greater awareness today than before of how individual female rulers negotiated and appropriated paradigms of power and authority, frequently exploiting the tools of allegory and symbolism to frame, shape, and fortify that authority. Invariably, although not always articulated as such by scholars and historians, those negotiations and appropriations—including the theoretical idea of the queen's two bodies—hinge on the interplay between the prevalent understanding of the office of sovereignty as male and its alignment with the equally prevalent understanding of certain moral and intellectual qualities or virtues as male. In sum, there is a tendency, it seems to me, to emphasize how female rulers operated in order to fit themselves into existing frameworks of male sovereignty.

There is no doubt, of course, that this is how many female rulers *did* operate, and that line of inquiry is entirely valid and immensely fruitful. However, that very alignment between sovereignty and male virtue, the construction of sovereignty as male, is called into question when the office of rulership itself and the nature of virtue is placed at the center of the analysis. So, while many of the writings examined above elaborate on female ability to embody and demonstrate male virtue and behave as male sovereigns, what is of far greater importance are the moments when the idea of male sovereignty dissipates in places where one might least expect it—such as Le Moyne's and Scudéry's portraits—to be replaced by an understanding (albeit

a fragile one) of rulership as necessitating a common human morality, a morality that simultaneously incorporates female virtue and supersedes the very notion of a binary sexual ethics that prescribes and circumscribes appropriate behavior for, and qualities of, men and women. What the Early Modern writings examined in both volumes of this study (excepting chapter 1 of this volume, of course) point to is that deep-rooted received ideas concerning the nature of virtue—royal virtue, political virtue, male virtue, female virtue, common human virtue—are manipulated in the positing of female government within a framework of stability, order and legitimacy, and manipulated often in conflicting and contradictory ways.

What are perhaps most unsettling for modern scholars are precisely these inherent contradictions in the texts. How can Le Moyne posit a nongendered sovereignty through the portrait of Isabella Clara Eugenia as the ideal sovereign and yet suggest that Zenobia reigns in part through her beauty or that Deborah is a declaration from God? How can Poulain argue for a moral and intellectual equality between the sexes and yet vigorously argue that women are superior in numerous ways? How can Suchon rail against dependence and yet defend male superiority? Easily it would seem. And yet uneasily for the modern researcher. Such unease, it seems to me, is born of a hierarchy of discourses accepted within our own norms of critical thinking today, a prioritization of an egalitarian discourse, within which older discourses have no currency, a hierarchy we need to suspend when looking at this material. The fact is that in the representation of stable gynæcocracy as a laudable reality, opposing discourses are marshalled; alongside that based on a moral and intellectual sexual equality, we find a celebration of the paradox of the weak woman as state-savior, the neo-Platonic valorization of beauty as an external manifestation of virtue, the traditional defense of women as superior. Contradictory though these may seem, the simultaneous use of these discourses should not be regarded as a weakness to be occulted but in fact as an indication of the importance of

this period as a key moment in the evolution of the understanding of equality and difference, as these concepts continue to mutate.

While similar discursive contradictions to those of the socio-political texts can also be identified in the drama of the period, the very nature of drama renders the parameters involved in the creation of meaning more complex. On the one hand, the aesthetic and generic conventions governing the writing of drama influence the ways in which concepts and characters are elaborated and articulated. More crucially though, when the written play text becomes theatre, its performativity and immediacy ignite a myriad of interpretations that transcend and transmute the written word. Further research concerning the productions of the plays examined here, their casting, sets, costumes, and reception—issues that go well beyond the limitations of the current study, and concerning which our knowledge may well be destined to be permanently incomplete—together with analysis of the particular “prismatic effects” characteristic of theatre would nuance considerably our understanding of the ways in which gynæcocracy was represented, refracted, diffracted, constructed in the Early Modern period.²

Examining the construction of meaning concerning gynæcocracy here has involved viewing the humanist concept of the ideal prince through the lens of sexual (virtue) ethics, in a superimposition of discourses that has highlighted a revealing discordancy. The juxtaposition of sexual ethics, political humanism, and gynæcocracy has meant positing the question of women’s access to power within a framework of mainstream political science and philosophy. As every reader knows, the political nature of the “woman question” has long been recognized, both inside and outside academic circles, as has (more recently and conversely) the gendered character of politics and political science. The increasing body of gender and politics literature, and the very publication of comprehensive reference tools such as the *Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics* (2013), is testament both to the growing acknowledgment of the

necessity of analyzing and unmasking the gendered nature of these androcentric fields, and to the ongoing refinement of the critical methodologies in use. The extent to which the “woman question” is also a philosophical question—and that Poulain and Suchon are philosophers, for example—is a more novel issue that is tentatively gaining support. It seems to me self-evident that any debate which treats of ethics, virtue, equality, and the ontological “nature” of women is irrefutably philosophical. To the extent that the construction of ideas concerning the female prince and gynæcocracy is inextricably linked to the history of equality, in itself a fundamentally political and philosophical concept, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the growing awareness of the ways in which our understanding of Early Modern paradigms is enriched by positing so-called ‘feminism’ and ‘feminist questions’ not as supplementary but as key concerns in the history of philosophy and the history of political thought, and the growing awareness of the ongoing necessity to review and refine (and recover) definitions of both genre and discipline, in the identification of what constitutes a political text or a philosophical text, and what constitutes a political question or a philosophical question.

As the debate concerning the access of women to political power heats up—not surprisingly, since like any intellectual or sociopolitical debate it is particularly hotly contested at moments when it becomes reality, or eminently possible—it seems to me essential to acknowledge and analyze the history of this debate. The importance of heightening awareness concerning a tradition of feminist thought, the sense that this is *not new*, that there is no need to reinvent the wheel, is a recurrent concern in pro-woman writings from the Early Modern period through to today. As Karen Offen asserts, simply and irrefutably, “When the history of feminisms is incorporated into the history of European thought and politics, our understanding of the European past—and of its pertinence for our own present and future—is radically altered.”³ Put differently,

acknowledging a tradition of resistance, of reevaluation, of reassessment regarding so-called normative gender assumptions, understanding that tradition, both its arguments and its very existence, although its parameters and modes of expression have changed, can only enrich our understanding of the silent mechanisms that underpin power relations and gender relations—in all their heterogeneity and complexity—in our own societies. It is to this ongoing project that this study has aimed to contribute.



APPENDIX: TABLE OF PRINCIPAL PLAYS ANALYZED*

<i>Date of first performance</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>First edition</i> [†]	<i>Date of first edition</i> [†]
1635	Isaac de BENSERADE	<i>La Cléopâtre</i>	A. de Sommaville	1636
1635	Jean MAIRET	<i>Le Marc-Antoine ou la Cleopâtre</i>	A. de Sommaville	1637
?	Charles CHAULMER	<i>La Mort de Pompée</i>	A. de Sommaville	1638
1637?	Gautier de Costes, sieur de LA CALPRENÈDE	<i>Jeanne, reyne d'Angleterre</i>	A. de Sommaville	1638
1637/38?	LA CALPRENÈDE	<i>Le Comte d'Essex</i>	[Augustin Courbé]	1639
1637?	Charles REGNAULT	<i>Marie Stuard, reyne d'Ecosse</i>	Toussaint Quinet	1639
1640	François Hédelin, abbé d'AUBIGNAC	<i>Zénobie</i>	A. Courbé	1647
1643/44	Pierre CORNEILLE	<i>La Mort de Pompée</i>	A. de Sommaville	1644
1644/45	Pierre CORNEILLE	<i>Rodogune, princesse des Parthes</i>	Toussaint Quinet [ou] A. de Sommaville [ou] A. Courbé	1647
1645?	N. GILLET DE LA TESSONERIE	<i>Sigismond, duc de Varsau</i>	Toussaint Quinet	1646
1645	Gabriel GILBERT	<i>Rhodogune</i>	A. Courbé	1646

continued

<i>Date of first performance</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>First edition</i> [†]	<i>Date of first edition</i> [†]
1646/47	Gabriel GILBERT	<i>Semiramis</i>	A. Courbé	1647
1646/47	Nicolas-Marc DESFONTAINES	<i>La Véritable Sémiramis</i>	Pierre Lamy	1647
1649?	Pierre DU RYER	<i>Nitocris, Reyne de Babylone</i>	A. de Sommaville	1650
1649?/50?	Pierre DU RYER	<i>Dynamis, Reyne de Carie</i>	A. de Sommaville	1653
?	Jacques POUSSET DE MONTAUBAN	<i>Séleucus</i>	Guillaume de Luyne	1654
1653	Jean MAGNON	<i>Jeanne de Naples</i>	Louis Chamhoudry	1656
1659	Claude BOYER	<i>Fédéric</i>	A. Courbé	1660
1659	Jean MAGNON	<i>Zénobie, Reyne de Palmire</i>	Christophe Journal	1660
?	Guillemay du Chesnay, dit ROSIDOR	<i>La Mort du Grand Cyrus ou la vengeance de Tomiris</i>	[No place] Guillaume Henry Streel	1662
1662	Pierre CORNEILLE	<i>Sertorius</i>	Rouen, et se vend à Paris, chez Augustin Courbé et Guillaume de Luyne	1662
1664/65	Philippe QUINAULT	<i>Astrate, roi de Tyr</i>	Guillaume de Luyne [ou] Gabriel Quinet [ou] Thomas Jolly	1665
1665	Jean RACINE	<i>Alexandre le Grand</i>	Pierre Trabouillet [ou] Théodore Girard	1666

continued

<i>Date of first performance</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>First edition</i> [†]	<i>Date of first edition</i> [†]
1668	Thomas CORNEILLE	<i>Laodice, reyne de Cappadoce</i>	Rouen, et se vend à Paris, chez C. Barbin [ou] Gabriel Quinet	1668
1672	Thomas CORNEILLE	<i>Théodat</i>	Guillaume de Luyne	1673
1672	Pierre CORNEILLE	<i>Pulchérie</i>	Guillaume de Luyne	1673
1673?	Gaspard ABEILLE	<i>Argélie, reine de Thessalie</i>	Claude Barbin	1674
1674?	Jacques PRADON	<i>Pirame et Thisbé</i>	Henry Loyson	1674
1678	Thomas CORNEILLE	<i>Le Comte d'Essex</i>	Jean Ribou	1678
1678	Claude BOYER	<i>Le Comte d'Essex</i>	Charles Osmont	1678
1681	Jean de LA CHAPELLE	<i>Cleopatre</i>	Jean Ribou	1682
1683	Edme BOURSAULT	<i>Marie Stuard, reine d'Ecosse</i>	Jean Guignard	1691
1689	Catherine BERNARD	<i>Laodamie</i>	Pierre Ribou	1735
1691	Jean RACINE	<i>Athalie</i>	Denys Thierry	1691

* Plays are listed in chronological order by date of first performance where known. A full list of all plays cited can be found in the primary bibliography.

[†] Place of publication Paris, unless otherwise indicated.

[‡] Information concerning the first editions has been drawn from Alain Riffaud, *Répertoire du théâtre français imprimé entre 1630–1660* (Geneva: Droz, 2009) and his online “Répertoire du théâtre français imprimé au XVII^e siècle,” <http://www.repertoiretheatreimprime.fr/>; accessed April 20, 2015. The editions consulted are indicated in the bibliography.



NOTES

Introduction

1. Two articles by Pierre Ronzeaud on Corneille and Racine provide very useful overviews of the debate concerning politics and tragedy, since the methodological issues he highlights, raised by him or by others, are pertinent to a broader theoretical framework than solely that of Corneille and Racine. See Pierre Ronzeaud, "Corneille dans tous ses états critiques. Pour une lecture plurielle de *Rodogune*," *Littératures classiques*, 32 (1998), 7–40; and "Racine et la politique: la perplexité de la critique," *Œuvres et critiques*, 24.1 (1999), 136–158.
2. For a recent stimulating study concerning the representation of rulership in the second quarter of the century, see Lise Michel, *Des Princes en figure. Politique et invention tragique en France (1630–1650)* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de la Sorbonne, 2013). Unfortunately, this volume appeared after the text of this current study was completed, and so it has not been possible to integrate its arguments here.
3. The distinction is made by Jacqueline Lichtenstein with regard to Corneille's theatre. See "The Representation of Power and the Power of Representation," *SubStance*, 25.2 (1996), 81–92. Lichtenstein sees Corneille as the "most important political thinker of the seventeenth century" (p. 81).
4. See Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994).
5. I borrow the phrase from Jean Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, "Introduction," in Jean Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, eds., *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 1–17 (p. 13).
6. Christian Biet and Christophe Triau, *Qu'est-ce que le théâtre?* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), p. 527.
7. The phrase is Lynda Hart's who, already in 1989, signaled the development in feminist criticism "from discovering and creating positive images of women in the content of the drama to analyzing and disrupting the ideological codes embedded in the inherited structures of dramatic representation" (Hart, "Introduction: Performing Feminism," *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on*

Contemporary Women's Theatre (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1989), p. 4).

8. "Reines, invraisemblables rois? Reines vierges et épouses célibataires dans le théâtre du XVII^e siècle: le cas d'Élisabeth, Nitocris et Pulchérie," in Jean-Vincent Blanchard and Hélène Visentin, eds., *L'Invoisemblance du pouvoir. Théâtres de la souveraineté au XVII^e siècle* (Fasano: Schena; Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2005), pp. 89–122; "Gender, Power and Authority in *Alexandre le Grand* and *Athalie*," in Edric Caldicott and Derval Conroy, eds., *Racine: The Power and the Pleasure* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2001), pp. 55–74.

I The Power and the Fury, or the Politics of Representation in Drama

1. Jacques Truchet, *La Tragédie classique en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, [1975] 1989), p. 73.
2. The four seventeenth-century characters Truchet lists are Corneille's Cléopâtre (*Rodogune*), his Arsinoé (*Nicomède*), Racine's eponymous *Athalie*, and Rotrou's Sira (*Cosroès*).
3. According to d'Aubignac, the stage is "where the demon of anxiety, of turmoil, of disorder reigns"; see François Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac, *La Pratique du théâtre* [1657], ed. Hélène Baby (Paris: Champion, 2000), p. 430.
4. According to Christian Biet, the notion of tyranny, an "eternal fear," has always been the true center of tragedy. See "Edipe dans la tragédie du XVII^e siècle: mémoire mythologique, mémoire juridique, mémoire généalogique," *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 21.41 (1994), 499–518 (p. 509). See also James D. Matthews, "The Tyrannical Sovereign in Pre-1640 French Tragicomedy: Political Statement or Dramatic Necessity?" in Milorad R. Margitic and Byron R. Wells, eds., *Actes de Wake Forest. L'Image du souverain dans le théâtre de 1600 à 1650; Maximes; Madame de Villedieu* (Paris, Tübingen, Seattle: PFSCS, 1987), pp. 147–158.
5. See Christian Biet, "Douceur de la vengeance, plaisir de l'interdit: le statut de la vengeance au XVII^e siècle," in Eric Méchoual, ed., *La Vengeance dans la littérature d'Ancien Régime* (Montréal: Université de Montréal, 2000), pp. 11–32. See also Elliot Forsyth, *La Tragédie française de Jodelle à Corneille (1553–1630). Le Thème de la vengeance* (Paris: Champion, [1962] 1994).
6. For an overview of unworthy kings in drama, or the deterioration of the individual in office, Maurice Baudin's *The Profession of King*

in *17th-Century French Drama* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1941) remains useful.

7. Of course the aim of tragedy is not solely didactic, nor is the *dénouement* always exemplary. For a rich analysis of the complex poetics of the *dénouement* and the difficulties involved in reconciling the often contradictory requirements of *docere* and *movere*, see Enrica Zanin, *Fins tragiques. Poétique et éthique du dénouement dans la tragédie de la première modernité (Italie, France, Espagne, Allemagne)* (Geneva: Droz, 2014). Unfortunately this current study was completed before Zanin's volume appeared and so it has not been possible to integrate its stimulating arguments.
8. Jo Eldridge Carney examines a similar phenomenon in English drama in terms of caricature, dilution, and elimination, a triptych of terms that suggests useful axes of analysis. See "Honoured Hippolyta, most dreaded Amazon": The Amazon Queen in the works of Shakespeare and Fletcher," in Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney, and Debra Barrett-Graves, eds., *High and Mighty Queens of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 117–131 (p. 129).
9. The principal tragedies examined are Isaac de Benserade, *La Cléopâtre* (1636); Jean Mairet, *Le Marc-Antoine ou la Cleopâtre* (1637); Charles Chaulmer, *La Mort de Pompée* (1638); Gautier de Coste, sieur de La Calprenède, *Jeanne, reine d'Angleterre* (1638); La Calprenède, *Le Comte d'Essex* (1639); Charles Regnault, *Marie Stuard, reine d'Ecosse* ([1639] 1641); Pierre Corneille, *Rodogune, princesse des Parthes* (1645); Philippe Quinault, *Astrate, roi de Tyr* (1665); Thomas Corneille, *Laodice, reine de Cappadoce* (1668); Thomas Corneille, *Théodat* (1673); Jacques Pradon, *Pirame et Thisbé* (1674); Gaspard Abeille, *Argélie, reine de Thessalie* (1674); Thomas Corneille, *Le Comte d'Essex* (1678); Claude Boyer, *Le Comte d'Essex* (1678); Jean de La Chapelle, *Cleopatre* (1682); Jean Racine, *Athalie* (1690); Edme Boursault, *Marie Stuard, reine d'Ecosse* (1691). Where a seventeenth-century edition is listed in the bibliography in addition to a modern edition, it is the former that has been used. Given the ubiquity of the queen figure in the drama of the time, this list does not claim to be exhaustive but rather representative. Figures who fall outside the parameters fixed here include such well-known queens as Dido, Sophonisbe, Bérénice, Phèdre, and Andromaque, eponymous heroines of plays in which, although gendered power dynamics are often central, gynæcocracy itself is not. Interestingly, Cleopatra is not given the status of queen in Chaulmer's text, and hence technically speaking has no monarchical authority, but since at the

- historical moment dramatized, Cleopatra is indeed queen, the play merits inclusion here.
10. Anne d'Autriche occupied the regency in 1620–21 and again from 1638 onwards. Although her regency officially ended in 1651 at the declaration of the king's majority, she remained in power with Mazarin until the latter's death in 1661.
 11. Mueller maintains, although with little supportive evidence, that she excited more interest in the seventeenth century than in any other; see Marlies Mueller, "The Taming of the Amazon: The Changing Image of the Woman Warrior in *Ancien Régime* Fiction," *Papers on Seventeenth-Century French Literature*, 22 (1995), 199–232 (p. 215). For an account of the myth of Joan of Arc, see Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981). For historical background, see Charles T. Wood, *Joan of Arc and Richard III: Sex, Saints and Government in the Middle Ages* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
 12. François Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac, *La Pucelle d'Orléans* (Paris: F. Targa, 1642); [Benserade?/La Mesnardière?], *La Pucelle d'Orléans* (Paris: A. de Sommaville et A. Courbé, 1642). According to Lancaster, it is impossible to determine now which one of them wrote it; see H. C. Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, 9 vols. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1929–42), II.i, p. 360. See Jeanne Morgan Zarucchi, "Sovereignty and Salic Law in d'Aubignac's *La Pucelle d'Orléans*," in Margitic and Wells, eds., *Actes de Wake Forest*, pp. 123–145 for a comprehensive comparison of the two texts and the light it throws on conflicting attitudes towards women.
 13. Zarucchi, "Sovereignty and Salic Law," p. 123.
 14. It is hardly surprising that the two versions of *La Pucelle d'Orléans* are among very few plays that refer directly to "Salic Law" since the entire controversy concerning female succession and the invention of "Salic Law" was indirectly one of the causes of the Hundred Years War and therefore of Joan of Arc's activity. In fact it is Somerset's reiteration of the king of England's claim to the French throne that instigates Jeanne's defense of Salic Law (see III.ii in both plays).
 15. Over fifty years earlier, in his refutation of "Salic Law," Jean Du Tillet had attributed the exclusion of women from monarchical succession to custom and to the specific law of the French dynasty, rooted in the magnanimity of the French who couldn't tolerate being ruled by women ("[la] coutume & loy particuliere de la maison de France, fondée sur la magnanimité des François,

ne pouvans souffrir estre dominez par femmes”). See Du Tillet, *Recueil des Roys de France, leur couronne et maison* [1580] (Paris: J. du Puys, 1586), p. 214. Variations of this “magnanimity” argument, the idea of a specifically French national characteristic that somehow (nebulously) couldn’t accept government by women, appeared in many guises subsequently.

16. This argument is reminiscent of that which frames queens as unfit to be tutors of their offspring, the future kings, because of their effeminizing influence.
17. Although the tendency to use recent history as source material was relatively rare, and indeed somewhat frowned upon, dramatists were occasionally drawn to sixteenth-century English and Scottish history for their plots. On the use of English history in French drama, see Alfreda L. Hill, *The Tudors in French Drama* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1932); Jane Conroy, *Terres tragiques. L'Angleterre et l'Écosse dans la tragédie française du XVII^e siècle* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999), esp. pp. 121–125; and Kirsten Postert, *Tragédie historique ou histoire en tragédie? Les Sujets d'histoire moderne dans la tragédie française (1550–1715)* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2010). Of the six plays devoted to the Virgin Queen between 1638 and 1691, three focus on the alleged sedition and execution in 1599 of Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex; two focus on the story of Mary Stuart, and one on the story of Lady Jane Grey. In none is the portrait flattering.
18. The term is Sarah Hanley’s. See “Identity Politics and Rulership in France: Female Political Place and the Fraudulent Salic Law in Christine de Pizan and Jean de Montreuil,” in Michael Wolfe, ed., *Changing Identities in Early Modern France* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 78–94 (p. 82).
19. The military argument features across the entire corpus under examination here, even those plays that present favorable portraits of gynæcocracy (see ch. 3). Physical weakness is frequently represented as combined with psychological weakness, underpinning the unsuitability of women to rule. See, for example, the comments of Cintille, queen of Sweden, in the anonymous tragicomedy *La Juste vengeance* (Paris: A. Courbé, 1641), as she hands over power at the close of the play:

Fidelles Suedois, vous sçavez mieux que moy
 Qu’un Estat ne sçauroit subsister sans un Roy;
 La Couronne en mes mains n’est pas en assurance,
 Le Regne d’une fille est Presque sans puissance;
 Et qui craint, mes amis, ne Regne qu’à demy;
 Le throne est en balance, & n’est pas affermy;

Mon sexe m'exemptant des travaux de la guerre,
 Je ne sçaurois moy mesme en deffendre ma terre.

O faithful Suedes, you know better than I
 That a state cannot survive without a king;
 In my hands, the Crown is not assured,
 The reign of a maiden is almost powerless;
 And they who fear, my friends, only reign by half;
 The throne is swaying, and is not stable;
 Since my sex exempts me from the toil of war,
 I myself am unable to defend my land.

(*La Juste vengeance*, V.v)

20. See ll. 47–49, 491–492, and 535. Although this last example occurs in a speech in which the queen is largely insincere, there is no reason to disbelieve this remark that is supported by others.
21. *Astrate*, ll. 285–286. See also Siché's reference to the reluctance of the court to obey a woman (l. 161).
22. Furetière defines *Tyran* as "Usurpateur d'un Etat. Tyran se dit aussi d'un prince qui abuse de son pouvoir, qui ne gouverne pas selon les lois, qui use de violence et de cruauté envers ses sujets" ("the usurper of a state. Said also of a prince who abuses his power, who does not govern in accordance with the law, who treats his subjects with violence and cruelty") (*Dictionnaire universel*, 1690).
23. See, for example, Bossuet's pronouncements on the issue in his *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture Sainte*, ed. Jacques Le Brun (Geneva: Droz, 1967), Bk. 2, p. 50.
24. Jacques Truchet, "La tyrannie de Garnier à Racine: critères juridiques, psychologiques et dramaturgiques," in M. Bertaud and N. Hepp, eds., *L'Image du souverain dans les lettres françaises des guerres de religion à la révocation de l'Edit de Nantes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1985), pp. 257–264 (pp. 258–261).
25. See Nina Ekstein, "Staging the Tyrant on the Seventeenth-Century French Stage," *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, 26.50 (1999), 111–129 (p. 112). See also Truchet, "La tyrannie," pp. 257–258.
26. Quinault's *Élise* (*Astrate*) is an ambiguous case since, although she has usurped the throne and murdered the legitimate heirs, her reign has been successful and hence legitimized. (Truchet, in fact, sees her as an example of a usurper whom one would hesitate to call a tyrant. See "La tyrannie," p. 258.) Furthermore, she sits uneasily among those who are primarily driven by an uncontrollable thirst for power or for love. However, as a figure whose representation, albeit as Machiavellian, aligns her with the emotional

- sphere rather than the political, and ultimately undermines the reality of female authority, we will have occasion to return to her later in the chapter.
27. Truchet, “La tyrannie,” p. 261. The latter half of Furetière’s definition also points to this.
 28. Jean-Marie Apostolidès, “Image du père et peur du tyran au XVII^e siècle,” *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, 10.2 (1978), 195–208 (p. 200).
 29. There are, of course, considerable differences between the six plays and it is not our intention here to imply otherwise. For these differences, see Jane Conroy, *Terres tragiques*. Nonetheless, the image of the queen as an unsuitable ruler is constant.
 30. See the reference in II.i to the concern for her people being her sole concern. She later declares that she has learnt that a reign cannot be founded on murder and blood (“Que le meurtre et le sang ne nous font point regner,” IV.i). This positive portrayal is due no doubt in no small degree to the fact that, as Guichemerre points out, it would have been impossible for La Calprenède to slander a Catholic queen; see Roger Guichemerre, “Le théâtre ‘anglais’ de La Calprenède,” in Marie-Madeleine Martinet, ed., *Regards européens sur le monde anglo-américain* (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1992), pp. 211–223 (p. 216). It is also worth remembering that while Northumberland was executed almost immediately for treason, Mary was initially opposed to the execution of Jane Grey and Guildford, and only agreed after the Wyatt rebellion when the political climate had changed. See John McGurk, *The Tudor Monarchies, 1485–1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 54–62. On Mary Tudor’s representation in this La Calprenède drama, see J. Conroy, *Terres tragiques*, pp. 236–238.
 31. La Calprenède himself refers to Herod and Tiberius again with reference to Elizabeth in the *Epître* to *Le Comte d’Essex*.
 32. See J. Conroy, *Terres tragiques*, pp. 146–150. On this play, see also Anne Teulade’s introduction to her online critical edition, Charles Regnault, *Marie Stuard, reine d’Ecosse* (1641), *Études Épistémè*, 8, 2005, <http://revue.etudes-episteme.org/?marie-stuard-reyne-d-ecosse-1641> (accessed April 12, 2015). On the important variants between the 1639 and 1641 editions, which do not change our argument here, see Teulade, pp. 6–14.
 33. See her instructions in ll. 577–78, II.iv.
 34. Norfolk and Marie are also lambs to be sacrificed at the altar of her ambition and passion. See ll. 289–294, I.ii.
 35. See Boursault, I.ii, where, concerning Pembroc (Pembroke) who helped her to the throne, Norfolk comments: “Pour le prix de

- son zele elle eut soif de son sang” (“As a reward for his zeal, she thirsted for his blood”). Later her psychological torture involves keeping Norfolk alive but feeling responsible for his beloved’s death (Boursault, ll. 447–454, II.i). See also ll. 864–76 (III.iii). On the differences between Regnault’s and Boursault’s representations of the Elizabethan court, see Jane Conroy, who argues that Regnault highlights “the disintegration of civilization by passion, the dominance of the irrational, even of madness,” where Boursault’s world is marked by cynicism, materialism and hypocrisy (J. Conroy, *Terres tragiques*, p. 194).
36. In Regnault, the unfavorable tone is evident even from the *dramatis personae*, in which she is referred to as Henry’s “fille naturelle” (“illegitimate daughter”), whereas Mary Stuard is described as queen of Scotland and Ireland, and legitimate heir to the English throne.
 37. See Regnault, ll. 1225–1232, IV.iv. (For Anne Teulade, this emphasis on history is crucial to the entire ideological meaning of the play, since it makes of Elisabeth’s own actions the explanation for the unrest in England at the time of Regnault’s writing. See Teulade, *Marie Stuard*, pp. 38–40.) In Boursault, there is no explicit reference to incest but the idea of criminal sexual behavior (presumably adultery) is maintained, when Neucastel refers to the “Princesse illégitime / Qui n’eût point vû le jour sans le secours d’un crime” (the “illegitimate princess / Who wouldn’t have been born but for a crime”) (Boursault, *Marie Stuard*, ll. 91–92, I.ii).
 38. See her lament in Regnault, ll. 215–218, I.ii.
 39. See La Calprenède, *Essex*, ll. 287–288, I.v.
 40. On the use of *Bajazet* as a model for Boyer, see J. Conroy, *Terres tragiques*, pp. 337–338.
 41. On this idea of emotional tyranny, see *ibid.*, pp. 322–323.
 42. J. Conroy (*ibid.*, p. 355) sees in Boyer’s text in particular an indication of the longevity of certain negative images of Elizabeth.
 43. See, for example, Laodice’s comment: “Il n’est pour moy qu’un choix, ou perir, ou regner” (“There is only one choice for me, reign or die,” *Laodice*, l. 404), or Cléopâtre’s cry: “Trône, à t’abandonner je ne puis consentir” (“Throne, I cannot consent to abandon you,” *Rodogune*, l. 1529).
 44. See *Théodat*, ll. 336–339, 760, 1651. Abeille’s Argélie has randomly killed five of her own suitors in order to promote her favorite. See *Argélie*, IV.iii.
 45. As Laodice remarks, “Je suis Reyne, et le Sceptre est la foudre des Rois” (“I am queen, and the scepter is the thunderbolt of kings,” *Laodice*, l. 648).

46. As Théodat's confidant comments of Amalasonthe: "sur le plus foible outrage elle croit que son rang / L'autorise à vanger sa gloire par le sang" ("For the least insult she thinks her rank / Authorizes her to avenge her *gloire* with blood," *Théodat*, ll. 55–56), an idea she confirms herself shortly afterwards (ll. 338–40), and which the play as a whole can be seen to demonstrate.
47. According to Élise's enemies, she believes that her will overrides the need for any political rationale for her actions: "les volontés des Rois tiennent lieu de raisons" ("The wishes of kings take the place of reasons," *Astrate*, l. 142).
48. See Lillian Corti, *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998). For a broader examination of other founding myths of infanticide, see G. Carloni and D. Nobili, trans. from the Italian by R. Maggiori, *La Mauvaise mère. Phénoménologie et anthropologie de l'infanticide* (Paris: Payot, [1975] 1977).
49. Of the numerous articles devoted to *Rodogune*, see in particular those by de Mourgues, Stamato, Menke, Fumaroli, Watts, Gossip, Biet, Merlin in the bibliography as well as the relevant chapters in the studies by Doubrovsky, Greenberg, and Stegmann. A very useful overview of the critical approaches to Corneille's theatre in general and *Rodogune* in particular can be found in Pierre Ronzeaud, "Corneille dans tous ses états critiques. Pour une lecture plurielle de *Rodogune*," *Littératures classiques*, 32 (1998), 7–40.
50. See the "Examen" to *Rodogune*, *Œuvres complètes* (hereafter *OC*), pp. 199–200.
51. Her jealousy of Rodogune is primarily based on the fact that the young princess would have usurped her political role (see ll. 463–468). However, the desire to avenge humiliation at the hands of Rodogune is never very far away, and jealousy develops overtly as a theme towards the end of the play, as the queen fumes at Rodogune's hold over her sons. (See, e.g., ll. 148off.) For a reading that sees sexual jealousy as the kernel of the tragedy from the beginning, unlike mine, see Mitchell Greenberg, *Subjectivity and Subjugation in Seventeenth-Century Drama and Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Ch. 4, "Rodogune: Sons and Lovers," pp. 87–112.
52. As Couton points out (*OC*, II, p. 220, n.1), the exceptional intransitive use of the verb *posséder* ("je possède" / "I possess," l. 449) epitomizes this *libido dominandi*.
53. Mitchell Greenberg, *Corneille, Classicism and the Ruses of Symmetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 149.

54. As Truchet puts it, these dramatic tyrants present themselves as God's equals, even God's rivals, rather than as God's instruments ("La tyrannie," p. 263).
55. See lines 644, 672, 1423.
56. See Hélène Merlin, "Corneille et la politique dans *Cinna*, *Rodogune* et *Nicomède*," *Littératures classiques*, 32 (1998), 41–61, (p. 49). This seed of disorder is not resolved at the *dénouement*. Antiochus occupies the throne by default rather than by the decrees of natural law (p. 50). As Sweetser points out, the very harboring of a (pseudo-) state secret gives Cléopâtre a superiority usually reserved for men in a patriarchal society; see Sweetser, "Les femmes et le pouvoir dans le théâtre cornélien," in Alain Niderst, ed., *Pierre Corneille* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), pp. 605–614 (p. 609). This position is in sharp contrast to Laodice who is the only character *not* privy to the central political secret of her court (the heir's survival).
57. See Odette de Mourgues, "*Rodogune*, tragédie de la Renaissance," in Niderst, *Pierre Corneille*, pp. 483–489. The centrality of the theme of royal power is highlighted by the fact that Rodogune also seeks a throne (see ll. 1230, 1248; see de Mourgues, p. 486). As Watts points out, Rodogune's role parallels as well as contrasts with that of Cléopâtre; see Derek A. Watts, "A Further Look at *Rodogune*," in Ulrich Döring, Antiope Lyrudias and Rainer Zaiser, eds., *Ouverture et dialogue. Mélanges offertes à Wolfgang Ieimer* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1988), 447–463 (p. 449).
58. See Sweetser, "Les femmes et le pouvoir," p. 612.
59. See also Séleucus's comments in II.iv, ll. 743–744. Séleucus's efforts to make his brother king (III.v) also fail since Antiochus refuses to accept his offer.
60. See lines 570–582 and 1309–1312.
61. See Watts ("A Further Look," p. 449), for whom these opening lines highlight "her self-celebration as priestess of evil," and Greenberg, *Subjectivity*, p. 103.
62. As Greenberg points out, Antiochus's "desperate invocation" at the close of the play, as he refuses to believe she planned to poison him ("Ah! vivez pour changer cette haine en amour," l. 1825), "is a plea that she conform to the idea he needs of maternity and thus of femininity. It is an idea [...] that subtends an entire masculinist projection of the world" (Greenberg, *Subjectivity*, p. 111).
63. See Greenberg, *Subjectivity*, p. 112, and Gossip, "The Problem of *Rodogune*," *Studi francesi*, 12 (1978), 231–240 (p. 240).
64. It is the (false) belief that her son Darie is dead that turns her away from her murderous quest for vengeance.

65. See scenes II.iv, III.v, IV.ii, IV.iii, IV.iv, V.i, V.ii, V.iii, V.iv.
66. In order to gain their support, Rhodogune tells each of her sons that, although he is the younger, she will give him the throne. Any would-be truth is completely irrelevant in this “unnatural” and immoral regime.
67. A novel element here is the suggestion by Artaxerse (IV.iv) that the estates of the realm be summoned to force the queen to name a king—another attempt to bypass her authority that comes to nothing.
68. The idea of contamination by blood is reminiscent of beliefs concerning the contaminating influence of mother’s breast milk. See Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550–1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 29.
69. As David A. Collins points out: “A striking trait [of Laodice and Pierre Corneille’s Cléopâtre] is the complete awareness each has of her own criminal temperament and the ease with which each justifies her maneuvers on the basis of this temperament. [...] This fatalistic resignation to one’s depravity, a Jansenist attitude frequently attributed to Racine’s heroines, is, in the hands of the Corneilles, converted into an active defiance of any effort toward moral recuperation”; David Collins, *Thomas Corneille. Protean Dramatist* (London, The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1966), p. 130. Laodice’s continued nonchalant disregard for life manifests itself in her betrayal of Anaxandre, the prince who obliges her in killing the imposter masquerading as her “son” and yet whose survival is completely irrelevant to her (l. 1111).
70. As Emy Batache-Watt points out, Racine’s heroines are usually foreigners in unwelcome territory. See *Profils des héroïnes raciniennes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1976), p. 91.
71. See ll. 1329–1333, and 1294–1304.
72. She is “de Jézabel la fille sanguinaire” (l. 59), “cette autre Jézabel” (l. 761) and “de Jézabel la Fille meurtrière” (l. 1329) (“the blood-thirsty daughter of Jezabel,” “this other Jezabel,” “the murderous daughter of Jezabel”). It is noteworthy that in the Bible, Athalie is Jézabel’s sister-in-law rather than her daughter. Racine has here chosen to follow Flavius Josephus and Bossuet rather than the Old Testament, a choice that appears to highlight Athalie’s monstrosity as inherited. See Eléonore M. Zimmermann, *La Liberté et le destin dans le théâtre de Racine* (Saratoga, CA: Amna Libri, 1982), p. 142. On the representation of this relationship with her mother, and the role of filial loyalty as a trigger for Athalie’s actions, see Véronique Desnain, *Hidden Tragedies. The Social Construction of Gender in Racine* (New Orleans, LA: University Press of the South, 2002), pp. 134–8.

73. The image of Cléopâtre that emerges from her confidente's account in Act I paints a more sympathetic character than the queen we see on stage. Here the reverse dynamic is in play. In both cases the surprise element adds to the dramatic pleasure; audience expectations are challenged and spectators forced to review them.
74. Bruneau concurs with this idea when she indicates how Racine undermines the biblical version of the story by allowing Athalie to give her own account, and by representing her opposing clan as "malicious, unjust, fanatical and contradictory." See Marie-Florine Bruneau, *Racine, le jansénisme et la modernité* (Paris: Corti, 1986), pp. 125–127. See also Zimmermann, *La Liberté et le destin* (pp. 137–139), which highlights the unease within the play, and the similarities between the orders that Joad and Athalie represent.
75. Bruneau, *Racine*, p. 130.
76. As Harriet Stone points out, "Recognizing separate powers and the practice of separate religions, she would coexist with the Jews, not annihilate them. Her gesture towards Joas is the only possibility that the play offers for ending the reciprocal acts of violence, its only hope for a resolution that is not itself an act of vengeance." See Harriet A. Stone, "The Seduction of the Father in *Phèdre* and *Athalie*," in Selma A. Zebouni, ed., *Actes de Baton Rouge* (Paris, Tübingen, Seattle: PFSCS, 1986), pp. 153–164 (p. 162).
77. Helen Bates MacDermott, "Matricide and Filicide in Racine's *Athalie*," *Symposium*, 38 (1984), 56–69 (p. 57).
78. See Bates MacDermott (pp. 59–61) for analysis of the dramatic conversion "from filicide to figure of maternal desire," and Desnain, *Hidden Tragedies*, pp. 145–151.
79. See n.23. As Muratore puts it, "In fact, Joad's bitter enmity towards Athalie appears to have no continued basis in fact. On the contrary, textual evidence belies Athalie's imposed identity. We witness not a monomaniacal despot but an innovative stateswoman [...]. Indeed, one of the more intriguing aspects of *Athalie* is that in the ideological battle at hand, the spectator is compelled to side with Athalie rather than Joad, Athalie appears less villain than victim, a capable queen for whom progress imports more than precedent." See M. J. Muratore, "Racine's *Athalie* or the Power of Precedent," *Dalbousie French Studies*, 49 (1999), 182–192 (p. 187).
80. "Respirer" here is used in the sense of to ardently wish for ("souhaiter ardemment"), as defined in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694).
81. On the "figure mythique de la veuve," see Scarlett Beauvalet-Boutouyrie, *Être Veuve sous l'Ancien régime* (Paris: Belin, 2001), pp. 19–143.

82. Pousset de Montauban, *Séleucus* (Paris: Guillaume de Luyne, 1654). See III.i and V.ii for the queen's justifications of their role and their eventual abdications. This Laodice, widow of Antiochus king of Syria, is, like her homonym of Cappadocia, drawn from Justin's *History*, Books 27 and 28.
- The mother-daughter relationship frequently fares no better than that of the mother-son. In Boyer's *Clotilde* (Paris: Charles de Sercey, 1659), for example, the power-hungry would-be consort Deuthère provides a caricatural portrait of a female fury, ludicrous rather than terrifying, who, passed over by her daughter in the king's favors, attempts to murder her. More common is the nonchalant use of daughters by queen-mothers as pawns in their own chess games of dynastic politics or of vengeance. See, for example, Rotrou's *Agésilon de Colchos* (1637), Thomas Corneille's *Timocrate* (1658), and Deshoulières' *Genséric* (1680).
83. For another vengeful consort see also Theodora in Rotrou's *Bélissaire* (1644).
84. On the figure of the Fury and its link with *fureur*, see Jean-Philippe Groperrin, "Furies de théâtre. Mythologie et dramaturgie des *fureurs* dans la tragédie classique," in Fanny Népote-Desmarres with Jean-Philippe Groperrin, eds., *Mythe et histoire dans le théâtre classique. Hommage à Christian Delmas* (Toulouse: Société de Littératures classiques, 2002), pp. 261–281.
85. Nicolas-Marc Desfontaines, *La Véritable Semiramis* (Paris: Pierre Lamy, 1647). A radically different version of the queen appears in Gilbert's *Semiramis* (see chapter 2, pp. 84–85), performed some weeks earlier, although both plays include the episode of a five-day reign (or three-day, in Desfontaines's case), as recounted in Diodorus. For Justin's account of Semiramis, see his *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, Book I.ii. While the epithet *véritable* was presumably added to distinguish Desfontaines's play from Gilbert's, and no doubt has more to do with publishing rivalry than with the representation of the queen, the fact remains that the incestuous tyrant, rather than the popular sovereign, is presented to the collective theatre-going public as the real queen. Certainly, the theme of incest is central to the representation of the queen in both Crébillon and Voltaire's later plays concerning her (1717 and 1749 respectively), although there is no indication that they were influenced by Desfontaines.
86. See, for example, Atalide's reference to Roxane as thirsting for her blood (Racine, *Bajazet*, I. 766).
87. See Apostolidès, "Image du père et peur du tyran," pp. 201–202.
88. For the discourse surrounding the remarriage of widows in seventeenth-century France, on the whole accepted but frowned upon, see Beauvalet-Boutouyrie, *Être Veuve*, pp. 38–52.

89. See, for example, ll. 500, 1141, 1535, 1537, 1544–1545, 1618, 1637, 1650. It is worth noting that a similar lexicon is used to describe her zeal for the throne (see ll. 461, 473–474, 999, 1486), thus highlighting, as in the case of Cléopâtre, the carnality of her *libido dominandi*.
90. See, for example, ll. 1646–1648.
91. As Carine Barbaferi has indicated, the notion of the *tragédie galante* as a sub-genre of tragedy, which flourished particularly between 1653 and 1670 and of which Quinault and Thomas Corneille are allegedly the masters, has little foundation. Elements of *galanterie*, plots revolving around a love interest, and the tensions between a *galant* ideal and a traditional heroic tragic ideal, can be found throughout the century. See Carine Barbaferi, *Atrée et Céladon, la galanterie dans le théâtre tragique de la France classique (1634–1702)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006).
92. Her *fureur* is referred to seven times in Act V, while only once earlier in the play (Act IV.viii, l. 1418).
93. Of course, the ranks of the spurned female rulers of tragedy are swelled by the array of volatile and lovestruck (at times caricatural) female sovereigns of tragicomedy who also abuse their power in the pursuit of personal ends, and hence bolster the dominant image of female misrule. See, for example, Rotrou's *L'Heureux Naufrage* (1637), Gillet de La Tessonerie's *La Quixaire* (1640), and Quinault's *Amalante* (1657).
94. Tristan de l'Hermite's *La Marianne* was published in 1637, two years before Regnault's drama appeared in print. For the similarities between the two plays, particularly between Elizabeth and Herod, see J. Conroy, *Terres tragiques*, pp. 118–119.
95. See Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants. Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 20–25, 63–69.
96. As Christian Biet puts it, “a woman whether mother, wife, lover or widow, whether a consort who is subject to the king or a regent, is always an absolute other, a threat for the patriarchal institution,” *Cedipe en monarchie. Tragédie et théorie juridique à l'âge classique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994), p. 425. On the construction of “Otherness” in theatre of the period, see, for example, Michèle Longino, *Orientalism in French Classical Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
97. Christian Biet, *La Tragédie* (Paris: A. Colin, 1997), pp. 67–69.
98. On the problematic notion of “oriental despotism,” see Joan-Pau Rubiès, “Oriental Despotism and European Orientalism: Botero to Montesquieu,” *Journal of Early Modern History*, 9.1–2 (2005), 109–180; Alain Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail: la fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'occident classique* (Paris: Seuil, 1979).

99. Particularly fertile in this kind of stereotypical generalization is Rotrou's *Bélissaire* (1644), where the spurned and power-hungry consort Théodore (who is given a discourse of tyranny) wreaks havoc, and where the female sex is represented, in specifically gendered terms, as the very incarnation of hatred, vengeance, and jealousy (see, e.g., lines 133, 192, 235, 719–720). It is worth remembering that, in the moralist literature of the period, jealousy is seen as a particularly female weakness. See Madeleine Bertaud, *La Jalousie dans la littérature française au temps de Louis XIII* (Geneva: Droz, 1981), pp. 50–57. On the use of quotation marks (*guillemets*) to signal maxims in play texts, see Alain Riffaud, *La Ponctuation du théâtre imprimé au XVII^e siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2007), pp. 73–74.
100. See, for example, Elizabeth's fainting fits in *La Calprenède* (ll. 150, 413, 1616–1617).
101. As Forestier points out, the question of whether a sovereign or heir to the throne should sacrifice love for power is typical of the type of “love question” fashionable in the salons of the second half of the century. Georges Forestier, “Notice” to *Bajazet*, in Jean Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), I, p. 1493.
102. On tears, see Barbaferi, ch. 5, “Le goût des larmes,” in *Atrée et Céladon*, pp. 167–196. See also Sheila Page Bayne, *Tears and Weeping: An Aspect of Emotional Climate Reflected in Seventeenth-Century French Literature* (Tübingen: Narr; Paris: Place, 1981), and the issue of *Littératures classiques*, 62 (2007) devoted to *Le Langage des larmes aux siècles classiques*.
103. See Julia M. Walker, ed., *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998) for the darker side of the discourse on Gloriana/Astraea/good Queen Bess. (The focus is on English non-dramatic material from the 1540s to the 1620s).
104. On Elizabeth's inability to separate the public and private spheres in this play, see Florence de Caigny, “Le Comte d'Essex de Claude Boyer: Élisabeth ou la confusion des rôles,” *Études Épistémè*, 16 (2009), 112–129, esp. 119–125 (<http://revue.etudes-episteme.org/?le-comte-d-essex-de-claude-boyer>; accessed March 29, 2015).
105. See also ll. 1016–1019 of the same play where she herself comments on her change. The duchesse de Clarence highlights a similar conflict of virtue, power, and cruelty in Boyer's play, implying that although Elizabeth has tremendous virtue and power, while she is the envy and the beloved of numerous kings,

her reputation will be tainted by cruelty (Boyer, *Le Comte d'Essex*, II.v).

The ambivalent reactions that Elizabeth continued to excite in the early seventeenth century are alluded to in the *Épître* to La Calprenède's *Essex*: "quoique sa mémoire soit en quelque horreur parmi nous, elle est en telle vénération parmi beaucoup d'autres qu'elle passe dans leur esprit pour la plus grande Princesse qui fut jamais" ("although we remember her with a certain horror, she is held in such veneration by many others that she is perceived as the greatest Princess who ever lived").

106. It is noteworthy that the dramatist returns, a third time, to the juxtaposition of *femme* and *héros* when a remorseful Améstris goes to stab herself at the end of the play: "Oüy, c'est icy qu'il faut montrer toute mon ame, / Et qu'un bras de Héros punisse un cœur de Femme" ("Yes, it is here that I must bare my soul, / And let the hero's arm punish the heart of a woman," V.vi), suggesting that violence (stabbing) is a male prerogative just as love is a female one.
107. See in particular I.vii. In one scene (III.iii) the dramatist gives her briefly a sense of regret and maternal affection but both are overshadowed considerably by her ambition and passionate love.
108. Jacques Truchet, "Notice" in Jacques Scherer and Jacques Truchet, eds., *Théâtre du XVII^e siècle*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), II, p. 1554.
109. The idea of a throne rooted in blood ("cimenté de sang") recurs in Boursault (*Marie Stuard*, l. 308), and in reference to Améstris's throne in *Pirame* (III.iv).
110. See, for example, her reaction to the ill fate that the oracle predicts in II.i (ll. 372–380, 384–400).
111. See also lines 214–219, 248–252, 434–440, 509–513.
112. See also her rebuke in lines 1332–1334, where she underlines that her interest in strengthening the throne was solely for Astrate's sake. For another inappropriate love that runs contrary to the rank of queen, see the character of Hélène in La Calprenède's *Phalante* (1642), a characterization all the more striking since it undermines the comments of her advisors who praise her reign as prudent and just (IV.i).
113. The situation is, of course, made more complex by the sacred context of the play. On legitimacy, see Zimmermann, *La Liberté et le destin*, pp. 140–141.
114. As Vincent Grégoire points out, in *Esther* and *Athalie*, the monarchical maxim of "one faith, one law, one king," to which Racine adhered is unwittingly undermined by another reality

- throughout these two plays that could be summed up as “faiths, laws, queens.” See Vincent Grégoire, “La femme et la loi dans la perspective des pièces bibliques raciniennes représentées à Saint-Cyr,” *XVII^e siècle*, 179 (1993), 323–336 (p. 323).
115. See Vol. 1, pp. 38, 42–43.
 For a similar analysis of *Athalie* as monarch see Bruneau (*Racine*, pp. 127–131) according to whom “the portrait of *Athalie* is that of the ideal monarch which could have been a model for Louis XIV” (p. 131). See also Jean-Marie Apostolidès, for whom *Athalie* resembles the Early Modern absolute monarch: “She has tried to govern wisely, has ended hostilities with neighbouring countries and is open to religious plurality” (*Le Prince sacrifié* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), p. 128). (One might legitimately question to what extent the Early Modern absolute monarch is open to religious plurality.) It is worth noting that the idea of the queen as a successful sovereign has no foundation in the Bible; Racine has chosen to entirely invent this aspect of her history.
116. Needless to say this can also be understood as part of the divine order since Joad has prayed to God that she become confused and imprudent (ll. 290–294).
117. See, for example, Grégoire who suggests that as a man *Athalie* could rule; “having become a woman again” she cannot (“La femme et la loi,” p. 333). On this return to femininity as impossible, see also Zimmermann, *La Liberté et le destin*, p. 143.
118. See Jacques Truchet, ed., *Recherches de thématique théâtrale. L'Exemple des conseillers des rois dans la tragédie classique* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1981).
119. The similarity with Acomat’s role in *Bajazet*, published two years earlier, has not gone unnoticed. See Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature*, IV.i, pp. 160–161.
120. N’ai-je avec un sujet partagé ma puissance,
 Ne l’ai-je relevé par-dessus sa naissance,
 N’ai-je soulé son cœur de gloire et de grandeurs,
 Et ne l’ai-je honoré de mes propres faveurs [?]
- Have I not shared my power with a subject,
 Have I not elevated him above his birth,
 Have I not made him reel with glory and grandeur
 Have I not honored him with my own favors [?]
 (La Calprenède, *Essex*, ll. 5–8, I.i)
121. For the radically different representation of Cleopatra in Corneille’s *La Mort de Pompée*, see below, pp. 103–107. A fifth *Cléopâtre* by La Thorillière was performed in 1667–68 but is now

- lost (see Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature*, III.i, p. 28). The perennial popularity of Cleopatra as subject-matter for the Early Modern period is underlined by the fact that four sixteenth-century dramatists had also devoted plays to her: Jodelle (1552), Guillaume Belliard (1578), Nicolas de Montreux (1595), and Robert Garnier (1578). A most useful list of Early Modern European representations of Cleopatra is provided in an appendix to Riffaud's edition to the Mairet play (see below, n.124).
122. As Ella Shohat puts it, "Each age, one might say, has its own Cleopatra, to the point that one can study the thoughts and discourses of an epoch through its Cleopatra fantasies." "Disorienting Cleopatra: A Modern Trope of Identity," in Susan Walker and Sally-Ann Ashton, eds., *Cleopatra Reassessed* (London: British Museum, 2003), pp. 127–138 (p. 127).
123. Mary Hamer, *Signs of Cleopatra: History, Politics, Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. xix. Hamer argues that the story of Cleopatra needs to be understood as a founding myth of Western culture. See pp. xvi–xvii. For the history of Cleopatra, as found in the Ancient sources, see Michel Chauveau, *Cleopatra. Beyond the Myth*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, [1998] 2002).
124. For the dating of the first performance as probably between early April and mid-May 1635, see Alain Riffaud's introduction to the play in Jean Mairet, *Théâtre complet*, tome 1 (Paris: Champion, 2004), pp. 204–205, n.11. Another useful modern edition has been produced by Philip Tomlinson (Durham: University of Durham, 1997).
125. She is given to express shame at her flight from Actium, perceives herself as responsible for Antoine's dishonor and demise (through the false news of her death), and gives voice to the commonplace regret at the power of her beauty.
126. The myth of Cleopatra had been renewed in Europe during the Renaissance, not least thanks to Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*. By the seventeenth century, it tended to oscillate between an image of her as power-hungry and debauched seductress, or paradoxically as chaste and loyal wife, whose external beauty mirrored her internal virtue. See Marylyn L. Williamson, *Infinite Variety. Antony and Cleopatra in Renaissance Drama and Earlier Tradition* (Mystic, CT: Lawrence Verry, 1974), pp. 71–168. As Tomlinson points out, Mairet goes so far as to invent, and to closely integrate into the plot, a profound piety on the part of the queen. See his introduction, pp. 18–19. On the conversion of the queen to moral example, see also Riffaud's introduction,

- pp. 250–258. Altering history to introduce Antony's wife Octavia contributes significantly to the moralist tone of the play.
127. See Philip Tomlinson, "Le personnage de Cléopâtre chez Mairet et Corneille," *XVII^e siècle*, 190 (1996), 67–75 (pp. 70–72).
 128. See, for example, the remarks of her confidante Iras and her high priest Aristée in III.i.
 129. While examination of audience reception is beyond the scope of this study, it is worth remarking that, since the character of Antoine was written for Montdory in the original cast, this speech (lines 891–970) was quite probably one of the most memorable speeches in the original performances of the play, delivered with Montdory's habitual vociferous fuming, despite having absolutely no historical foundation. It does nothing to contribute to Cléopâtre's stature that she is running offstage to avoid Antoine, and hence appears in a position of timorous weakness, when he happens upon her at the beginning of the scene (III.iv).
 130. Interestingly, César's failure to keep Cléopâtre alive and bound for Rome is explicitly presented in gendered terms: his inability to "triumpher d'une femme" ("to triumph over a woman") is "[une] honte infâme" ("an infamous shame") (ll. 1763–1764), a sentiment repeated some lines later (ll. 1820–1821). See also his comments in lines 1543, 1566, and 1810. (The same topos is highlighted in d'Aubignac's *Zénobie*; see chapter 2, p. 80.)
 131. See Tomlinson, "*L'art d'embellir des vices*: The Antony and Cleopatra plays of Mairet and Benserade in the Light of Richelieu's Rehabilitation of the Theatre," *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 33 (1996), 349–365 (p. 360).
 132. That we are encouraged to see the trappings of power as meaningless, and the queen's power as nonexistent, is underpinned by César's remark: "Titre, honneur, dignité, couronne, sceptre, bien / Je lui laisse tout pour ne lui laisser rien" ("Title, honour, dignity, crown, scepter, possessions / I leave her with nothing in leaving her everything," ll. 1107–1108). In the published volume, the queen is defined from the outset as a captive, since in the sonnet to Richelieu, which Benserade includes before the text proper, she voices her own submission to the cardinal. That this sonnet needs to be understood as part of Benserade's homage to his patron does not take from the fact that it feeds into a larger discourse that diminishes any understanding of the queen as powerful ruler.
 133. For the grieving widow, see in particular the deathbed scenes III. v and III.vi, as well as ll. 1285–1290.

134. See Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, Book 51.12. According to W. W. Tarn, this story was written, “not to vilify Cleopatra, but to glorify the continence of Octavian”; see W. W. Tarn, “The Battle of Actium,” *Journal of Roman Studies*, 21 (1931), 173–199 (p. 197).
135. See III.v and I.ii; it seems to me, however (unlike Tomlinson), that this should not be taken at face value and stems rather from Antoine’s taunting of Cléopâtre, given his suspicions of her.
136. See II.v and III.iv for Cléopâtre, and V.ii for Antoine.
137. These evocative scenes and impassioned encounters explain in part the considerable popularity the play enjoyed, given the marked audience taste at the time for *le tendre*. The play was one of the greatest financial successes at the time of the newly established *Comédie française*. See Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature*, IV.i, p. 207. La Chapelle himself saw in it his recipe for posthumous fame, forecasting in verses addressed to his patron Conti (François-Louis de Bourbon) that the play would be successful as long as people enjoyed being moved to tears. Quoted in Les Frères Parfaict, *Histoire du Théâtre françois* (Paris: P. G. Le Mercier et Saillant, 1734–1749), Vol. 12, p. 297.
138. See I.ii, I.v, I.vii, II.iii, I.vii. In Mairet, see lines 499, 677, 683–684, 1288, 1093. This topos can be traced back to Lucan’s *Pharsalia*.
139. See II.i for her lengthy description of her fear at Actium, all the more forceful since given to her to voice.
140. That Augustan literature, source material for La Chapelle, is heavily marked by a fear of Cleopatra has long been accepted. The link between her sex and the fear she evoked for the Romans in general (and the unease she provoked in some early twentieth-century historians, it would seem) is succinctly caught by W. W. Tarn in the first edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* in the memorable line: “For Rome, who had never condescended to fear any nation or people, did in her time fear two human beings; one was Hannibal, and the other was a woman” (*Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), vol. 10, p. 111). In La Chapelle, there is a clear desire on the part of the Romans to conquer the queen—particularly evident in the monologue of Agrippa, ambassador to the absent Octavius (V.i), but also mentioned by Cléopâtre in III.iv, Antoine in II.v and Octavie in IV.iii—which thinly masks the fear her power inspires in them.
141. Agrippa appeals to Antoine to “[rendre] un Pere à [ses] Enfants” (“give a father back to his children” I.v), while Octavie also appeals to Antoine in terms of his children (I.vii) and to

- Cléopâtre in terms of his homeland: “Eloignez-le de vous, rendez-le à sa Patrie” (“Move away from him, give him back to his country,” II.iii).
142. As the younger sister of the queen in *Jeanne, reyne d'Angleterre*, she does not feature in the *dénouement* of the sixth play.
 143. See also her initial reaction (ll. 1383–1404) to Antoine’s death.
 144. See Marc Fumaroli, “Tragique païen et tragique chrétien dans *Rodogune*,” *Revue des Sciences humaines*, 152 (1973), 599–631. Reprinted in *Héros et Orateurs. Rhétorique et dramaturgie cornéliennes* (Geneva: Droz, 1990), pp. 170–208.
 145. Watts (“A Further Look,” p. 458) describes Cléopâtre’s demise as a “flamboyantly triumphant death, a diabolical apotheosis.”
 146. A similar point could be made regarding the relationship between patriarchy and the aesthetic conventions of the *dénouement* in tragicomedy. It is insufficient to accept the insistence on the patriarchal institution of marriage as a simple generic requirement without noting how that very insistence makes of tragicomedy a genre well-placed to comment on marriage, whether to uphold or critique it. In *L'Heureux Naufrage, Amalasonte, La Quixaire* (see n.93), in addition to the anonymous *La Juste Vengeance* (1641) and Rotrou’s *Les Occasions perdues* (1635), the female sovereigns are all portrayed as blissfully happy with their new marital union and the loss of their power, pleased to be back in an appropriate role for women. The prerequisites of the genre of tragicomedy, in these instances at least, facilitate the maintenance of societal power relations. It is tragicomedies that do not end with marriage or do not end with female submission (such as Du Ryer’s *Nitocris, Reyne de Babylone* (Paris: A. de Sommerville, 1650)) that are particularly interesting, since they go against the grain. See chapter 3, in this volume.
 147. As Zanin indicates (*Fins tragiques, passim*), frequently the *dénouement* of Early Modern tragedy is out of harmony with a simple triumph of justice or condemnation of vice, and is in fact not at all exemplary.
 148. See Corneille’s comments on the role of divine justice in the *dénouement* of *Rodogune* in his second *Discours* (OC, III, p. 160) and his justifications of his alterations to history in this light.
 149. On *Athalie* as the incarnation of the transcendence of monotheist patriarchy, see Bruneau, *Racine*, p. 135. On her role as “a metaphoric mother, a symbol of female power” that needs to be eliminated, see Desnain, *Hidden Tragedies*, p. 122. On the elimination of Cléopâtre, see Menke, for whom the widow can be read as “a site of resistance to the political and sexual economies

that subtend these early modern institutions” (Anne M. Menke, “The Widow Who Would Be Queen: The Subversion of Patriarchal Monarchy in *Rodogune* and *Andromaque*,” *Cahiers du dix-septième*, 7.1 (1997), 205–214, p. 205).

For all these tragedies, it would be very fruitful, although beyond the scope of this present study, to examine female death in the light of Nicole Loraux’s conclusions concerning death in Greek tragedy. See *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, [1985] 1987).

150. As Maurice Baudin pointed out nearly eighty years ago, “it is not peculiar to the nature of a woman that, in a drama where power is notoriously ephemeral, she relinquishes or even loses a throne. What matters is the queen’s conduct during her reign”; see Maurice Baudin, “The Stateswoman in Seventeenth-Century French Tragedy,” *Modern Language Notes*, 53.5 (1938), 319–327 (p. 325).
151. See Muratore, *Expirer au Féminin. Narratives of Female Dissolution in French Classical Texts* (New Orleans, LA: University Press of the South, 2003), pp. 49–59.
152. On Siché, see Truchet’s “Notice” to *Astrate*, p. 1553. On *Athalie*, see Bruneau, *Racine*, pp. 125–127, and Zimmermann, *La Liberté et le destin*, pp. 137–139.
153. Élise poisons herself in order to prevent the king having to defend her anymore, to prevent him from committing any crime, and hence to protect him from himself (ll. 1437–1440). The people’s reaction is also different to that of the majority of these plays, since here they do not demand the queen’s death, but leave it for their newly revealed king to decide (V.iv)—the ultimate dramatic irony since it becomes apparent she could have lived (l. 1648).
154. For a similar reflection, see Grégoire, “La femme et la loi,” p. 336. This unease is precisely due to the *déséquilibre* (imbalance) between expectations and *dénouement* that Zanin examines.
155. See d’Aubignac’s justification for modifying history, *La Pratique du théâtre*, p. 113.
156. On the well documented, and unique, use of history by Corneille, see, for example, Georges Forestier, *Essai de génétique théâtrale. Corneille à l’œuvre* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1996); John D. Lyons, *The Tragedy of Origins: Pierre Corneille and Historical Perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Alain Couprie, “De l’usage de l’histoire dans les tragédies de Corneille et de Racine: deux visions différentes de la tragédie politique,” *Papers on Seventeenth-Century French Literature*, 27.52 (2000), 225–234.

- On *Rodogune* in particular, see also Gordon D. McGregor, "Rodogune, Nicomède and the Status of History in Corneille," *Stanford French Review*, 11.2 (1987), 133–156.
157. On Elizabeth's self-presentation and the importance of the image of the virgin, see Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995) and Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics and Sex and Power* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994). See also the studies by Susan Frye, Louis Montrose, and Susan Doran (titles in bibliography).
158. On the shift from history to myth, see Jane Conroy, *Terres tragiques*, pp. 243–262. On the Essex Irish expedition and later rebellion, see Alison Plowden, *Elizabeth Regina. The Age of Triumph 1588–1603* (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 135–171. The primary written source for all three was William Camden's *Histoire d'Elizabeth* (1627). On sources, see Jane Conroy, *Terres tragiques*, pp. 248–255, and André Lefèvre, "Les sources des tragédies sur le comte d'Essex (XVII^e siècle), en France et en Angleterre," *Revue de littérature comparée*, 40.4 (1966), 616–624.
159. La Calprenède alludes to her age once (l. 626).
160. On what she calls Boyer's "inversion of history" in this respect, see Jane Conroy, *Terres tragiques*, p. 348.
161. At the point in time historically at which the play takes place, the eighteen-year-old Cleopatra had been successfully ruling Egypt for three years, officially jointly with her ten-year-old brother Ptolemy XIII, but in reality alone. Temporarily bereft of her power in early 48 BC, Cleopatra set about regaining it. Civil armed strife between brother and sister seemed inevitable before the course of events was changed by the arrival in Egypt of Pompey, accompanied by his wife Cornelia and son Sextus, following his defeat by Caesar at the Battle of Pharsalus. Pompey's hope of support from Ptolemy proved illusory, as the king and his pernicious advisors opted to murder the Roman in order to curry favor with Caesar, to the horror of Cleopatra in exile watching from the wings. See Edith Flamarion, *Cléopâtre. Vie et mort d'un pharaon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), pp. 31–40.
162. While there is some historical evidence to suggest a liaison between Sextus and Cleopatra, there is no evidence of a rejection. See Flamarion, *Cléopâtre*, p. 39.
163. Tomlinson neatly sums up the coincidence between the political and esthetic implications of the representation of Cleopatra as virtuous exemplum, in line with the newly evolving conception

of theatre as a moral edifying force: “She is recuperated in the name of a patriarchal political authority which posits itself equally as moral authority, a recuperation which functions by means of an aesthetic which is itself also bolstered by this same authority” (“elle a été récupérée au nom d’une autorité politique patriarcale qui se voulait aussi autorité morale, récupération accomplie au moyen d’une esthétique qui est, elle aussi, celle de cette même autorité”). See “Introduction” to Mairet’s *Le Marc-Antoine*, p. 24.

164. Lancaster suggests these are his sources. Corneille himself only refers to Blondus (Flavio Biondo) whose *Historiarum ab inclinatione Romanorum imperii decades* (written from 1439 to 1453) was first published in 1483. For modern accounts of her life and reign, see A. Daniel Frankforter, “Amalasantha, Procopius, and a Woman’s Place,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 8.2 (1996), 41–57; Vito Antonio Sirago, *Amalasantha. La Regina (ca. 495–535)* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1998).
165. The same observation applies to Quinault’s version of the queen in his tragicomedy *Amalante* (1658, performed 1657) as a gullible, volatile, indecisive usurper.
166. The nuances and contradictions inherent in Early Modern dramatic theory, and the related debates surrounding the use of history, have given rise to a number of in-depth volumes by leading seventeenth-century scholars, and it is not my intention to rehearse here the detailed arguments meticulously and expertly examined elsewhere. See, in particular, Henry Phillips, *The Theatre and Its Critics in Seventeenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); John D. Lyons, *Kingdom of Disorder: The Theory of Tragedy in Classical France* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999); Georges Forestier, *Passions tragiques et règles classiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003); “Théorie et pratique de l’histoire dans la tragédie classique,” *Littératures classiques*, 11 (1989), 95–107; and, “Imitation parfaite et vraisemblance absolue. Réflexions sur un paradoxe classique,” *Poétique*, 82 (1990), 187–202. The idea that the “Rules” dominated seventeenth-century theatre, and that every dramatist was desperate to adhere to them, was first called into question, as Lyons points out, over fifty years ago. See E. B. O. Borgerhoff, *The Freedom of French Classicism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950) and William Moore, *The Classical Drama of France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). In recent years, the existence of the divergence between theory and practice is widely accepted. Nonetheless, it is reasonable

- to assume that most dramatists would have paid some heed to the dramaturgical debates of their time, even if it were only lip-service.
167. D'Aubignac, *La Pratique*, p. 637. As Christian Biet puts it, the *bienséances* operate as a filter, which allow the work to be adapted to the moral and political ideologies of the public; see *Cédipe en monarchie*, p. 96.
 168. Lyons, *Kingdom of Disorder*, p. 85.
 169. See, for example, d'Aubignac, *La Pratique*, p. 113.
 170. The issue therefore is not, for example, that fury is expected from a scorned female character, as Vialleton points out (Jean-Yves Vialleton, *Poésie dramatique et prose du monde. Le Comportement des personnages dans la tragédie en France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2004), pp. 638–640), but how and why that expectation is fostered. Furthermore, it is precisely because the figure of the scorned woman is part of an inherited literary myth, dating back to Seneca (*ibid.*), that it should be unpacked rather than accepted as a given.
 171. Some did address the issue: see, for example, Mairet's justification in the *avertissement* to his *Illustre Corsaire* (1640) of his introduction of Octavia in *Le Marc-Antoine* as an example of the "ingénieuse liberté" that adhering to verisimilitude permitted.
 172. And hence the more successful option, he might be forgiven for believing (mistakenly, in this case, as it transpired). Given the success of his earlier *Laodice* (1668) and Quinault's *Astrate* (1665), the figure of the murderous, usurper queen in love appeared to appeal to audience taste. The formulaic nature of these three plays, in addition to Pradon's *Pirame*, is striking: these four plays premiered within a nine-year period (1665–74) all share the same basic plot.
 173. Hippolyte-Jules Pilet de la Mesnardière, *La Poétique* (Paris: A. de Sommerville, 1640), pp. 120–125.
 174. See, for example, Mairet, ll. 1641–1642, 1766; Benserade, IV.v, V.ii, and V.viii; La Chapelle, II.iii.
 175. D'Aubignac, in fact, uses La Calprenède's Élisabeth as an example of verisimilitude, given her distraught tirade announcing her own death, after Essex's execution; she speaks apparently as she should (by which he clearly means, as a heartbroken woman) (*La Pratique*, p. 207).
 176. In La Calprenède, this unsuitability of passionate love to her rank is highlighted in a wonderfully ironical passage that thinly masks reference to her perceived illegitimate birth (La Calprenède, *Essex*, ll. 1064–1069).

177. See also Syroes's rebuke to Syra in Rotrou's *Cosroès* (1649), highlighting how inappropriate her fury is to her rank (l. 47).
178. I am reminded of Jean Howard's comment regarding Renaissance cross-dressing plays, when she suggests that while they do not constitute "comments' on cross-dressing debates, "collectively they play a role in producing and managing anxieties about women on top, [...], and in managing anxieties about the fragility of male authority"; see Jean E. Howard, "Cross-Dressing, the Theatre and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39.4 (1988), 418–440 (p. 429). It is worth recalling the other models of queenship that equally diminish the threat of female rule but which lie beyond the scope of this study, namely those models of virtue for whom the throne and a role as consort hold little attraction; see, for example, Gilbert's *Marguerite de France* (1641), Scudéry's *Eudoxe* (1641), or Thomas Corneille's *Camma* (1661).
179. Mary Jo Muratore, *Expirer au Féminin*, p. 49. The comment is made in reference to Cléopâtre but, in the context here, is equally applicable to the others.
180. Pierre Corneille, "Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique" (*OC*, III, p. 125).

2 The Drama of Gender Struggle: Androgyny and Female Government

1. Gillet de la Tessonerie, *Sigismond, duc de Varsau* (Paris: Quinet, 1646); see H. C. Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature*, II.ii, p. 639. The Polish Vanda was the subject of three further plays between 1639 and 1651: two Latin tragedies that have been lost, and Jobert's *Balde, reine des Sarmates* (1651), where government by women is not a key theme. On the four plays, see Daniela Dalla Valle, "Autour de *Sigismond, duc de Varsau* de Gillet de la Tessonerie: l'histoire et le mythe de Vanda en France," in Françoise Lavocat, ed., *La France et la Pologne. Histoires, mythes, représentations* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2000), pp. 181–192. See also François Rosset, "Wanda: du mythe au roman," *XVII^e siècle* (1995), 453–465.
2. The story of the queen's election can be found in medieval Polish chronicles. For these chronicles and other possible sources for the play, see Dalla Valle, "Autour de *Sigismond*," pp. 182–183. However, as Dalla Valle points out (p. 190), little is made of this election in the Early Modern texts, even in this one, despite this prefatory mention; Vanda is a queen because she is a king's daughter.

3. Gillet de la Tessonerie presents the queen in the *dramatis personae* as having stepped down voluntarily from the throne (“[elle] quitta volontairement la couronne”). Lancaster is one critic who thus reads the play as ending with an abdication. In fact, the *dénouement* is less categorical and leaves a doubt hanging as to whether the queen abdicates or goes on to rule with her new husband. In any case, the dramatist has radically altered his sources, since in the original legend the queen commits suicide to retain her chastity and avoid an unwanted marriage, a fact that reveals la Tessonerie’s “quitta volontairement” as euphemistic in the extreme.
4. Jean Magnon, *Jeanne de Naples* (Paris: Louis Chamhoudry, 1656), according to Lancaster (*A History of French Dramatic Literature*, III.i, p. 175) probably first performed in 1653.
5. The life of Joanna of Naples (1326–82) has been the subject of considerable myth and fabulation. A useful overview of her reign and the diverse attitudes toward her can be found in Elizabeth Casteen, “Sex and Politics in Naples: The Regnant Queenship of Johanna I,” *Journal of the Historical Society*, 11.2 (2011), 183–210. See also Émile G. Léonard, *Histoire de Jeanne I, reine de Naples*, 3 vols. (Monaco: Imprimerie de Monaco, 1932–37). According to the Frères Parfaict (*Histoire du théâtre français*, Vol. 8, p. 108), Magnon altered the historical account to paint a favorable portrait of the queen, an idea that survives today; cf. Charles Mazouer, who claims that Magnon “veut faire éclater [son] innocence, alors qu’elle est connue pour ses galanteries” (*Le Théâtre français de l’âge classique*, II (Paris: Champion, 2010), p. 252). However, one version of the historical account is in itself favorable; see, for example, her depiction in Boccaccio’s *Famous Women*, which provides a contemporary account of the queen.
6. The three kings present or evoked—her late husband, Andrew of Hungary, her current husband (historically, Louis of Taranto) and her brother-in-law, Louis of Hungary—are all represented as barbarous or tyrannical (although never named in the play except by their titles).
7. A similar argument is raised by Scudéry’s tragicomic heroine Andromire, queen of Syracuse, legitimate heir to her father’s throne, when she describes herself as only answerable to divine authority. See Georges de Scudéry, *Andromire* (Paris: A. de Sommaville, 1641), I.iv.
8. Claude Boyer, *Fédéric* (Paris: A. Courbé, 1660), first performed 1659. The text is available online at <http://www.theatre-classique.fr> (accessed March 29, 2015). A critical edition by Catherine Neveu (submitted as a *maîtrise* thesis, Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2000) is also available online at <http://www.crht>.

paris-sorbonne.fr/ (accessed March 29, 2015). On Boyer, see Sylvie Benzekri's doctoral thesis "Claude Boyer dramaturge: une traversée du XVII^e siècle, 1618–1698" (Université Paris IV-Sorbonne, 2008). On cross-dressing in drama, a typically Baroque topos and a form of the age-old device of theatrical disguise, see Georges Forestier, *L'Esthétique de l'identité dans le théâtre français (1550–1680): le déguisement et ses avatars* (Geneva: Droz, 1998), who identifies 121 incidences of female cross-dressing in drama in the period indicated; John D. Lyons, *A Theater of Disguise: Studies in French Baroque Drama (1630–1660)* (Columbia, SC: French Literature Publications Company, 1978); and Joseph Harris, *Hidden Agendas: Cross-Dressing in 17th-Century France* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2005). See also the bibliography for articles by Hilgar and Pellegrin.

9. On the issues of *vraisemblance* and cross-dressing in the play, see Neveu's *maîtrise* dissertation, pp. 12–35.
10. Since Frédéric is hoping that Yoland will marry him as soon as the Council accepts her as queen regnant, it could be assumed that his enthusiasm is self-interested. However, Boyer ensures that we are sufficiently reminded throughout the play of the hero's nobility and honor so that ambition is not seen as his motivating force, a fact that is underlined by his abdication at the *dénouement* in favor of his son and the happy couple.
11. See chapter 3 in this volume with regard to Pulchérie and Anne de Bretagne.
12. Despite being chosen by the people, Frédéric cedes the throne to his son, Valère, whom Yoland loves and will marry.
13. Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature*, II.ii, p.535; Forestier, *L'Esthétique de l'identité*, p. 491.
14. Howard, "Cross-Dressing, the Theatre and Gender Struggle," p. 428.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 432. See, for example, ll. 51, 52, 77–78, 236.
16. The play seems to have met with a certain amount of success. Loret's *Muze historique* of November 15, 1659, refers to it as "quite to the public's taste" ("tout-à-fait au gré du public"). The author refers to it in his *Épître* as having merited public approval, while the Frères Parfaict suggest the play met with quite some success ("assez de réussite") (Les Frères Parfaict, *Histoire du théâtre français*, Vol. 8, p. 302).
17. Twenty years later, Catherine Bernard devoted a *nouvelle* to the same subject entitled *Fédéric de Sicile* (Paris: Jean Ribou, 1680), translated into English as *The Female Prince, or Frederick of Sicily* (London: H. Rodes, 1682). As the title implies, in this case Frédéric

- is the name of the disguised princess, not the admiral, and the names Yoland and Camille are likewise given to different characters. While the two texts share a historical backdrop and basic plot (the politically inspired transvestism of the king's daughter), the focus here is entirely on love, complete with the lost letters, mistaken identity, multiple lovers, and *qui propros* typical of the *nouvelle* genre. Bernard, who was to create a compelling female sovereign in 1689 with the eponymous *Laodamie*, does not engage with the political implications of gynæcocracy in this earlier text (unsurprisingly, again given the *nouvelle* genre). It is not clear whether Boyer's play was known to Bernard or to what extent she may have used it as a source: in the *Avis au lecteur*, she indicates her source to be a Spanish *nouvelle*. Franco Piva in his recent critical edition of Bernard's text in *Œuvres*, 1, *Romans et nouvelles* (Fasano: Schena; Paris: Nizet, 1993) appears to be unaware of Boyer's play.
18. The figure of the warrior woman is ubiquitous in the art and literature of Early Modern Europe, unsurprisingly given the importance in society of military values in the first half of the century. On the representation of the warrior woman in French imaginative literature of the period, see Marlies Mueller, "The Taming of the Amazon," *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 22 (1995), 199–232; Derval Conroy, "Mapping Gender Transgressions? Representations of the Warrior Woman in Seventeenth-Century Drama," in Richard G. Hodgson, ed., *La Femme au XVII^e siècle* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2002), pp. 243–254; Micheline Cuénin, "Bradamante: de l'épique au burlesque," in E. Freeman et al., eds., *Myth and Its Making in the French Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 30–43. For the broader European context, see the studies by Dugaw, Shepherd, Tomalin, and Schwarz (titles in the bibliography). On the related popularity of representation in the visual arts of French aristocratic women as Minerva, see Elise Goodman, *The Cultivated Woman: Portraiture in Seventeenth-Century France* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2008), pp. 75–115.
 19. See Vol. 1, Ch. 2, "The Warrior Queen." In drama, criticisms of the cross-dressed warrior woman are raised in the two plays concerning Joan of Arc of the period (see Ch. 1, n.12 for full titles). In both cases, and true to the historical reality, the principal criticism of the heroine concerns her cross-dressing, rather than her military activity. See d'Aubignac, *La Pucelle d'Orléans* (II.ii and IV.i) and [Benserade?/La Mesnardière?], *La Pucelle d'Orléans*, IV.i.
 20. Abbé d'Aubignac, *Zenobie* (Paris: A. Courbé, 1647), first performed 1640; for a modern edition, see Bernard J. Bourque, ed.,

Abbé d'Aubignac: Pièces en prose (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2012). According to the printer's *avis*, the play at the time of its creation had "charmed all the Court" and had been greeted with much applause. Jean Magnon later also suggests in his prefatory address to the reader in his versification (1660) that the play had enjoyed "a fine success."

21. On this discourse, see Joël Cornette, *Le Roi de guerre. Essai sur la souveraineté dans la France du Grand Siècle* (Paris: Payot, 1993).
22. "C'estoit bien irriter nos destins que de nous obliger de vaincre une femme," Aurélian chides the queen (IV.iii). She is "guilty of their shame" (IV.iii), "the shame of their emperor" (V.ii). The Senate has repeatedly rebuked him for taking so long to defeat a woman (III.vii). Aurélian feels dishonored that he was wounded by a woman (II.ii). See also Marcellin's account of the army's attitude to the queen (IV.vi).
23. "J'ay soutenu seule," she claims, "au milieu de trente Usurpateurs l'honneur des Romains. Claude ce sage Empereur m'a laissé régner en repos comme un rempart dans l'Orient contre vos Ennemis, & vous me traitez en criminelle?" ("Alone, I upheld the honor of the Romans amid thirty usurpers. The wise emperor Claudius left me to reign in peace as a buffer in the East against your enemies. And you treat me as a criminal?" (d'Aubignac, *Zénobie*, IV.iii).
24. The idea that Zénobie's suicide could be attributed to Marcellin's efforts is belied by her words throughout the play. While Aurélian focuses on Marcellin's treachery in encouraging her to die, it is clear throughout that this was the queen's desire ("Mourons souveraine" / "Let me die as Sovereign," as she says, II.ii), in order to avoid the shame of a Roman triumph. D'Aubignac's decision to allow Zénobie self-affirmation in death is, of course, a radical alteration to history, since the queen in reality was brought in triumph to Rome and ended her days on an estate outside the capital. The primary source for the history of Zenobia (ca. 241–272) is Trebellius Pollio's "The Lives of the Thirty Pretenders," and Flavius Vopiscus's "The Life of Aurelian," both found in the *Historia Augusta*, a collection of biographies of dubious historical authenticity, composed before 425 AD. See the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Loeb Classical Library (London: W. Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1922–32), III.
25. Otherwise the idea of her providing a buffer for the Romans, the reference to Claudius, the allusions to Roman shame, the idea of her being as formidable an enemy as a man can all be found in the *Historia Augusta*.

26. Jean Magnon, *Zenobie. Reyne de Palmire* (Paris: C. Journal, 1660), first performed 1659. Magnon's play, which met with little success, differs considerably from d'Aubignac's, not least in the substitution of a daughter, Odénie, for the two small sons, Timolaus and Herennian, of the earlier text. This may be somewhat explained by the fact that Magnon's text is dedicated to Christine de France, duchesse de Savoie (1606–63) whose daughter Marie Louise is also highly praised in the *Épître*. Two of the poems included before the text proper are dedicated to the duchess and to her daughter. For a useful overview of the considerable differences between the plays, see B. J. Bourque, "Deux versions de *Zénobie*: imitation ou transformation?" in Jane Southwood and Bernard Bourque, eds., *French Seventeenth-Century Literature. Influences and Transformations. Essays in Honour of Christopher J. Gossip* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 219–233. This queen of Palmyra is not to be confused with the heroine of Pousset de Montauban's *Zenobie, reine d'Arménie* (1653), a very different historical figure. Montauban's heroine bears no resemblance to the warrior queens. Rather, as she seeks vengeance on her two husbands, she appears to share certain characteristics with the vengeful figures examined in chapter 1 in this volume, although given the fact that both husbands tried to kill her, she is given more justification than most. A further *Zénobie*, attributed to Boyer, was performed in 1693, but has been lost.
27. Jean Guillemay Du Chesnay, dit Rosidor, *La Mort du Grand Cyrus ou la vengeance de Tomiris* (n.p.: Guillaume Henry Streel, 1662). Rosidor adheres closely to Herodotus's account of the conflict between Tomiris and Cyrus, as recounted in *The Histories*, Book 1, §201–214, although he has Cyrus die at the queen's hands rather than in battle; he also makes much more both of her maternal instinct and of her role as queen than is in his source.
28. See Sylvie Steinberg, "Le mythe des Amazones et son utilisation politique de la Renaissance à la Fronde," in Kathleen Wilson-Chevalier and Éliane Viennot, eds., *Royaume de Fémynie. Pouvoirs, contraintes, espaces de liberté des femmes, de la Renaissance à la Fronde* (Paris: Champion, 1999), pp. 261–273 (p. 272). See also Vol. 1, Ch. 2, "The Warrior Queen" and "Le Moyne's Warrior Queen."
29. Three years earlier, another Tomiris had appeared in Quinault's tragedy *La Mort de Cyrus* (1659), first performed in late 1658. Here, however, testament to the changing literary fashions, her military abilities are entirely incidental to the plot, described only once by Cyrus in an evocation of the past (II.i), and no mention is made at all of government by women. The play, largely inspired by

- Scudéry's novel, is *romanesque* in the extreme (Tomiris is desperately in love with Cyrus rather than seeking his head as vengeance for the suicide of her son, as Herodotus relates), and highlights how depoliticized the figure could be. On this play, see Étienne Gros, *Philippe Quinault* (Geneva: Slatkine, [1926] 1970), pp. 305–312, and William Brooks, *Philippe Quinault, Dramatist* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009). Marie-Anne Barbier also drew on Scudéry's novel for her *Tomyris* (1707). More in line with Rosidor, and clearly drawing on Herodotus, are the anonymous *La Mort du grand et véritable Cyrus* (Lyon: Jean Montecat, 1654), attributed to Françoise Pascal in the *Bibliothèque dramatique de Soleinne* and in Alain Riffaud's *Répertoire du théâtre français imprimé entre 1630 et 1660* (Geneva: Droz, 2009), and Borée's earlier *Tomyre Victorieuse* (Lyon: V. de Cœursilly, 1627).
30. Gabriel Gilbert, *Semiramis* (Paris: A. Courbé, 1647).
 31. See, for example, the references to her in his *Mémoires sur les choses advenues en France* (n.p., 1646), III, pp. 105–118. Gilbert's interest in the Amazon figure is highlighted in the characterization of the earlier Rhodogune as an Amazon and by the multiple references to the Amazons in the ode to Christina of Sweden. See *Poème à la Sérénissime Reyne de Suède. Fait en l'an 1651* (Paris: G. de Luyne, 1655).
 32. The quasi-legendary Assyrian figure of Semiramis is believed to be based on the historical Sammu-ramat, who reigned as regent for her son Adad-nirari III from 811 BC to 806 BC.
 33. Even Desfontaines's alternative, and unfavorable, portrait of the queen in the less successful *La Véritable Semiramis* (also 1647) accords space to her impressive and invaluable military prowess (see, e.g., I.iii, III.i). In fact, one of the most evocative descriptions of the warrior woman in the drama of the time, clearly not devoid of elements of male erotic fantasy, can be found in Ninus's description of his beautiful wife's defeat of Thermodonte (III.i). On this play, see chapter 1, pp. 28–29.
 34. Gilbert's main source is Diodorus Siculus's *The Library of History*, Vol. 1, Book 2, a text that in turn draws apparently on two different accounts of Assyrian history, by Ctesias of Cnidus (for Ch. iv–vi) and by one Athenaeus and “certain other historians” (for Ch. xx, which introduces the idea of the five-day reign). Unsurprisingly, he eschews Justin's version of the queen's history, which evokes the theme of an incestuous love for her son Ninyas, and which Desfontaines used. On the sources of the play, see Eleanor J. Pellet, *A Forgotten French Dramatist: Gabriel Gilbert (1620?–1680?)* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1931), pp. 109–115.

35. In love with Semiramis, Ninus had tried to force her husband Ménon to divorce her and to marry Ninus's daughter, so that Ninus could marry Semiramis himself. Since Ninus had threatened to kill Semiramis if Ménon didn't comply, Ménon had committed suicide to save Semiramis's life and avoid the dishonor of rejecting his beloved wife. This is the case that Semiramis presents to the satraps for their judgment, without naming the protagonists, as custom demands (V.ii).
36. At any rate, Gilbert avoids any mention of tyrannicide, justifiable or otherwise, by ensuring that Ninus is not king when judgment is pronounced and that he kills himself before her order, based on the council's judgment, can be carried out. It is also worth noting that she does not put Ninus's daughter to death, as Lancaster mistakenly suggests (*A History of French Dramatic Literature*, II.ii, pp. 584–585). His daughter stabs herself onstage at the end of V.ii, as the reference to blood at the opening of V.iii implies.
37. Pellet, *A Forgotten French Dramatist*, p. 116.
38. The contrast with Desfontaines's *Véritable Semiramis* of the same year is marked. As Pellet puts it: "The trend of the two pieces is in opposite directions. Gilbert's Semiramis is a warrior and a devoted wife, who through the operation of the tragic intrigue is set, by popular wish, upon the throne; Desfontaines' Semiramis is upon the throne at the beginning, and disgraced and unhappy, takes her life at the end" (Pellet, *A Forgotten French Dramatist*, p. 122). The Desfontaines play was published some weeks before Gilbert's version, although may have only been performed after publication (Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature*, II.ii, pp. 583–584). Gilbert's play met with "a felicitous success at court," according to the author's dedication; the Frères Parfaict include lengthy citations of the play in their *Histoire* with the comment that the play seemed to them to merit being unearthed ("la Pièce nous a paru mériter d'être tirée de l'obscurité") (Les Frères Parfaict, *Histoire du théâtre français*, Vol. 7, p. 153).
39. Although two of these plays were performed before the Fronde, and two after, no substantial difference in the representation of military activity for women is apparent. It may be significant that the earlier two were more successful than Magnon's, although that lack of success could be attributed to numerous factors. I have been unable to unearth any information concerning the reception of Rosidor's play. The theme of the captive capable warrior queen is also exploited in Boyer's tragicomedy *La Sœur généreuse* (Paris: A. Courbé, 1647), where Clomire, queen of Themiscire, and her sister of the title are both captured separately. Both women are depicted as calm, virtuous souls who greet their captors' amorous

advances with stoicism and honor. Mention should also be made here of Scudéry's tragicomic queen Andromire (see n.7), an interesting example of a queen whose military ambitions, she feels, are thwarted by both her sex and her rank (III.iv). Here, Scudéry provides a sympathetic portrait of a courageous woman hampered by gender expectations. While her authority and ability to govern are never called into question because of her sex, nor is good government ever explicitly linked to military prowess, in practice she is hampered by her dependency on her chief defender Cleonime (who ends up captured) and on the cowardly soldiers who deserted him. Scudéry's *dénouement* is somewhat uncommon in that the queen *does* end up on the throne, the populace has not been clamoring for a male king, and while she will marry her beloved, the latter refuses to take over her role.

40. For a stimulating recent analysis of this issue in relation to seventeenth-century moralist literature, see Pierre Zoberman, "No Place for (a) Woman: The Generic Use of *l'hommelles hommes* as a Gendered Discursive and Cultural Topos," in William Brooks, Christine McCall Probes, and Rainer Zaiser, eds., *Lieux de culture dans la France du XVII^e siècle* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 275–289. For a revolutionary analysis of the implications of gender use in language, see John Leslie's *A Defence of the Honour of Marie, Quene of Scotlande* (London, 1569), as examined in Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism. Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 243–244. The bibliography on gender and language studies is, of course, vast. Useful starting points for non-linguists, like this writer, can be found in the following: Anna Livia, "'Un homme sur deux est une femme': Introduction—Pronoun Envy and Phallogocentrism," in *Pronoun Envy: Literary Uses of Linguistic Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 3–30; Monique Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), pp. 76–89; Heiko Motschenbacher, *Language, Gender and Sexual Identity: Poststructuralist Perspectives* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2010); Marlis Hellinger and Hadumod Bußmann, eds., *Gender Across Languages. The Linguistic Representation of Women and Men*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2001–03), a comprehensive reference work that examines thirty languages. Two chapters are devoted to French in Volume 3. See also Éliane Viennot's *Non, le masculin ne l'emporte pas sur le féminin!* (Donnemarie-Dontilly: Éditions iXe, 2014).

41. See also Élisabeth's remarks on court dynamics earlier where she moves from the *ils* of *les rois* to *je*, in another self-referential usage of *rois* (Boursault, *Marie Stuard*, ll. 411–419).
42. See also the reference to Quinault's *Élise*, "les volontés des Rois tiennent lieu de raisons" (*Astrate*, l.142) and Laodice's claim, "Je suis Reyne, et le Sceptre est la foudre des Rois" (*Laodice*, l. 648), both cited in chapter 1, nn. 45 and 47.
43. See also the comments of Cintille, queen of Sweden, in the anonymous tragicomedy *La Juste vengeance*, where the reign of a "maiden" is contrasted with that of the "Roy" that the state needs (V.v, cited in chapter 1, n.19). Here, the word "roy" is contrasted with "fille," so that age as well as sex highlights the unsuitability of the queen to rule.
44. I have only come across one example to date where a parity is implied, in other words where reference is made to both "les Reynes & les Roys" as God's "vivantes images" ("living images") (see Regnault, *Marie Stuard*, II.ii). Richelet (1680) defines *reine* first as "femme de Roi" ("the wife of a king") and second as "princesse qui a un Roiaume" ("a princess who has a kingdom"). The *Académie française* (1694) also puts "femme de Roy" ahead of "Princesse possédant un Royaume de son chef" ("princess possessing a kingdom of her own"). Only Furetière (1690) defines *reynne* first as "Souveraine, Maistresse absoluë d'un Royaume" ("sovereign, absolute mistress of a kingdom"), and second as "femme d'un roy." The term *souveraine* is, of course, frequently used to refer to the female ruler, but once again, given that queen consorts also are imbued with a certain sovereignty, the term is not unambivalent.
45. Zoberman, "No Place for (a) Woman," p. 276.

3 Dramatizing the Female Prince: Virtue, Statecraft, and Virginal Wives

1. References are to Jean Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Georges Forestier, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), I; Pierre Corneille, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Georges Couton, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1980–1987); Catherine Bernard, *Laodamie* in Perry Gethner, ed., *Femmes dramaturges en France (1650–1750). Pièces choisies* (Paris, Seattle, Tübingen: PFSCL, 1994); Pierre du Ryer, *Nitocris, Reyne de Babylone* (Paris: A. de Sommerville, 1650); Pierre du Ryer, *Dynamis, Reyne de Carie* [1653], ed. Jean Rohou (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992). It is worth noting that Forestier sees *Dynamis*, and by implication *Nitocris*, as in essence being closer to tragedy than

tragicomedy, as the latter is nearing extinction by 1650. Certainly these two plays have little or nothing in common with the *romanesque* tragicomedies referred to in chapter 1, nn.93, 146. See Forestier, *Corneille. Le Sens d'une dramaturgie* (Paris: SEDES, 1998), p. 46, n.13.

2. Since discussions concerning many of the qualities given to the queens are commonplaces in the “mirror for princes” literature, the references given in the following pages are clearly not unique but are merely representative examples of those discussions.
3. The plot is largely invented and revolves around two rival attempts to gain the queen’s throne: firstly, by the queen’s illegitimate half-brother Trasile, urged on by the self-interested princess Proxene, and secondly by the prince Arcas who is in love with the queen (or at least with her crown) and is suspected of murdering her husband. To gain power, Trasile attempts to blacken the queen’s name, while Arcas attempts to blacken the name of the queen’s beloved Poliante, king of Lycia, whom he rightly sees as the greatest threat to his plan.
4. Readers will recall that the verb *flatter* had a broader sense in the seventeenth century than it does today, meaning not only to praise obsequiously or to attribute qualities to a person that they do not have but also to hide a truth that would be unpleasant for them. See Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel* (1690). On the use of the signifier “roi” to refer to the queen regnant, see chapter 2 in this volume, “Un roi sur deux est une reine: the *roi* as epicene.”
5. Admittedly, the fact that the deputies appear to issue an “order” to the queen (l. 1283) might explain Taxile’s outrage.
6. On the role of discernment in listening to advice, perceived as a manifestation of prudence, see, for example, Jean-François Senault, *Le Monarque ou les devoirs du souverain* (Paris: P. Le Petit, 1661), pp. 262, 417–419.
7. In a similar vein, du Ryer portrays the queen as closely attentive to her *conseiller*: it is he, for example, who advises the queen to use spying (l. 1271) and who also suggests the pardoning of Araxe (l. 1676). In *Laodamie*, Bernard also gives it to the queen to reflect on the issue of counsel. Initially she appears unopposed to a popular input. While Gélon voices the unfavorable attitude towards the people typical of traditional aristocratic values, the queen manifests an acceptance of the contribution of the people as an important part of a sound dynamic between sovereign and subject (ll. 641–642). In practice, she is later less sanguine about the role of her subjects and is irritated at the army delegation’s insistence on her choice of husband (ll. 1208–1213). For analysis of the sovereign/

- subject debate in this play, see Derval Conroy, "The Displacement of Disorder: Gynæcocracy and Friendship in Catherine Bernard's *Laodamie* (1689)," *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 67 (2007), 443–464 (pp. 447–450).
8. *Dynamis*, ll. 546–550. See also *Dynamis*, ll. 1497–1498 and *Nitocris* ll. 389–394, 1267–1268.
 9. As Gaines indicates, here it is given to Nitocris to adhere to Richelieu's idea that anyone who conspires against a useful royal prop is guilty of *lèze-majesté*. See James F. Gaines, *Pierre du Ryer and His Tragedies: From Envy to Liberation* (Geneva: Droz, 1988), p. 182.
 10. Axiane also serves as a reminder for spectators of Nitocris's political power since it is she who has secured Axiane's throne for her (ll. 853–856).
 11. On the pernicious influence of flatterers, see, for example, Richelieu, *Testament politique*, ed. Daniel Dessert (Paris: Complexe, 1990), Part II, Ch. 8; Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac, *Le Prince* [1631], ed. Ch. Leroy (Paris: La Table ronde, 1996), Ch. 5; Senault, *Le Monarque*, VII.4; Pierre Le Moyne, *L'Art de régner* (Paris: S. Cramoisy, 1665), IV.I.viii. On reputation, see, for example, Nicolas Faret, *Des Vertus nécessaires à un prince pour bien gouverner ses sujets* (Paris: Toussaint du Bray, 1623), p. 43; Jean de Lartigue, *La Politique des conquérans* (Paris: Guillaume de Luyne, 1662), Ch. XVIII; and Richelieu, who argues that a well-respected ruler can do more through his good name alone than a ruler who is not respected can do with an army (*Testament politique*, Part II, Ch. 9.2, p. 77). On the presence of the monarch, see also Guez de Balzac and Bossuet, nn.62 and 63, in this chapter.
 12. On punishment and recompense, see for example Guez de Balzac, *Le Prince*, Ch. 17, and Richelieu, *Testament politique*, Part II, Ch. 5. As one would expect, for the cardinal, punishment and recompense are two vital tools in government (p. 43); a misguided clemency ("une fausse clémence"), he adds, is more dangerous than cruelty itself (p. 45). Likewise, Le Bret advocates cautious use of clemency, although he does characterize it as one of the most eminent qualities a king can have (*De la Souveraineté du Roy*, pp. 582, 560). For an extolling of the virtue of clemency, on the other hand, see chapters in Faret, Senault, Le Moyne et al. (listed in Vol. 1, Ch. 1, nn.127–131, of this study).
 13. The debate concerning the role of the royal council and the king's ministers is as recurrent as the debate concerning the limitations on royal power, with which it is implicitly linked, and evolves just as absolutism evolves. See, for example, Le Moyne, *L'Art de régner*,

- IV.1; Lartigue, *La Politique des conquérans*, Ch. XVIII; Senault, *Le Monarque*, VII. The disparity of viewpoints in circulation at the time of du Ryer's writing can be judged by comparing Daniel de Priezac's *Discours politiques* (Paris: P. Rocolet, 1652), and Claude Joly's *Recueil de maximes véritables et importantes pour l'institution du Roi* (Paris: n.publ., 1652), the former an absolutist manifesto, the latter a forceful appeal for the increased political participation of the *États-généraux*, the *parlement*, and the people.
14. On dissimulation and political prudence, see Vol. 1, Ch. 1, pp. 36–37 of this study.
 15. The advice to Dynamis, for example, “Que vostre autorité soit en vos seules mains” (“May your authority be exercised by you alone”), with what could be perceived as its anti-Mazarin sentiment, could have had particular resonances among audiences of early 1653, as the end of the Fronde drew near. See Georges Couton, *Corneille et le Fronde* (Clermont-Ferrand: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Clermont, 1951). For an opposing view to Couton's, see Forestier, *Corneille. Le Sens d'une dramaturgie*, p. 45. For an overview of the historical context, see also Jean Rohou's edition, p. xxvi. *Nitocris* was probably first performed in 1649, and *Dynamis* in 1649 or 1650. The two plays appear to have been written within an interval of a few months.
 16. This political awareness is not incompatible with the recourse to male military strength of both queens. (We are constantly reminded, for example, that Poliante is a primary agent of Dynamis's success, to the extent that he physically fought her battles for her. See *Dynamis*, ll. 535–536, 639–644, 1509–1516.) On the contrary, by not representing them as warrior queens, dramatists eschew the ambiguity unavoidable in the figure of the *guerrière* (see chapter 2 in this volume) and validate their power-holding as women.
 17. The queen is less dependent on the “whims of fate” than Gaines implies (*Pierre du Ryer*, p. 189). Furthermore, divine Providence has played a role in the vanquishing of the enemies (l. 1875).
 18. She is not then “brutally indifferent to her brother's fate,” as Lancaster suggests (Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature*, II.ii, p. 714). Du Ryer adds depth to the queen, and dramatic interest to the play, by highlighting her inner conflicts. Juxtaposed with the proud, lucid (female) prince is the frail human being, beset with doubts, whose judgments are not always accurate. Where in the past Dynamis was strong and constant, she admits to Poliante that she now feels anxious and troubled (ll. 367–372). Although she keeps her public persona intact, we see

that in private her angst grows throughout the play, particularly after Euristène's and Proxène's revelations, indicting Poliante and Trasile respectively. In her monologue of Act IV.vi, she is clearly torn between the need to avenge her husband's death and her love for Poliante, who she now believes is her husband's assassin, while in her later monologue of Act IV.viii, following Poliante's version of events, she is equally distressed, unsure who to believe, simultaneously appealing to the gods for illumination, and yet dreading the truth. The familiar topos that death would be preferable to a troubled throne surfaces again (ll. 1762–1764). However, ultimately, her duty to avenge her dead husband and the state reemerge as the most important concerns (V.iii).

19. Senault, for example, in the section he devotes to the topic "That kings need to control their passions" ("Que les Rois doivent commander à leurs Passions") would write some short years later, "[le véritable souverain] doit travailler soigneusement à se domter [sic] luy-mesme, avant que de songer à domter les autres" ("[the true sovereign] should work carefully at self-control before thinking about controlling others"; Senault, *Le Monarque*, pp. 193–194). For other primary source references on self-mastery, see Vol. 1, chapter 1, nn.140, 142–144.
20. The victory is emphasized by the exclamation of her advisor Achate "Cette victoire est digne d'une Reine!" ("This victory is worthy of a queen!" l. 1671) who puts it on a parallel with a military victory, and by the queen's own reference once again to "a great triumph" obtained over herself (l. 1752) in her final speech.
21. Gaines sees her capacity to administer justice as the "major theme of the drama in the last two acts" (*Pierre du Ryer*, p. 181). Lancaster goes further: in his eyes, the clemency of the absolute monarch is the principal theme of the play and parallels with Corneille's Auguste are apparent (see H. C. Lancaster, *Du Ryer: Dramatist* (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1912), p. 142).
22. Gaines sees her forthright dismissal of the idea that suspicion suffices as proof of conspiracy as a "belated reproof of the kind of tactics Richelieu used to persecute enemies such as Marillac" (*Pierre du Ryer*, p. 182). Nitocris is nonetheless aware of the temptation to use political power for personal ends (ll. 1535–1536), and succeeds in resisting it.
23. Dynamis does also set herself up as a sovereign judge (since *roi*), but, unlike Nitocris, she is of the harsh and unforgiving school: in her case clemency is unthinkable. See *Dynamis*, ll. 939–942, 1705, 1873–1874.

24. See also her attitudes to her rank expressed in Act III.iii, ll. 907–913. While this mention of vengeance introduces a note of ambiguity into Dynamis’s character reminiscent of her counterparts examined in chapter 1, the crucial difference lies in the fact that here it is not vengeance of some disinterested lover that is at stake but of a slanderous, and hence dangerous, subject, and one who is suspected of (and duly later confesses to) regicide. See her earlier cry: “C’est ici qu’il sied bien aux Reines vertueuses / Et de verser du sang & d’estre furieuses” (“This is where it is appropriate for virtuous queens / To both spill blood and to be in a fury,” ll. 189–190).
25. Critical attention, such as it is for this largely neglected play, tends to focus on the figure of Martian, often seen as a reflection of the dramatist himself, *le vieil amoureux*. As Eléonore Zimmermann points out, critics have failed to see that “this plays belongs to women, and our attention should be focused on them”; see Eléonore M. Zimmermann, “La *Bérénice* de Corneille: *Pulchérie*,” in Sylvie Romanowski and Monique Bilezikian, eds. *Homage to Paul Bénichou* (Birmingham, AL: Summa, 1994), pp. 93–111 (p. 99). In addition to Zimmermann’s article, see also for analysis of the role of the empress, Simone Ackerman, “Roxane et Pulchérie: autorité réelle et pouvoir illusoire,” *Cahiers du dix-septième*, 2.2 (1988), 49–64; Huguette Gilbert, “Pouvoir et féminité dans *Pulchérie*,” in Yvonne Bellenger et al., eds., *L’Art du théâtre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), pp. 101–110; Domna Stanton, “Power or Sexuality: The Bind of Corneille’s *Pulchérie*,” *Women and Literature*, 1 (1980), 236–247.
26. Her words are reminiscent of Tite’s declaration, “J’ai des yeux d’empereur et n’ai plus ceux de Tite” (“I have the eyes of an emperor and no longer those of Titus”) (Corneille, *Tite et Bérénice*, l. 495). As Couton points out, noting this link, the “I am master of myself as of the universe” of *Cinna*’s Auguste is not far away (*OC*, III, p. 1198, n.1). Both Couton (in this *OC* “Notice”) and Huguette Gilbert (pp. 108–109) see her transformation as due to a type of illumination, of sovereign grace. The transformation of a very different type of character can be found in Louis Ferrier’s *Anne de Bretagne* (Paris: Jean Ribou, 1679), where the irate, jealous duchess de Bretagne metamorphoses into a calm, self-controlled, compassionate sovereign as soon as she becomes queen of France, declaring “Je regne, et suis enfin de moy-mesme maistresse” (“I reign, and at last am mistress of myself,” V.i).
27. See lines 14, 228–230, 554. Corneille mentions in the prefatory “Au lecteur” that she had reigned since the age of fifteen. Taken

together, these comments imply that she is roughly thirty years old at the moment of the play. Historically, while Pulchérie did indeed commence her reign at the age of fifteen, that is, in the year 414, the events the play focuses on took place in 450, when she was fifty-one years old. The empress' age and the inclusion of a love interest as motivation for her vow of virginity are the two principal modifications to history that Corneille makes. The dramatist indicates in the prefatory epistle to the reader that Pulchérie was over fifty in reality, and that history attributes religious reasons to her vow of chastity. No explanation is given for his modifications to history.

28. See also her double-guessing of the Senate's motivations in III.iii, ll. 949–952.
29. Earlier in the century, Mairet's tragicomedy *Athénaïs* (1642) provides another favorable portrait of Pulcheria, this time one drawn from her earlier career. Here, she is depicted as a strong, capable, and just stateswoman whose qualities are thrown all the more into relief by the foibles and mood swings of Théodose. He is assisted, in his words, by “une ame grande et forte”, a woman who “par ses conseils prudens & salutaires / Agit si clairement dans la nuit des affaires” (I.i). The healthy state of the realm, by implication under her jurisdiction, is underlined (II.iii), as is her role as dispenser of justice: Mairet presents her twice concretely in action as judge (I.iii and V.iv). It is she who essentially orchestrates her brother's marriage (partly to ensure the choice of a woman who would not interfere with her authority (III.ii), partly to give him a virtuous wife), it is she whose approval he desires for the marriage (III.i), and it is she who suggests solutions to the difficulties presented by Athénaïs' paganism and alleged infidelity. On this play, see Marianne Béthery, “L'*Athénaïs* de Mairet, une tragi-comédie à sujet religieux: voie nouvelle ou impasse?” *Littératures classiques*, 65 (2008), 155–166.
30. According to Forestier, the fact that from Corneille's Egyptian Cléopâtre onwards, his queens “speak, love and act like queens,” indicates both the fundamental importance of *bienséance* for the dramatist, and precisely his deliberate intention to distinguish his characters from the lovelorn *reines amoureuses* of tragicomedy. See Forestier, *Essai de génétique théâtrale*, p. 156. For examples of the tragicomic creations, see chapter 1, nn.93, 146. For royal patronage of Corneille, see Alain Niderst, “Corneille et Anne d'Autriche,” in Niderst, ed., *Pierre Corneille*, pp. 189–195. For the historical context of the play, see chapter 1, n.161, in this volume. For an account of the influence of Richelieu's policies on the representation of Cleopatra, and a comparison between Corneille's

- portrait and that of Mairet, see Tomlinson “Le personnage de Cléopâtre.”
31. *Corneille. OC*, I, p. 1077. Readers will recall, of course, Corneille’s argument in his *Premier discours* that tragedy needed to be sustained by “an important state concern, or a passion more noble and more male than love, like ambition or vengeance” (“quelque grand intérêt d’État, ou quelque passion plus noble et plus mâle que l’amour, telles que sont l’ambition ou la vengeance”).
 32. As she remarks drily: “J’ai de l’ambition, mais je la sais régler: / Elle peut m’éblouir, et non pas m’aveugler” (“I have ambition, but I know how to control it; / It can dazzle me but not blind me,” ll. 623–624). It has often been remarked that Corneille misjudges his own female characters, “which is only to say,” as Allentuch puts it, “that Corneille writes more conventionally and simplistically as a critic than as a dramatist”; see Harriet R. Allentuch, “Reflections on Women in the Theater of Corneille,” *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 21 (1974), 97–111 (p. 100).
 33. To her brother’s remark that a king’s actions are always justifiable if they are for the good of the state, she retorts, “Ce genre de justice est à craindre pour moi” (“I fear this type of justice,” ll. 603–604). Her objections are not dissimilar to those La Calprenède gives it to Marie Tudor to voice to Elizabeth in *Jeanne, reine d’Angleterre* (1638), IV.i.
 34. On the idea of nonviolent reason in women, see Timothy J. Reiss, *The Meaning of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 98–99, although he devotes little space to Cléopâtre.
 35. It is worth remembering that her value system is also underlined in the nuanced portrait of her ambition: Cléopâtre is not so ambitious that she wants her brother to die, or even that she wants his share of the throne. Content to leave him his share ungrudgingly (ll. 632–634), pleading for clemency in his regard with César (ll. 1181–1182, 1434–1436), anxious for his safety (ll. 1449–1450), agitated when she fears the worst (ll. 1629–1630), Cléopâtre greets the news of her brother’s death at the close of the play with mixed emotions. Although now left the sole sovereign of Egypt, she is moved apparently both by “nature” and by reason (l. 1792), and her (re)ascension to the throne is tinged with sadness (ll. 1795–1796).
 36. Michel Prigent, “L’Exercice du pouvoir dans les tragédies de Corneille,” in Niderst, ed., *Pierre Corneille*, pp. 593–604 (p. 600).
 37. See, for example, ll. 334, 569–572, 654–655.
 38. On Cléopâtre as both “a politically adept temptress and proudly independent queen of Egypt,” see David Clarke, “African

- Temptresses and Roman Matrons: Female Roles on the Paris Stage, 1634–1643,” in Keith Cameron and Elizabeth Woodrough, eds., *Ethics and Politics in Seventeenth-Century France* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), pp. 201–210 (p. 208).
39. On the success of the play, see Forestier’s “Notice,” in *OC*, I, pp. 1274–1284.
 40. See *ibid.*, p. 1287.
 41. See the statistics provided on the classical theatre website www.theatre-classique.fr, where 22% of the lines in their online edition are attributed to her (accessed April 13, 2015). Alexandre, Porus, and Cléofile are each given approximately 17% of the lines. Her monologue in IV.i is of forty-eight lines as opposed to Taxile’s brief eight lines in IV.v, the only other monologue in the play. Despite this dominance, Axiane has been largely ignored by critics. For the variations that Racine brought to the play between the first and final editions, including the excision of sixty-eight lines and the modification of a further eighty-two, see Valerie Worth, “The Shape of Things to Come: Racine’s Revisions of *Alexandre* (1666–1697),” *French Studies*, 44.4 (1990), 385–402.
 42. For the circumstances surrounding the creation of *Alexandre*, which, most unusually, was performed in both the Palais Royal and the Hôtel de Bourgogne in December 1665, see Forestier’s “Notice,” *OC*, I, pp. 1278–1281. Du Parc premièrè the role in the Palais Royal. On Racine, *Alexandre*, and du Parc, see Alain Couprie, *Marquise ou la “Déhanchée” de Racine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006), pp. 181–185.
 43. She is criticized by Cléofile and Alexandre within the play as *fière, aveuglée, ingrate* (ll. 981, 865, 1253, 1289). However, by implying that her opposition misjudges her (see n.52), and by giving her a number of commendable virtues, Racine ensures that we do not accept unequivocally the portrait of the proud, hard, inflexible queen that the others paint of her.
 44. According to Forestier, Racine gives Axiane this unusual plan in order to find a reason for her to be still in the camp at the opening of Act III (*OC*, I, p. 149, n.2). Even if this dramaturgical reason were convincing, it doesn’t explain why Racine allows her to be successful in her mission.
 45. See Timothy Reiss, “Banditry, Madness and Sovereign Authority: *Alexandre le Grand*,” in Romanowski and Bilezikian, eds., *Homage to Paul Bénichou*, pp. 113–142 and Bruneau, *Racine*, pp. 92–97.
 46. See ll. 525–545, 1044–1048, 1357–1373 for the criticisms of Porus, Axiane, and Cléofile respectively.

47. See, for example, ll. 159–164, 241–256.
48. Both Axiane and Porus earlier refer to Alexandre as a *tyran* twice each (in lines 810, 816, and 152, 283 respectively).
49. See Reiss, “Banditry, Madness,” p. 125.
50. According to Senault, for example, who qualifies war as “the most odious thing in the world” and who condemns ambition and conquest as motivations for war (citing, in fact, Alexander the Great as an example of inappropriate warmongering), defense against invasion or the attack of one’s subjects or one’s allies justifies war (Senault, *Le Monarque*, pp. 461, 473). See also Le Moyne, *L’Art de régner*, IV.III; Lartigue, *La Politique des conquérans*, Ch. VI. On the notion of “a just war,” see Cornette, *Le Roi de guerre*, pp. 119–149.

The ambiguity in Axiane concerns less her passion, which leads her to defend her country, but rather the blurring of public and private spheres and motivations. Clearly, she is not solely defined in terms of a public role. In addition to her concern for her country, she is also concerned for Porus. Her political motivation of Taxile to arms is seconded by a desire to provide an ally for her beloved (l. 311), she fears for him frequently, and in a lyrical monologue when she believes him dead, she appears to perceive her love as more important than her *gloire* (ll. 1010–1013) (although once it is apparent that Porus lives, it is her *gloire* that dominates once again). Furthermore, she believes that love for her should manifest itself in political opposition to Alexandre and should motivate Taxile to political action (ll. 1169–1174). This blurring of spheres is underlined by the consistent wordplay involving the double register of *la guerre militaire* et *la guerre amoureuse*. Hence, either one can perceive her, as does Reiss (“Banditry, Madness”) as an example of the type of ruler unable to distinguish between public and private concerns, which political writers condemn; or as an example, as does Bénichou, of the harmonious embodiment of heroism and *tendresse* within an aristocratic ethic, where they are not seen as oppositional but rather as inextricably linked (Paul Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), pp. 179–180). Where alignment with the emotional sphere in the plays examined earlier (see chapter 1) serves to diminish the political clout of the queens, by preventing them from ruling well and making of them doddering fools or furious lunatics, here love goes hand in hand with a “public” heroism, and does not prevent Axiane from playing an important political role.

51. On female celibacy, see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500–1100* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Judith M. Bennett and

- Amy M. Froide, eds., *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). On celibacy and queenship in early English literature, see Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London: Routledge, 1995).
52. Interestingly, both Cléofile and Alexandre misjudge Axiane; both believe that Axiane, when offered what Cléofile calls “l’empire” (l. 834) and what Alexandre refers to as “trois diadèmes” (l. 870), will accept Taxile as a husband. Neither fully understands the importance to her of her *gloire*, and how she perceives it. See n.43.
 53. Menke, “The Widow Who Would Be Queen,” p. 205.
 54. See, for example, Saint-Évremond, *Dissertation sur le grand Alexandre* in *Ceuvres*, pp. 183–189 (p. 183). For Racine’s reply, see the “Préface,” *OC*, I, p. 126. See Worth, “Racine’s Revisions” for subsequent cuts, which would imply he took these criticisms on board.
 55. For Cléofile’s role, see Philippe Lacroix, “Le langage de l’amour dans *Alexandre le Grand* de Racine,” *XVII^e siècle*, 146 (1985), 57–67 (pp. 60–65), and Reiss, “Banditry, Madness,” pp. 123–124. Worthy as her pacifism may be, she is also associated with a certain amount of underhand scheming. Certainly, she misjudges Axiane.
 56. It is unclear to what extent Cléofile requires her brother’s consent. While he implies she controls her own destiny (l. 858), she appears to see herself as dependent on him (l. 957).
 57. Alexandre’s final words to them highlight the perceived parity between them: “Vivez, Régnez tous deux, et seuls de tant de Rois / Jusques aux bords du Gange allez donner vos lois” (“Live, reign both of you, and alone among kings / May you impose your laws as far as the banks of the Ganges,” ll. 1575–1576). Parity between Axiane and Porus is earlier highlighted by Axiane’s desire to die with the same dignity as Porus (“mourir en Reine ainsi que [Porus] en Roi”) (l. 1032), and is implicit in Porus’s comment: “J’aime la Gloire; / Et c’est tout ce qu’aime la Reine” (“My *gloire* is important to me; / And it is all that is important to the queen,” l. 234).
 58. “Préface,” *OC*, I, p. 126.
 59. See Corneille, *Don Sanche d’Aragon*, *OC*, I, ll. 19–22, 97–100, 373–376. Since there is little sense of actual government by women or political authority in this play, it falls outside our main focus here.
 60. In a deliberate attempt to conquer her love for him (a gesture possibly inspired by Corneille’s Infanta of *Le Cid*), the queen has pushed Gélon toward her sister Nérée. Laodamie’s turmoil therefore is not only due to the rejection of her love but also to

- the fact that her close relationship with her sister is now jeopardized by rivalry. See Conroy, "The Displacement of Disorder," pp. 454–460.
61. For a contemporary moralist's attitude to *devoir* and *amitié*, see Sylvie Requemora, "L'amitié dans les *Maximes* de La Rochefoucauld," *XVII^e siècle*, 205 (1999), 687–728 (pp. 720–721).
 62. "Il n'y a rien de si fort naturellement, ni de si achevé par l'artifice des hommes, qui puisse résister à la présence du Roi" (*Le Prince*, Ch. 2, p. 52).
 63. "Il y a un charme pour les peuples dans la vue du prince; et rien ne lui est plus aisé que de se faire aimer avec passion" (*Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture sainte*, ed. Jacques Le Brun (Geneva: Droz, 1967), Bk. 3, p. 89).
 64. Another female dramatist to explode the traditional gendered association of men with public virtue and women with love, as Bernard does here, is Marie-Catherine Desjardins (*dite* Mme de Villedieu) in her tragedy *Nitétis* (1663). Here the moral standards and heroic impetus of the eponymous heroine and her sister-in-law Mandanne contrast radically with those of the male characters, including (especially) the king Cambyse. Furthermore, although the two women enter little into the political arena for most of the play, the final act sees Nitétis calming and commanding the fleeing soldiers (V.ii). The play ends with the implicit acknowledgment that one of the women will go on to rule, a just state of affairs since Nitétis is the legitimate heir to a throne (l. 31) and Mandanne is also owed a crown (l. 165). For a modern edition of the play, see Perry Gethner, *Femmes dramaturges en France (1650–1750). Pièces choisies*, tome II (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2002).
 65. On the initial success of this play and its subsequent checkered reception in later periods, see Couton, ed., *OC*, III, pp. 1440–1442; Joseph Marthan, *Le Vieillard amoureux dans l'œuvre cornélienne* (Paris: Nizet, 1979), pp. 69–70, 76–83. *Sertorius* was both first performed and published in 1662, the year after the end of the regency of Anne d'Autriche. For potential echoes of the French political landscape, see Couton, ed., *OC*, III, pp. 1446–1450.

Against the political backdrop of Roman dictatorship, the plot hinges on a series of acknowledged or unacknowledged loves. Viriate, queen of Lusitania, wants to marry the aging Roman general Sertorius, who has been long rebelling against the dictatorship of Sylla in Rome, and whose military aid has helped to protect her throne. Unaware of her love, Sertorius believes his own love

- for her is in vain, and so urges her to commit to a political marriage with his lieutenant Perpenna, an *ambitieux* who also loves the queen, and who is prepared to kill Sertorius in order to gain his rank. Furthermore, Aristie, Pompée's abandoned first wife, is (initially) anxious to marry Sertorius, in order to strengthen his power against Rome and simultaneously avenge her repudiation.
66. Primary among those to read Viriate as *une grande amoureuse* are André Stegmann, *L'Héroïsme cornélien. Genèse et signification*, 2 vols. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1968), II, pp. 517–527 and Marthan, *Le Vieillard amoureux*, pp. 69–127. For an emphasis on politics, see Michel Prigent, *Le Héros et l'État dans la tragédie de Pierre Corneille* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), pp. 385–404. My own emphasis on Viriate as stateswoman is similar to Liliane Picciola's approach in *Corneille et la dramaturgie espagnole* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2002), pp. 335–349. See also Rathé, *La Reine se marie. Variations sur un thème dans l'œuvre de Corneille* (Geneva: Droz, 1990), Ch. IV, "Demi-succès ou échecs déguisés?" pp. 53–68.
67. Picciola points to the use of possessive pronouns (*sa, mes, nos*), which underline "the passion which unites Viriate to her country." For Picciola, she represents "a collective aspiration" (*Corneille et la dramaturgie espagnole*, p. 335).
68. For the female characters' role as instruments of order and peace, see Monique Bilezikian, "Divorce, désordre et légitimité dans Sertorius de Corneille," *Cahiers du dix-septième*, 3.2 (1989), 1–16 (pp. 10–12).
69. See also her categorical distinction between love and marriage, in her declaration that she does not want a lover, but a husband, a hero, who through marriage will lend his support to her throne ("Je ne veux point d'Amant, mais je veux un époux / Mais je veux un Héros, qui par son Hyménée / Sache élever si haut le Trône où je suis née," ll. 1288–1290).
70. See Rathé, *La Reine se marie*, pp. 54–55. Marthan (*Le Vieillard amoureux*, p. 113, n.69) sees the reference to *monarques* here as a reference to her own projected offspring. I see it as a reference to the "grand roi" (l. 1383) she wants to make of Sertorius. On the conflict between Sertorius and Viriate, see also Prigent, *Le Héros et l'État*, pp. 402–403.
71. Lines 401–404 suggest that Corneille gives Viriate a similar *précieux* conception of love that later marks Pulchérie. For her distinction between love and marriage, see also lines 1284, 1288. For the critics that emphasize her love, see n.66.

72. For Rathé (*La Reine se marie*, p. 66), Sertorius is more useful to Viriate dead than alive as all ideological differences can be ignored. This is not explicit however.
73. Allentuch, “Reflections,” p. 105. For Prigent, “Viriate is entirely Cornelian here, since she makes herself mistress of her fate and is equal to her destiny” (Prigent, *Le Héros et l’État*, p. 398).
74. Although the first lines of this speech (ll. 1891–1893) are cited by both Stegmann and Marthan, twice in the case of Stegmann, little attention is given to the lines that follow, where the queen outlines a political future for herself (see Stegmann, *L’Héroïsme cornélien*, II, pp. 26, 623; Marthan, *Le Vieillard amoureux*, p. 114). The stereotype of the young woman in love with the older man, presented as normative by Pocock (p. 134), clearly dominated readings of the play for a certain period. While it is possible to read Viriate as a young, besotted, even coquettish woman, enamored of an older man, whose political arguments are merely screens for her passion, such a reading fails to take account, it seems to me, of her reaction at the news of his death: her first concern is for her throne, which she sees as targeted by the assassination, and her ultimate concern is to rule alone.
75. See Anne Ubersfeld, “Corneille: du Roi au tyran, un itinéraire,” in Margitic and Wells, eds., *Actes de Wake Forest*, pp. 11–42 (pp. 22–24).
76. Couton points to this theme in *Tite et Bérénice*, *Suréna*, and, as we will see below, *Pulchérie*. See Georges Couton, *La Vieillesse de Corneille* (Paris: Maloine, 1949), pp. 221–222.
77. For a similar evocation of the queen as a puppet in the hands of her people, see Louis Ferrier’s *Anne de Bretagne*, I.vi.
78. While the religious foundation for her motivation has recently been called into question by modern historians—see, for example, Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, pp. 93–96, for whom her vow of chastity had very specific political origins—it was nonetheless the accepted historical account as Corneille would have known it. What is significant here is that he chooses to modify that account.
79. As Rathé aptly points out, readings of the heroine are frequently marked by “the search for signs of decline” with which this play is frequently associated, by simple virtue of its position as the penultimate work of an aging dramatist. So, it has been used to illustrate theories concerning the decline of the hero (Dobrovsky), the debasement of heroism (Stegmann), and a politics of sterility (Prigent). Hence, she adds, the heroine of the play is easily perceived in a negative context (Rathé, *La Reine se marie*, p. 84). For a more favorable reading of the *mariage blanc* and the

association of marriage with female freedom in Corneille's three last plays, see Nina Ekstein, "Women and Marriage in Corneille's Theater," in Hodgson, ed., *La Femme au XVII^e siècle*, pp. 391–405 (pp. 402–404).

80. Her choice of virginity is made *vraisemblable* by her comments at the opening of the play that her love for Léon is not physical or sensual, but rather noble and strong ("généreuse et solide"), guided by virtue and reason (ll. 3–10). Although this is nuanced later by her description of her love to Justine (expressed *after* she has decided the marriage is impossible), Corneille can be seen to prefigure the *dénouement* from the beginning.

The *précieux* element of Pulchérie's attitude has been overlooked, to the best of my knowledge, although it is eluded to in passing in Octave Nadal, *Le Sentiment de l'amour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 5; in Judd Hubert, "De l'écart historique à la plénitude théâtrale: Pulchérie et Suréna," in Claire Gaudiani with Jacqueline Van Baelen, eds., *Création et Recréation: Un dialogue entre littérature et histoire* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1993), pp. 55–65, n.6, and in somewhat more detail in Stegmann's examination of Corneille and *préciosité* in *L'Héroïsme cornélien*, I, p. 169. That Pulchérie's love is a form of *amour-estime*, as Forestier argues (*Essai*, p. 163, n.39), does not negate the idea that she is a *précieuse*. Du Ryer gives Dynamis a similar sentiment (see *Dynamis*, 329–332), although she does later marry the man she loves.

81. For Stegmann, this "passion for the throne" is entirely legitimate and in conformity with Corneille's habitual monarchist stance, prioritizing a strong centralized power (Stegmann, *L'Héroïsme cornélien*, II, p. 377).
82. I disagree here with Huguette Gilbert for whom Pulchérie's solution does not ridicule or subvert the patriarchal order but preserves it, by keeping its appearances intact (Gilbert, "Pouvoir et féminité dans *Pulchérie*," p. 110). It seems to me that, on the contrary, it is precisely in maintaining solely the appearances of patriarchy that it is subverted.

For an opposing viewpoint to mine that argues that Pulchérie's (unnatural) choice of "sterility" condemns the state to disorder, see Prigent, "L'Exercice du pouvoir," pp. 482–493. This interpretation takes inadequate account, it seems to me, of the degeneration of her line and the placement of Léon as future heir.

While it is true, as Domna Stanton points out, that the perpetuation of the patriarchal system is guaranteed in the long term by the choice of Léon as heir, it is also true that in the meantime Pulchérie fulfils her desire to reign. Furthermore, given

the way in which the empress goes about organizing affairs in the final act, marrying off Justine without consulting her father Martian (l. 1622), it does not seem to me that she will remain a “master-in-name-only” (Stanton, “Power or Sexuality,” p. 243). As Zimmermann points out, giving the examples of Titus and Louis XIV, the argument that Corneille embraces a phallogentric vision of society by not allowing his heroine both love and power fails to take account of the fact that men also, in real life and in drama, are confronted with the same dilemma. See Zimmermann, “La *Bérénice* de Corneille,” p. 104.

83. See lines 323–332. While these sentiments are possibly expressed for Arcas’s ears, Poliante’s reaction to her refusal to marry him raises the same idea, namely that she is possessive of her authority, and anxious not to lose it through marriage (ll. 473–474).
84. The suggestion by the grandee deputies that Poliante would be the only suitable husband is framed in terms of a vehement opposition to Arcas, in the hypothetical event of the queen tiring of carrying her sovereign burden alone, and is juxtaposed with the recommendation that she keep a tight rein on her authority alone (ll. 1275–1276): there is little sense that there is a *need* for the queen to marry.
85. It is worth remembering that du Ryer takes pains later to highlight the extent of her power and success, as the queen outlines how she has strengthened her state, confounded her enemies, and ensured Babylon’s grandeur (see *Nitocris*, ll. 905–916).
86. Doran refers to Elizabeth’s handling of the suit of Francis duc d’Alençon, for example, over a period of six years from 1572 to 1578 as “a masterpiece of protracted dalliance” and indicates how the French as well as the English were “more interested in the benefits to be gained from the negotiations than in the marriage itself”; see Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 130.
87. As the Scottish ambassador James Melville put it: “Your Majesty thinks, if you were married you would be but Queen of England; and now you are both King and Queen” (*Memoirs of Sir James Melville of Halhill* (London: Routledge, 1929), p. 94). For a sample of the type of arguments raised against the Alençon marriage, see Philip Sidney’s *A Letter to Queen Elizabeth . . . touching her marriage with Monsieur* (1579?) in Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten, eds., *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 46–57.
88. The recurrent topos of the necessity of a male monarch does return at the *dénouement*, but here it is in relation to Axiane not

Nitocris. The fact that Axiane's people have been demanding a king in fact allows Nitocris to give Cléodate to her in marriage, since it is Nitocris who has been asked to resolve the situation (ll. 1688–1694). Axiane and Cléodate therefore will rule over Media (Axiane's country), while Nitocris remains the sole celibate female ruler of Babylon.

89. See, for example, Le Moyne's section "De la jalousie que le Prince doit avoir de son autorité," *L'Art de régner*, III.iii.i.
90. In the marriage of Dynamis and Poliante, their states are united (ll. 1985–1986). There is no sense that Poliante will rule alone.
91. See Introduction, p. 1.
92. Reference is made to a queen Nitocris in Dio Cassius's *Roman History*, Book LIV and in Herodotus's *Histories* (I.185–187) but the plot resembles neither of these sources otherwise.
93. Couton, ed., *OC*, III, p. 1661. Given Pulcheria's frequent appearance in the galleries of illustrious women of the period, she may not have been as ill-known as Couton suggests.
94. In the light of our remarks earlier (chapter 1, pp. 54–65) concerning the ideological implications of *vraisemblance*, it is noteworthy that the Frères Parfaict criticize *Nitocris* for the lack of *vraisemblance* of its characters (Les Frères Parfaict, *Histoire du théâtre français*, vol. 7, p. 262). One can only surmise which characters in particular they had in mind.
95. In her analysis of du Ryer's theatre in general, Marie-France Hilgar argues that du Ryer manifests a belief in "the indivisibility of sovereignty" in his work; see "L'Art de régner dans le théâtre de Pierre du Ryer," in Margitic and Wells, eds., *Actes de Wake Forest. L'Image du souverain dans le théâtre de 1600 à 1650*, pp. 178–189 (p. 188). I would argue that we can add to this idea the suggestion that du Ryer does not perceive the sovereignty in question as fundamentally gendered, or fundamentally patriarchal, as others do, but rather as an essentially androgynous institution that transcends questions of both sex and gender. It is also telling that he gives Dynamis the same "constitutional" leanings as male sovereigns in other plays of his, again implying that sex is irrelevant to a particular political stance.

Parallels between female and male princes in Corneille's work have not escaped critics. Alice Rathé, for example, points to the similarities in the "privileges, rights and obligations" of sovereigns of either sex and to the similarities in the attitudes of Pulchérie and Héraclius, the difference quite simply being that the female prince would "impose herself by different means" (Rathé, *La Reine se marie*, p. 87).

96. It is important to consider that the politics of marriage and dynastic alliance are contributory factors, but not the sole factors for consideration, in the broader architecture of power dynamics and sovereignty that is at stake in these plays. The critical tendency to focus primarily on marriage in these plays, or to think of them solely as what R. C. Knight called “the matrimonial tragedies,” may blind us to that broader architecture. My own analysis has tried to bear it in mind. See R. C. Knight, “Que devient l’héroïsme dans les tragédies ‘matrimoniales?’” in Alain Niderst, ed., *Pierre Corneille*, pp. 625–631.

Conclusion

1. Gisela Bock, “Women’s History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate,” *Gender and History*, 1.1 (1989), 7–30 (p. 10).
2. On the idea of “prismatic effects,” see Alain Viala, “Prismatic Effects,” trans. by Paula Wissing, *Critical Inquiry*, 14 (1988), 563–573.
3. Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700–1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 1.



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