Theme and structure in Rodogune of Corneille and La Thébaïde of racine: a study of the baroque

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THEME AND STRUCTURE IN RODOGUNE OF CORNEILLE
AND LA THÉBAÏDE OF RACINE: A
STUDY OF THE BAROQUE

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In this study, the writer shall examine the parallels and contrasts between Rodogune of Pierre Corneille and La Thébaïde of Jean Racine, with special emphasis on the baroque aspects of the two works. The total production of these two writers has long been unjustly placed or labeled in one particular category, that of being "classical." That type of categorizing is quite unjust if we take into consideration such works as Rodogune, Attila, Soréna of Corneille and La Thébaïde and Alexandre Le Grand of Racine. This traditional and misleading conception in applying the label "classical" to the two dramatist by such critics as Gustave Lanson in his Esquisse d'une histoire de la tragédie français and Martin Trunell in his Classical Moment has been challenged by a group of "Revisionists." Such modern day critics as W.G. Moore, French Classical Literature, Imbrie Buffum, Studies in the Baroque and E. B. Borgehoff, "The Freedom of French Classicism." The study of these revisionists have lead to a truer and deeper appraisal of the two dramatist. In this study, the writer shall consider the baroque and classicism, not only in their artistic and literary sense but also in relation to the time and the milieu in which they developed. The writer wishes to show that the classical period is not one particularized school. The persistance of le goût baroque of the public reflected itself in the multiplicity of
the plans on which Racinien and Corneillien tragedy was based. Although Corneille and Racine endeavored to conform to the classical ideals, they could not completely escape the influence of the baroque. It is a fallacy to assume what we see in seventeenth century literature as calmness and repose corresponds to the conditions in which it was written, that the calm of classical literature for example, is an achievement, a reply to violence and to chaos. The writer does not propose however, that the two works contain no classical features, for in each work these features can be found. On the other hand, to employ the word "classical" does not mean that one is precluded from discerning baroque tendencies, and that these tendencies should be ignored.

The writer shall attempt to identify the dominant baroque characteristics as well as the classical and then proceed to draw examples from the two works to substantiate those dominant characteristics while at the same time point out certain similarities and analogies evident in the two works. Chapter one will include the introduction, and explain the relationship between the baroque and classicism. Chapter two will be a comparative study of the two tragedies. Chapter three will concern itself with the baroque characteristics of the two tragedies and the conclusion. In the conclusion, the problem will be restated as originally posited. The writer shall indicate what has been shown and all that can still be done on this subject.

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It is with deep sincerity that I express my gratitude to Dr. Benjamin F. Hudson for his untiring assistance on my behalf. With equal sincerity I dedicate this work to my mother and "à une jeune fille" whose dedication and assistance was invaluable.
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CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since the aim of this study is to point out the baroque elements of the two works; Rodogune of Pierre Corneille and La Thébaïde of Jean Racine, it is necessary to arrive at a definition of the baroque style in French Literature.

As a useful definition, one may say that the baroque is a style often characterized by excess, and animated by a strong will toward that which is conceived to be good. The baroque emphasizes the physical aspects of the world in all its beauty, horror, picturesqueness, diversity, and movement, while at times it ultimately hopes for the triumph of positive and meaningful values. Rousset describes "Le Baroque et Le Classicism":

On dit: ordre, mesure, raison, règle, et c'est le classicisme. On dira donc; désordre, outrance, fantaisie, liberté, et ce sera le Baroque. Cosmos et chaos; équilibre et jouissance vital. C'est vrai et c'est faux. Le Baroque et le Classicisme se regardent en ennemis, mais comme on le fait dans une famille; Il s'opposent avec un air fraternel, tout courants et de l'époque, tend à se former en monde à s'isoler en elle même pour ne plus rassembler qu'au monde unique et original qu'elle crée. Chacune appelle une formule particulière. Dans la mesure toute fois ou sont applicables des formules général et au risque d'accuser à l'excès une opposition en réalité beaucoup plus souple. On peut dire que l'oeuvre classique exclut certain caractères essentiels au baroque, en premier lieu la métamorphose, au lieu de présenter comme l'unité mouvante d'un ensemble multiforme. L'oeuvre classique réalise son unité en
immobilisant toutes ses parties en fonction d'un centre fixe: au lieu d'être animée par un mouvement qui se propage au delà d'elle même, elle se contient à l'intérieur de ses propres limites; au lieu de faire éclater au vaciller ses structures, elles les stabilise et les renforce; au lieu d'inviter le spectateur à la mobilité et à l'inquiétude, elle le rassemble sur elle-même et le contraint au repos, le dénoue dans l'appaisement d'une contemplation silencieuse.¹

According to Wolffin:

Le propre baroque est de ne plus compter avec un pluraliste d'élément qui doivent s'accorder harmonieusement mais avec un unité absolue ou chaque partie a perdu son droit particulier à l'existence.²

To speak more specifically about baroque aspects, we should be aware of certain characteristics of baroque. In studying the scholarship on "what is baroque" one can discern seven characteristics which though distinct, are in many ways interrelated.

They are as follows: (1) Moral purpose: baroque writers are not, as a rule, exclusively artists. They have an intention which cannot be ignored, and they use their skill for the furtherance of some aim which is outside the realm of pure art. Agrippa d'Aubigné was a great poet, but at the same time he was a soldier in the Protestant cause. Moral purpose also includes political or religious purposes as well. (2) Horror and Exaggeration: exaggeration is hyperbole. The baroque artist delighted in the heaping up of evidence to reinforce his point. He also exhibited a fondness


for use of forceful verbs. Hyperbole, whether of style or content is a characteristic more frequently found in the works of baroque artists. Horror reinforces with gruesome, terrifying or morbid details, the mood or atmosphere of sentiment which the author is endeavoring to create in the mind of his readers or spectators. Excessive use of horror by an author is sometimes indicative of his personal interest in the subject for its own sake.

In Rodogune, the brothers Étéocle and Polynice would rather fight to the death of each other rather than reach an agreement in regards to the throne of Thèbes. The majority of their conversation is, therefore, about death, blood, fire, destruction, all of which is a good example of horror. (3) Incarnation is essentially a theological term. As a baroque trait it expresses, according to Roques:

An intangible idea in concrete form. Instead of abstraction, there are many images which appeal to the senses. Through the creative activity of the baroque artistic ideals take on the physical being.¹

Included also in another aspect of incarnation; imagery, which though expressing abstract ideas, retains its full physical effect and realistic detail. In other words, the simultaneous appeal to several senses as sound, sight, and smell, all at once. (4) Illusion: the baroque artistic endeavored to create illusion in the minds of his readers. In the theater this is generally called theatricality and is characterized by scenes painted with great naturalism. The

theatrical quality is also created in the theater by use of excessive or exaggerated gestures, and lighting. The sudden arrival of death, bursting unexpectedly upon the daily round of human activities is dramatically powerful. The art of the theater is not only suspense--it is above all the creation of illusion. The baroque artist delighted in deceiving the spectator with the contrast between appearance and reality. For example, we consider people in high office to have lofty thoughts and motives but an impressive appearance is not always a sign of an impressive mind. R. A. Sayce says:

Du masque de l'apparence il n'en faut pas faire une essence réelle, n'y de l'étranger le propre. C'est assez de s'enfauner le visage, sans s'enfariner la poitrine.1

(5) Contrast and surprise: the characteristic in baroque works is achieved by the use of an assortment of antithesis. It can scarcely be used as a criterion of the baroque unless it corresponds to a basic idea of the author's spirit. The baroque artist delighted in looking at words from a variety of angles; similarly he delighted in contrasts and oppositions. Antithesis pleased the baroque artist because it produced surprise. The baroque gloried in surprises.

(6) Movement and metamorphosis: when the baroque artist wished to express the idea that inner peace of soul is more important than

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outward decorous calm, he resorts to images of writhing movement. Not only is society like an ever moving sea; the body and soul of the individual man are constantly changing. Stability itself is an illusion, actually it is an extremely slow form of change. Metamorphosis represents the powerful forces which mold our life, strengthening our capabilities and weaken some of them. (7) The last of the categories is organic unity and acceptance of life. The baroque artist ties all the trivial details of life in his depiction of the routine daily living which is a dynamic phenomenon. The likes and dislikes, personal comfort, and moral philosophy may differ from character to character but they continue to the major motif: the evaluation, according to a certain pattern, into an organized unity.

Since movement has been considered by all critics as one of the essential elements of the baroque, a stylistic study of the two works, Rodogune of Corneille and La Thébaïde of Racine shall reveal the baroque as well as the classical elements of the two works. The study will also point out that in spite of the clarity, precision and order exercised on the literature under the influence of the principles of classicism, the baroque aspects guarded the color, picturesqueness and vitality of the same literature. So that both classicism and the baroque existed together.

In order to clarify this movement from baroque to classicism a brief sketch of the development of both is in order.
We may begin the development with the Pléiade, and the year 1548. A particular work of the Pléiade, Défense et illustration de la langue français was published in 1548. The author of the Pléiade insisted that works should express ideas on philosophy, morals, religion, and politics. The desire of the members of the Pléiade to enrich their language did contribute to the introduction of new poetic forms in the weed choked garden that was French poetry of the early 1500's. The first four books of Ronsard's Odes appeared in 1550 and we find that poetry was beginning to be modeled after the theories set forth in the Défense et illustration de la langue français, all of Ronsard's contemporaries imitated his works or adhered to his theories. If we moved to 1578, the date of Les Tragiques of Agrippa d'Aubigne, we find one of the outstanding baroque works of that period. The work contained many of the seven elements which characterize baroque literature. Following the same baroque trend are Du Bartas, whose work Semaine was a masterpiece of antithesis and metaphores and Deportes whose sonnets on religion were published in 1575. In this work Deportes imitated the Italiens with his use of antithesis and his choice of words. Following the trend of baroque farther we find that Montaigne's Essais which appeared in 1580, represent one of the major works of the baroque age. The Essais are a collection of studies of the human mind in all its manifestation, as gathered both from self-examination and from observation of the society in which the author lived. However in early 1600's a change from what has been described as
baroque can be noticed. With Malherbe definite rules were formulated for versification, for the first time. He was discontented with the "bizarre" and the "grossière." He wanted to "fixer" and "épurer" the language. The "bizarre" and the "grossière" style employed by Saint-Amant, Théophile de Viau and Racan was then being challenged and critized by Malherbe and his school. The works of the former were in direct competition with the latter. These rules were set up by Malherbe and for the first time definite rules were proposed for poetry.

In order to explain further the baroque aspects of Corneille and Racine we can look at the first half of the 1600's when Richelieu and the L'Académie Française condemned Le Cid of Corneille. This confrontation was brought about because of an earlier disagreement between Richelieu and Corneille and other rules governing the classical tragedy. The unities were introduced in 1630 but were not generally observed. Corneille's successful play aroused the envy of other writers, and of Richelieu which lead to the "Querelle du Cid." When the Academy was forced by Richelieu to condemn Le Cid the Academy used the rules as a basis for their condemnation of the work. This "Querelle du Cid" lead to stricker observance, not only of the unities, but of the principles of bienséance and vraisemblance as well.

Classicism, with its emphasis on reason, clarity and regularity, its emphasis on order and discipline, its love of the universal and its disregard for the external, the individual and the
the picturesque became the dominant movement in French literature about the middle of the seventeenth century. It is very different from baroque, though in some ways it is a continuation of it. Classicism may thus be regarded as a reaction against certain aspects of baroque and a continuation of others. Be that as it may, there is in most of the prominent writers of the seventeenth century, even those who are labelled classical, a combination of classical and baroque themes, and stylistic devices.

Evidence of this combination of classicism and baroque can be seen in the numerous revisions of Mélite and Clitandre of Corneille. In his Examens, 1666, he states why he changed the two plays. He is apologetic—he explains that they were after all, his first plays, and they observed none of the rules, because at that time he did not know that there were any. Nevertheless, he says that his common sense did lead him to observe the unity of action. Corneille is also sensitive with regard to the violation of the unity of time, and unity of place in these plays. Mélite, thusly, is full of irregularities. The playwright begs our indulgence for a youthful work. The weakness of the play, as a more mature Corneille sees them, may be summed up under two main headings: Failure to observe the rules, and invraisemblance. Actually, it is clear from the Examens that in 1660 Corneille considered the rules to be based on reason; they are not arbitrary, but determined by the concern for vraisemblance. And here, the
classical author is condemning his baroque youth. In the baroque era, literary irregularities were not necessary to be avoided nor was surprising conduct to be ruled out as unbelievable.

In order to clarify what has been said concerning Mélite, one has only to observe the changes that he made on the original edition.

The first performance of Mélite took place in 1633. Though the play was a great success, Corneille published a succession of amended editions in an effort to make his comedy conform more closely to the new literary canons. These toned-down versions appeared in 1644, 1648, 1654, 1655, 1657, 1660, 1663, 1664, 1668, and 1682. The most considerable alteration occurs in the edition of 1660 -- coinciding with the beginning of the greatest classical period in France. If we compare the original version and the revised versions, we would notice above all, that the language is chastened, improprieties are removed, brutalities toned-down, concrete images replaced by elegant abstractions, disturbing agitation changed to civilized calm. One may still raise the question, did Corneille improve Mélite in making these transformations? Or has he just succeeded in rendering his comedy more coherant and less bizarre?

We should also be aware of the fact that although classicism finally overcame the baroque as a rule, Corneille during this time simply patterned and padded his works to follow the rules which had been firmly instituted for the classical tragedy. We
find that the generation of Racine and Corneille was deeply christian. But the principles of bienséance and order and reason together with the proscribing of the Merveilleux Chrétien in literature, tended to discipline the baroque taste of an earlier age and to produce that new style, more restrained, intellectual, and abstract, which we know as classicism. Thus we sometimes hear classicism being defined as un baroque dompté with the implication that the baroque needed toning-down.

Classicism was toned-down but the fact remains that it was ever present. This will be seen in the analysis of Rodogune and La Thébaide.
CHAPTER II

AN ANALYTICAL RESUME OF RODOGUNE AND LA THÉBAÏDE

Before discussing the baroque characteristics of Rodogune and La Thébaïde, it would seem desirable to present a brief resume of the two plays followed by a brief analysis of each chapter.

The tragedy Rodogune was produced in late 1644 or early 1645. The characters are:

Cléopâtre: queen of Syria, widow of Démétrius
Séleucus: sons of Démétrius and Cléopâtre
Antiochus
Rodogune: sister of Phraates, king of Parthes
Timagène: governess of the two princes
Oronte: ambassador of Phraates
Laonice: sister of Timagène, confident of Cléopâtre

The scene is Selevira. Démétrius Nicanor, king of Syria, has been captured by the Parthians. Cléopâtre his queen a woman of ruthless ambition, believing him dead, has married his brother Antiochus, and sent the twins sons of Nicanor to Egypt. Nicanor, angered by Cléopâtre's second marriage, has set out for Syria announcing his intention to marry Rodogune, sister of the Parthian king. Cléopâtre, to avoid being dispossessed of her throne, has
Nicanor killed in an ambush and takes Rodogune captive. She recalls her two sons from Egypt, intending to declare which is to inherit the crown. The two sons, Antiochus and Séleucus, both fall in love with Rodogune. Each is prepared to renounce the crown and princess in favor of the other. Cléopâtre tells them she will cede the crown to the one who kills her hated rival Rodogune. Rodogune on the other hand tells the brothers that she will marry the one who will kill his mother Cléopâtre. Rodogune confesses her love for Antiochus and withdraws her offer. Cléopâtre pretends to accept the marriage of Rodogune and Antiochus and to grant Antiochus the crown, but Cléopâtre kills Séleucus and prepares a poisoned nuptial cup for Antiochus and Rodogune. In the meantime all the deaths and misdeeds that Cléopâtre has caused is being unveiled. When Cléopâtre confronts Antiochus and he reveals his knowledge, she drinks from the poison cup and falls dead.

The play is admirably constructed, the structure is simple, clear and logical:

Act I  Exposition
Act II  Cléopâtre appeals to the brothers: he who kills Rodogune shall rule.
Act III  Rodogune appeals to the brothers: he who kills Cléopâtre shall be her husband
Act IV  Cléopâtre put her scheme into action: to have Rodogune and Antiochus die of poison
Act V  Cléopâtre's scheme fails
The play opens with a mystery: we learn that Cléopâtre is about to declare which of her two sons in the elder and the elder is to marry Rodogune. A "coup de théâtre" takes place in the middle of the act however, when Antiochus says that he is about to offer his brothers the kingdom in exchange for Rodogune, but before he can make his offer Séleucus forestalls him with the proposal that Antiochus should have the crown and Séleucus Rodogune. At the end of Act I, Rodogune is filled with foreboding, and her confident tries to reassure her. Rodogune says that she loves one of the two brothers, without naming him. Thus, at the end of the first act, the reader is curious about three things: (1) Who is the eldest brother and the destined husband of Rodogune? (2) Whom does Rodogune love? (3) And what is Cléopâtre really like, who is right about her, Rodogune or Cléopâtre's confident, Laonice?

Cléopâtre opens the second act. Cléopâtre reveals her true character, her hatred and fear of Rodogune, her lust for power, and her intention of using the secret of the order of her sons birth for her own ends. The act ends with a new mystery; a proposed plan of Séleucus.

In the third act, we learn that the plan of Séleucus is that the brother who is loved by Rodogune shall be king and marry Rodogune and the other shall renounce all claim to the throne. Rodogune's reply provides a "coup de théâtre": she will marry the one who kills Cléopâtre. The end of the act leaves us wondering what the outcome of this impossible situation can be. But in Act
IV we learn that Cléopâtre intends to kill both her sons, so that the suspense is carried over into Act V.

In Act V, we learn that Cléopâtre has killed Séleucus and means to poison Rodogune and Antiochus. Séleucus before he died, was able to warn his brother of "Une main qui nous fut bien chère." Antiochus hesitates: does he mean Cléopâtre or Rodogune? He tries to commit suicide. Cléopâtre accuses Rodogune and Rodogune Cléopâtre; Antiochus nearly drinks the poisoned cup; Cléopâtre drinks it and dies.

La Thébaïde by Racine was produced in 1664 by Molière's company. The major characters are:

Etéocle: king of Thèbes
Polynice: brother of Etéocle
Jocaste; mother of the two princes and Antigone
Antigone: sister of Etéocle and Polynice
Créon: uncle of the two princes and princess
Hémon: son of Créon and lover of Antigone
Olympe: confident of Jocaste
Attale: confident of Créon
Ménecée: son of Créon

Act I. The first act contains Jocaste's statement of her intention to enlist the aid of Antigone concerning her sons, Etéocle and Polynice, who are about to do battle. The problem is that Jocaste's husband, before he died decreed that each son shall rule in alternate years. Etéocle is on the throne at the beginning of
the tragedy. His year is up but he refuses to render the throne to his brother because of his hatred for him. Jocaste approaches Antigone but her attempt is unnecessary when Étocle arrives. Étocle refuses to be swayed by his mothers' pleas. Étocle is confident that if the Thébans are allowed to choose their king, he himself rather than Polynice will be chosen. Créon, the uncle of the brothers appears in a short scene with Jocaste and she reveals to him that she is aware of his love for Antigone and his desire to mount the throne himself. The first act set in motion what seems to be the principal line of action, the attempts by Jocaste and Antigone to prevent the bloody combat between the brothers.

The second act begins with a long scene between Antigone and Hémon. Jocaste, Antigone and Hémon all try to prevail upon the other brother, Polynice, to forget about trying to regain the throne. Polynice refuses because he feels that the will of his father should be followed. The only diversion from the main line of action, the solving of the struggle between the two brothers, in a short love scene between Hémon and Antigone. This scene reveals that Hemon is actually trying to bring the brothers to terms because Antigone demanded that he do so.

In Act III we learn of the suicide of Ménéée through Olympe, the confident of Jocaste. Ménéée has taken his life to protest against the brothers refusal to come to an agreement. Jocaste attempts to use his death as an argument for peace in her attempt to separate the brothers. This attempt fails so she
arranges a confrontation in the brothers presence.

Act IV. This act is devoted to the confrontation, of the two brothers Etéocle and Polynice. Créon appears again and assures us that the suspicions of Jocaste were correct because he incites Etéocle to continue the struggle, thus revealing his duplicity and dual role. In scene three the brothers meet and Jocaste appeals to them from a paternal standpoint, a political standpoint, and a fraternal standpoint. All of the appeals by Jocaste fail and the two brothers agree to meet in a single combat with each other--the victor gaining the throne.

Act V. The denouement to the various lines of action is set in motion. Jocaste realizes that her sons will not reach an agreement so she takes her life. The two brothers kill each other in the dual. Hémon is killed trying to separate the brothers. Créon reveals his intention to gain the throne and to marry Antigone. Antigone takes her life rather than marry Créon. Créon in a fit of rage kills himself so that he might be able to be with Antigone in death. Thus the tragedy ends.

The two tragedies afford some outstanding parallels and contrasts. From an analytical study, Four different character parallels can be seen: (1) The role of the mother in each play. In La Thébaïde Jocaste represents a mother with pure maternal feelings towards her sons and family and the ideals each should portray. Her feelings are enhanced by the kinds of arguments she sets
forth in her exchanges with Étéeole and Créon; she is invariably on the side that is presented, from the beginning, as the right side. She is for the natural affections, against the hateful affections of her sons:

Vous pourriez d'un tel sang, Ô Ciel! souiller vos armes?
La couronne pour vous a-t-elle tant de charmes?
Si par un parricide il la fallait gagnée,
Ah! mon fils, à ce prix voudriez-vous régner? 1

She is for honor and peace:

Mais il ne tient qu'à vous, si l'honneur vous anime,
Si nous donner la paix sans le secours d'un crime...

She is for justice and hereditary rights:

...vous le savez, mon fils, la justice et le sang
Lui donnent comme à vous sa part à ce haut rang. 3

She is for greatness of action and soul:

Les peuples, admirant cette vertu sublime
Voudront toujours pour prince un roi si maganime. 4

One can see, therefore, that Jocaste is concerned from a maternal standpoint, however, the contrast is seen in Rodogune. Cléopâtre possessed nothing but hatred for her husband and this same hatred was passed to her sons. She states that the "trône"

1 Charles Péguy, Oeuvres de Racine: Tome Premier (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1963), p. 20. (Unless otherwise indicated all other references are to this edition).

2 La Thébaïde, Act I, Scene III, p. 22.

3 La Thébaïde, Act I, Scene III, p. 23.

4 La Thébaïde, Act I, Scene III, p. 23.
means more to her than her sons:

Délices de mon coeur, il faut que je te quitte.
On m'y force, il le faut, mais on verra quel fruit
En recevra bientot celle qui m'y reduit.
L'amour que j'ai pour toi tourne en haine pour elle...¹

Cléopâtre represents all a mother should not be. She reveals her true character in Act II, her fear and hatred of Rodogune:

Quand je mis Rodogune en tes mains prisonnière.
Ce ne fut ni pitié, ni respect de son rang
Qui m'arrêtâ le bras, et conserva son sang.²

her lust for power:

La mort d'Antiochus me laissait sans armée,
Et d'une troupe en hâte à me suivre animée
Je me voyais perdue à mains d'un tel otage...³

and her intention of using the secret of the order of her sons' birth for her own ends.

...Apprends, ma confidente, apprends à me connaître
Si je cache en quel rang le ciel les a fait naître
Vois, vois que l'ordre en demeure douteux...⁴

We can see therefore how the two dramatist use the character of a mother to suit his particular story. The role of Jocaste is maternal; the one of Cléopâtre, self-centered, vile and corrupt.

(2) Another interesting parallel is the mother-son relationship in the two plays. In La Thébaïde Jocaste appeals to both sons

¹Rodogune, Act II, Scene II, p. 38.
⁴Rodogune, Act II, Scene II, p. 37.
to forget their hatred for one another and think about "leur sang"

Vous le savez, mon fils, la justice et le sang  
Lui donnent, comme à vous, sa part à ce haut rang,  
Voulut que tous à tous vous fussiez tous deux rois... 1

In *Rodogune*, Cléopâtre is just the opposite. In Act II she appeals to the brothers: he who kills Rodogune shall rule. She is not concerned with family honor or "leur sang." Her "son" is the "throne." (3) If we look at the sons in each play we find another interesting parallel. In *La Thébaïde*, one can see no visible hope for the brothers ever coming to an agreement. Eteocle says:

Nous avons l'un et l'autre une haine obstinée:  
Elle n'est pas, Créon, l'ouvrage d'une année  
Elle est née avec nous; et sa noire fureur  
Aussitôt que la vie entra dans notre coeur.  
Nous étions ennemis dès la plus tendre enfance.  
Que dis-je? Nous l'étions avant notre naissance.  
Triste et fatal effet d'un sang incestueux... 2

Yet in Rodogune, a direct contrast is found. The brothers wish to do what is right and each of them tries to arrive at a proper agreement. Even though Cléopâtre does succeed in thwarting their efforts. The brothers stand out:

Gardons plus de respect aux droit de la nature,  
Et n'imputons qu'au sort notre triste aventure:  
Nous le nommions cruel, mais il nous était doux.  
Quand il ne nous donnait à combattre que nous. 3

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3 *Rodogune*, Act II, Scene IV, p. 45.
(4) Another outstanding parallel is the mother-son protagonist conflict. In *La Thébaïde* this conflict is best represented by Jocaste, Polynice and Créon. We see Jocaste trying to negotiate a peaceful agreement between her sons while Créon's political ambition, and his ruthlessness in the pursuit of his ambition, causes him to encourage the hatred that exist between the two brothers. He says:

> Je me demandais au ciel la princesse et le trône.  
> Il me donne le sceptre et m'accorde Antigone.  
> Il aime en ma faveur et la haine et l'amour...

We therefore see hatred and greed opposing good. In *Rodogune*, Cléopâtre, due to her hatred and political ambition, tries to turn her sons against each other when she gives them a choice between motherly love and the "trône" against the love of another woman. Yet the other half of this conflict, Timagène, is somewhat different from Créon. Timagène is more optimistic and at times the reader feels that he wants to tell Cléopâtre to end her vile ways.

We have therefore seen that although the two dramatist belong to different eras their early plays *Rodogune* and *La Thébaïde* reveal outstanding parallels and contrasts. The two dramatist concentrated their attention upon the inner working of their characters to the point of producing a character more subtle and

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1 Pierre Corneille, *Rodogune* (Paris: Libraire Larousse), pp. 43-44. (Unless otherwise indicated all other references are to this edition).
varied.

With the analytical resume and the parallels and contrasts discussed, a look at the seven baroque aspects of the two plays is now in order.
CHAPTER III

THE BAROQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF RODOGUNE AND LA THÉBAÏDE

Seven characteristics were mentioned earlier in this paper as being the dominant characteristics of "what is baroque." We shall now examine each characteristic as it applies to Rodogune and La Thébaïde. It should be stated here that although each of the plays abound in examples of each characteristic, the aim of this paper will not be to point out every example but rather to give a representative example or examples as exemplified in the two works.

(1) Moral purpose: In Rodogune and La Thébaïde politics represents the moral purpose. In Rodogune, Cléopâtre states:

Je hais, je règne encore. Laissons d'illustres marques
En quittant, s'il le faut, ce haut rang des monarques:
Faison-en avec gloire un départ éclatent. 1

The dominant thought in her mind is to reign forever. For her lust is for power and more power. The "trône" represented the power that she sought and she is prepared to go to any length to preserve it. In La Thébaïde, politics are looked upon from a somewhat different angle. Jocaste is concerned about the thoughts of the people over which they are ruling and how they will look

1 Rodogune, Act II, Scene 1, p. 36.
upon the ruling monarchy in which hate, greed and possible death are the dominant characteristics. Jocaste states:

...Est-ce donc sur des morts que vous voulez régner? Thèbes avec raison craint le règne d'un prince qui de fleuves de sang inonde sa province.¹

The highest thought in the mind of Jocaste is to represent a good example for the people over which they rule. Basically this is what she is saying when she talks to Étéeocle in the first act:

Associez un frère à cet honneur suprême. Ce n'est qu'un vain éclat qu'il recevra de vous; Votre règne en sera plus puissant et plus doux. Les peuples admirant cette vertu sublime, Voudront toujours pour prince un roi si magnanime; Et cet illustre effort, loin d'affaiblir vos droits, Vous rendra le plus juste et le plus grand des rois.

One has little difficulty in seeing that in both plays the moral purpose is basically political.

(2) Horror and exaggeration. This characteristic abounds within the tragedies. Although the classical school of thought did not allow horror and exaggeration to be presented on stage, the two dramatist used certain key words like sang, parricides, funeste, douleur, and crimes, to convey what they had in mind. The actual battle and deaths are related by a character or confidant. In Rodogune we find an example of horror and exaggeration when Cléopâtre tells her son that she killed Nicanor, their father, because he was courting Rodogune:

¹ La Thébaïde, Act IV, Scene III, p. 56.

² La Thébaïde, Act I, Scene III, p. 23.
Je fis beaucoup alors, et ferais encore plus  
S'il était quelque voie, infame ou légitime,  
Que m'enseignât la gloire, ou que m'ouvrît le crime,  
Qui me pût conserver un bien que j'ai chéri.

One of the most horrible features of the tragedy comes at the end of the play with the news of the death of Séleucus, and Cléopâtre's plot to kill Antiochus and Rodogune. Timagène relates the death of Séleucus:

Je l'ai trouvé, seigneur, au bout de cette allée  
Où la clarte du ciel semble toujours voilée.  
Sur un lit de gazon, de faiblesses étendu,  
Il semblait déplorer ce qu'il avait perdu;  
Son âme à ce penser paraissait attachée;  
Sa tête sur un bras languissamment penchée,  
Immobile et rêveur, en malheureux amant...

Cléopâtre prepared a nuptial cup of poison and Rodogune questioned the contents of the cup and Cléopâtre answers by saying:

Ah! gardez-vous de l'une et l'autre main!  
Cette coupe est suspecte, elle vient de la reine;  
Craignez de toutes deux quelque secrète haine.

Antiochus gives us an example of exaggeration when he speaks to Rodogune:

Ce coeur qu'un saint amour rangea sous votre empire,  
Ce coeur, pour qui le votre a tous moments soupirer,  
Ce coeur, en vous aimant indignement percé.

In La Thébaïde, horror is exemplified in the very first scene as Jocaste speaks:

1 Rodogune, Act II, Scene II, p. 38.  
2 Rodogune, Act V, Scene IV, p. 79.  
3 Rodogune, Act V, Scene IV, p. 85.  
4 Rodogune, Act IV, Scene I, p. 61.
Ah! mortelle douleurs
.................................
Puisse plutôt la mort les fermer pour jamais
Et m'empêcher de voir le plus noir des forfaits.\(^1\)

Also she says:

Tu ne t'étonnes pas si mes fils sont perfides,
S'ils sont tous deux méchants, et s'il sont parricides:
Tu sais qu'il sont sortis d'un sang incestueux.\(^2\)

Horror can be seen when the two brothers meet and Étéocle says:

Et ces mêmes combats et cette même guerre,
Ce sang qui tant de fois a fait rougir la terre,
Tout cela dit assez que le trône est à moi...\(^3\)

Exaggeration also begins with the first scene when Olympe speaks
to Jocaste:

Je les ai vus déjà tous rangés en bataille;
J'ai vu déjà le fer briller de toutes parts;
J'ai vu le fer en main, Étéocle lui-même;\(^4\)

Also when Étéocle speaks to Jocaste concerning what she would
like for him to do in regard to rendering the throne to Polynice.

Étéocle says:

Hé bien, Madame, hé bien, il faut vous satisfaire:
Il faut sortir du trône et couronner mon frère;
Il faut, pour seconder votre injuste projet\(^5\)

again when Antigone speaks to Hémon about how dearly she has missed

\(^1\)La Thébaïde, Act I, Scene III, p. 9.
\(^2\)La Thébaïde, Act I, Scene III, p. 20.
\(^3\)La Thébaïde, Act IV, Scene III, p. 55.
\(^4\)La Thébaïde, Act I, Scene I, p. 18.
\(^5\)La Thébaïde, Act I, Scene II, p. 23.
him for the past year:

J'en voyais et dehors et dedans nos muraille;
Chaque assaut à mon coeur livrait mille combats;
Et mille fois le jour je souffrais le trépas.¹

also, in La Thébaïde all the major characters are killed, which affords an excellent example for horror. Jocaste decides to end her life in the fourth act. She tells Étéehole:

Je n'ai plus pour mon sang ni pitié ni tendresse
Votre exemple m'apprend à ne le plus chérie;
Et moi, je vais, cruel, vous apprendre à mourir.²

Olympe relates to Antigone the death of the two brothers and Hémon at the beginning of Act V:

Le Roi n'est plus, Madame et son frère est vainqueur.
On parle aussi d'Hémon: l'on dit que son courage S'est efforcé longtemps de suspendre leur rage
Mais que tous ses efforts ont été superflus ...³

Antigone, realizing Créon's desire to marry her, decides to take her life rather than accept him. She tells Créon:

Je la refuserais de la main des Dieux même;
Et vous osez, Créon m'offrir le diadime!⁴

after this speech she commits suicide.

Créon learns of her death through Attale and he decides to take his life. He says:

...Inhumaine, je vais y descendre après vous

¹ La Thébaïde, Act IV, Scene III, p. 61.
² La Thébaïde, Act V, Scene III, p. 62.
³ La Thébaïde, Act V, Scene III, p. 69.
⁴ La Thébaïde, Act V, Scene V, p. 73.
Vous y verrez toujours l'object de votre haine
Et toujours mes soupirs vous rediront ma peine.
Ou pour vous adoucir ou pour vous tourmenter,
Et vous ne pourrez plus mourir pour m'éviter.
Mourons donc...

(3) Incarnation as applied specifically to the baroque school
means a change through the use of the senses from the present
to future or any other combination of these times. The favorite
word of the baroque school is "voir." We see this incarnation in
Rodogune when Cléopâtre talks to her sons about the monarchy and
the distinction that Rodogune can cause when she says:

Je vis votre royaume cher entre ces murs reduit
Je vis votre royaume mais voir après douze ans
Mais voir votre couronne après lui destinée.²

she goes from past to future to present in a matter of three
lines. The baroque writer used such for enhancing the suspense
of his work and to exemplify the changes that can be made either
for the better or the worst of a particular character in regard
to his present, past and future.

Incarnation in Rodogune can be seen when Cléopâtre
talks to herself:

...vois jusqu'ou m'emporta l'amour du diadème,
Vois quel sang'il me coute, et tremble pour toi-même
..........................................................
Vois-tu que le peuple s'apprête...³

¹La Thébaïde, Act V, Scene V, p. 73.
²Rodogune, Act III, Scene I, p. 47.
and again she talks to her confident:

...vois, vois que tant ne règne et je règne pour eux.\(^1\)

In *La Thébaïde*, as Jocaste and Olympe discuss the suffering that she is experiencing in her attempts to reconcile her sons. Jocaste says:

Mes yeux depuis six mois étaient ouvert aux larmes
Et m'empêcher de voir le plus noir de forains...\(^2\)

also when she speaks with Antigone about the irreconcilable hate that her sons feel toward each other:

Vous voyez qu'Étéclole a mis les armes là-bas...
Il veut que je les voie leur fureur noire...

...............[omitted].............
Vous voyez les malheurs ou le ciel m'a plongé...\(^3\)

when Étéclole speaks to Créon about his intention to do battle with his brother Polynice:

Nous verrons ce qu'il veut; mais je répondrais bien...
Tu verras que sa rage est encore la même...\(^4\)

"Il faut voir" is constantly reoccurring throughout the conversations between the characters in the two plays. Ideals seem to take on the physical being by means of this stylistic device.

(4) Illusion: Illusion was one of the prime objectives of the baroque writer. This characteristic not only is suspense-

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ful but also dramatically effective. In Rodogune the very first act relates to the reader that Cléopâtre believes her husband, Nicanor, is dead and she marries his brother Antiochus only to discover that Nicanor is not dead at all. Cléopâtre is an illusory figure for her sons throughout the play until the fifth act. The two sons refuse to regard her as a "mother" who is to be honored and obeyed. She thus commits all types of vile acts and hateful deeds. She has Nicanor killed, Rodogune captured and plots to kill her sons and Rodogune. Most of the play is characterized by the illusion in the minds of the characters. Rodogune tries to convince both brothers that their mother is not the maternal being that she alludes them into believing. Cléopâtre does the same with Rodogune. These attempts to keep the sons in complete illusion continues up and into the last act of the tragedy.

In La Thébaïde, Act IV, Scene II, the reader and Jocaste are informed of a battle between the brothers and all of a sudden Etéocle walks in with blood on his clothes and the problem is seemingly solved. Since we deduce that Etéocle has killed Polynice, we soon discover that it was just an illusion and that Etéocle has not been fighting with his brother. The blood on his clothes came from a short battle near one of the enemy camps. Thus, we find that the problem is not solved. We can readily see the dramatic effect that illusion carries and why it is also a dominant characteristic of the baroque school. (5) Contrast and Surprise: The
baroque writer delighted in the use of antithesis to achieve contrast and surprise. The two plays afford a wealth of examples of this outstanding baroque characteristic. In *Rodogune*, when Sélecus speaks to his brother about how they should look upon their mother, Sélecus says:

> Et, si j'ose tout dire, un titre assez léger,  
> Un droit d'ainesse obscur, sur la foi d'une mère,  
> Va combler l'un de gloire, et l'autre de misère.

when Laonice speaks of what Antiochus wishes to do in regards to his mother, Cléopâtre, she says:

> ...lui voulut dérober les restes de sa vie,  
> Et préférant aux fers la gloire de périr.

and Rodogune answers her by saying:

> C'est à vous de choisir mon amour ou ma haine,  
> J'aime les fils du roi, je hais ceux de la reine.

In the same manner, we find antithesis in *La Thébaïde* when Jocaste says to Créon, in regard to the manner in which her sons are reacting towards each other, that:

> Quand deux frères armés vont s'égarder entre eux.  
> Ne les pas séparer, c'est les perdre tous deux.  
> Peut-on faire au vainqueur une injure plus noir.  
> Que lui laisser gagner une telle victoire.

Créon also employs antithesis when he says:

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En lui donnant deux rois, lui donne deux tyrans.
Par un ordre souvent l'un à l'autre contraire.\(^1\)

and when Créon confesses to himself all the deaths he has caused he says:

\begin{quote}
L'ambitieux au trône et l'amant couronne.
Je demandais au ciel la Princesse et le trône:
Il me donne le sceptre et m'accorde Antigone.
Pour couronner ma tête et ma flamme en ce jour,
Il arme en ma faveur et la haine et l'amour;
Il allume pour moi deux passions contraires...\(^2\)
\end{quote}

(6) Movement and metamorphosis: As stated above the two plays deal with the internal sentiments of the characters. The baroque writer resorted to images of movement and external forces which drive or end the life span, to express the idea that inner peace of soul is more important than outward decorous calm. In Rodogune, the brothers best represent this characteristic. Even though the other characters allude to inner peace, the conversation between the two brothers affords an excellent example of movement and metamorphosis:

\begin{quote}
Dans mon ambition, dans l'ardeur de ma flamme,
Je vois ce qu'est un trône et ce qu'est une femme,
Et jugeant par leur prix de possession,
J'éteins enfin ma flamme et mon ambition,
Et je vous céderais l'un et l'autre avec joie.\(^3\)
\end{quote}

\(^1\) La Thébaïde, Act I, Scene III, p. 22.

\(^2\) La Thébaïde, Act III, Scene III, p. 43.

\(^3\) La Thébaïde, Act III, Scene IV, p. 45.
also when Antiochus says:

Gardons plus de respect aux droits de la nature
Et n'imputons qu'au sort notre triste aventure.¹

The brothers are aware of the external forces working against them but they strive to maintain the eternal fraternal love and honor that exist between them. In La Thébaïde, Jocaste represents internal-external conflict. She appeals to the brothers from their "internal" viewpoint over and over again. She says:

Vous le savez, mon fils, la justice et le sang
Lui donnent, comme à vous, sa part à haut rang vous
Montâtes au trône; il n'en fut point jaloux:
Et vous ne voulez pas qu'il y monte après vous?²

also when she says:

Si la vertu vous touche autant que fait le crime,
Si vous donnez les prix comme vous punissez,
Quels crimes par ce sang ne seront effacés?³

Although Jocaste appeals over and over again to her sons, the external forces are too great and she visualizes death for her two sons so that the metamorphosis brought on by the movement of the external forces have slowly drained her will power to live. Thus, she takes her life.

(7) Organic unity: In both Rodogune and La Thébaïde we can see how both Corneille and Racine linked all the problems and details of the "families" into a unit. Each uses a different

¹La Thébaïde, Act I, Scene III, p. 22.
²La Thébaïde, Act III, Scene III, p. 43.
³La Thébaïde, Act III, Scene IV, p. 45.
pattern with certain similarities. Cléopâtre's hatred, the brothers concern for fraternal love, Jocaste's maternal love, her sons hatred, are all direct opposites at the beginning of the plays. Some of the opposites are changed or altered and some are not. But in the tradition of a baroque writers, these opposites are assembled in a certain pattern and organized into a meaningful unit. We can readily see in Rodogune and La Thébaïde how the two dramatist took diverse characters and situations and organized them into a meaningful unit.

Conclusion

In this study, the writer has attempted to examine the parallels and contrasts between Rodogune of Pierre Corneille and La Thébaïde of Jean Racine according to the criteria of the baroque school. The two dramatist have long been placed in one category, that of being classical. In giving a short sketch of the history of the baroque and classicism the writer endeavored to convey the idea that although classicism finally overcame the baroque, a total destruction of the baroque was not the end result. Classicism may thus be regarded as a reaction to certain aspects of baroque and a continuation of others—just as "L'art pour l'art" and Parnassianism are at once a reaction against Romanticism and a continuation of it.

From the study of scholarship on what is baroque in litera-
ture, the writer presented seven characteristics: (1) Moral purpose, (2) Horror and exaggeration, (3) Incarnation, (4) Illusion, (5) Contrast and surprise, (6) Movement and metamorphosis, (7) Organic unity. The seven characteristics were applied to the two plays, Rodogune and La Thébaïde, with specific examples drawn from the two plays. The writer is not proposing, therefore, that the two works contain no classical features, for in each work these features can be found. Yet, to employ the word "classical" does not mean that a work is exempt from baroque tendencies. There is in most of the prominent writers of the seventeenth century, even those labeled classical, a combination of classicism and baroque stylistic devices.

Of course this study is not all inclusive but rather a general sketch of baroque and classicism as the two terms apply to French Literature during the seventeenth century. Much more can be done and is being done by a group of revisionist, who wish to give a deeper appraisal of such writers of the classical period as Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine. Studies of such nature are quite fulfilling and rewarding intellectually.
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