AFTER POMPEE CORNEILLE WROTE, FIRST, TWO COMEDIES around the figure of the liar, then, a group of three tragedies notable, among other things, for the prominence they give to protagonists of evil. All five works can be seen as, in part, reactions to the preceding Roman plays, and most particularly to the trilogy. The liar and the monster of evil, in different ways, are both counterparts to the providential heroes of Rome’s greatness.

The theme of lying, which Corneille treats in *Le Menteur*, was by no means new in his theater. On the contrary, it had played an important role in every one of his early comedies, from *Mélite* to *L’Illusion comique*. But just as the rectification that he had practiced in *L’Illusion* became more deliberate after the Quarrel of the *Cid*, so his interest in lying seems to have been sharpened by the literary controversy and the subsequent writing of the Roman plays. Corneille’s critics had attacked the *Cid* as a fraud, all glittery surface with no real substance; and Corneille, as we have seen, responded finally by constructing his next plays around the double truths of Roman history and the Christian faith. Polyeucte, the perfect hero, is an iconoclast and martyr who goes to his death proclaiming public witness to his newfound God. *Le Menteur* reverses the polarities of *Polyeucte*, substituting comedy for tragedy, and a liar for a truth-teller. *La Suite du Menteur*, in which the liar, Dorante, is reformed and begins to tell the truth, would seem to be, on the other hand, an effort to rectify
comedy; that is, to test the premise just established in *Le Menteur* and to see whether the comic hero, like the earlier tragic hero, could not also be made into an ally of truth. If Corneille's intentions were indeed to reverse *Polyeucte* in *Le Menteur* and then correct *Le Menteur* in the *Suite*, the failure of the sequel apparently discouraged him from wanting to pursue further lines of development in the comic genre; and, with *Rodogune*, he returned to tragedy.

*Rodogune, Théodore, and Héraclius* make up a triad of plays second in importance in Corneille's theater only to *Horace, Cinna*, and *Polyeucte*. Couton refers to them collectively as "la trilogie des monstres" (p. 112), Sweetser as "les pièces manichéennes" (p. 138). They compose a trilogy only in the very loosest sense. From Cléopâtre to Marcelle to Phocas one can see, it is true, a gradual decline from an absolute of monstrosity, just as earlier one saw in Horace, Auguste, and Polyeucte a gradual ascent toward ever higher levels of heroic virtue. This new gradation exists in something of a vacuum, however. It is not linked to any step-by-step unfolding of a central historical vision, is not integrated into any other grander pattern of ethical or cultural evolution. As a consequence, the considerable difference visible between the almost totally monstrous Cléopâtre of *Rodogune* and the rather human Phocas of *Héraclius* is apt to strike one, if at all, as merely accidental. The plays do, however, all evince the same general dramatic structure: marked by the clear-cut opposition of good and evil, and the attendant double reversal at the denouement. This formula is basically the Tassoan formula of *Pompée*, minus the complicating admixture of Lucan and the *Pharsalia*. Corneille has emphasized the evil characters much more than Tasso ever intended, however. He has also drastically narrowed the scope of the action and, instead of focussing on conflicts of worldwide import, deals now with disputes that scarcely go beyond the walls of a single palace, or the concern of a single royal family. These two adjustments in all probability are not independent of each other. In the Roman plays, Corneille had already shown virtue playing itself out on the grand stage of Roman history. Could he now, in the new group of plays, do something of the same thing for evil? Theoretically, yes; but in fact it would have gone against his grain for the playwright to unleash evil on the full arena of world politics. By reducing the
range of influence of his evil characters, however, he could contain or neutralize their evil to some extent. I am suggesting, in other words, that the sacrifice of epic scope was the price that Corneille had to pay in order to feel free elsewhere to amplify greatly the role of his antiheroes.

The “monster” plays, like the “liar” plays, appear then, to represent modulations whose negativity the playwright seeks to contain. An essential element of this containment can be seen in the playwright’s continued interest in rectification. For it is not only La Suite du Menteur that sets out to correct the flaws of an earlier text; Rodogune, Théodore, and Héraclius have this aim also. Marc Fumaroli (in his article, “Tragique païen et tragique chrétien dans Rodogune”) has clearly demonstrated the complexity of the various corrections implied in the text of the first of Corneille’s “monster” plays; and I have nothing to add to what he has already said so well. To my knowledge, no one, however, has noticed or commented on a series of concealed rectifications central to Théodore and Héraclius. The purpose of this chapter will be to study these other rectifications, which have the added interest for us in the present context of being carried out on the only two dramatic texts that Tasso himself has left us: the dramatic pastoral, Aminta, and the tragedy, Torrismondo.

THÉODORE AND AMINTA

At first glance hagiography and pastoral poetry would appear to have little or nothing in common, and indeed it will be my argument here that Corneille wanted to keep the two genres apart. By the time the playwright came to treat it, however, the story of Saint Theodora had acquired—together with an allegorical meaning that I shall examine in a later chapter—a well-developed love interest where none had existed originally. Saint Ambrose, whom Corneille cites as a source, recounts that Theodora, after being cast in a brothel for refusal to recant, was rescued from her predicament by the intervention of a Christian frater, Didymus, at whose side she was later martyred. No mention is made of love. In the play of Girolamo Bartolommei, which scholars often suggest as a more recent source for Corneille, Theodora, though of course still a Christian virgin, has become a “ninfa” in the eyes of Christian and pagan characters alike; and
Didymus is only one among several suitors for her hand. Between these extremes lie several other Italian plays on the subject and also the Olindo-Sophronia episode in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (2. 32), which, Fumaroli has pointed out, is both pastoral in tone and modeled on the second half of the saint's story (where Theodora and Didymus contend with each other for the glory of a martyr's death).

If in our imagination we superimpose the text of Corneille's *Théodore* on the text of Tasso's *Aminta*, we can readily perceive several important concordances. In both works we find a respectful hero in pursuit of a virginal heroine with whom he is finally united. The heroine begins by rejecting her suitor rather roughly, but eventually yields to his importunities. And the young hero, in both cases, rescues the virgin from a brutal sexual assault planned by another. The nature of the love involved is quite different in the two texts, as are the circumstances of the lovers' final union. *Aminta* is a celebration of youth's awakening to the delights of love, including the excitement of the senses. *Théodore*, on the other hand, aims at the suppression of the senses and a sublimation of human love into the all-embracing love of God. The satyr who attacks Silvia at the fountain, like the coarse soldiers who would violate Théodore in the brothel, represents the degradation of love into animalistic lust. But over against this nightmare image of love, the *Aminta*, which ends with the lovers' marriage, evokes the vision of lawful, human sensual bliss, whereas *Théodore* unites the couple only in a martyrdom undertaken above all for the love of God. These are differences of tone or of coloring, however; they do not invalidate the basic homology of the plots, the harmony of the basic structural patterns.

To note these similarities in plot incident does not, of course, prove that Corneille himself necessarily was aware of them. The parallels might be construed as accidental or at least inadvertent on the playwright's part, something he inherited perhaps from earlier versions of Theodora's life. In fact, however, Corneille seems not only to have seen the homologies but wanted us to know he had seen them.

Let us start with Didyme, Théodore's suitor, later her savior, and finally her co-martyr. Didyme is mentioned as a suitor early
in the play, notably in act 2, scene 2, where the heroine confesses to her cousin Cléobule that, if she were to marry anyone, it would be Didyme. She has rejected him and intends to continue rejecting him—for reasons that for the moment she withholds, but that involve a secret vow to save her love for God alone. She feels attracted to Didyme, however, and must struggle with herself to resist him:

[Oui, j’aimerois Didyme,]
Didyme, que sur tous je tache d’éloigner,
Et qui verroit bientôt sa flamme couronnée,
Si mon âme à mes sens étoit abandonnée,
Et se laissoit conduire à ces impressions
Que forment en naissant les belles passions.

Théodore’s understanding of her own emotions is quite sophisticated—too much so, perhaps, to be entirely plausible. One suspects that the playwright, here and in what follows, is sacrificing strict verisimilitude for purposes of defining as clearly as possible his own ideological stance, which is antipastoral. For what the heroine analyzes in herself and tries, through analysis, to transcend is obviously the traditional pastoral conception of love, familiar to Corneille’s audiences through both novels and theater.

Mais comme enfin c’est lui qu’il faut que plus je craigne,
Plus je penche à l’aimer, et plus je le dédaigne,
Et m’arme d’autant plus que mon coeur en secret
Voudroit s’en laisser vaincre, et combat à regret.

This psychology would apply as well to Silvia as to Théodore, but Tasso’s heroine is much too naïve and untutored to be able to analyze it for herself:

Je me fais tant d’effort, lorsque je le méprise,
Que par mes propres sens je crains d’être surprise;
J’en crains une révolte, et que las d’obéir
Comme je les trahis, ils ne m’osent trahir.

(2. 2. 390–402)

Elsewhere in the early acts of the play, Didyme is also presented to us indirectly through a rival, Placide, the Roman governor’s son, who is also in love with Théodore. In the opening
scene of the play, Placide complains of the cruel treatment he has received from Théodore and attributes it to a supposed preference on her part for Didyme:

Sans doute elle aime ailleurs, et s'impute à bonheur
De préférer Didyme au fils du gouverneur.

(1.1.93-94)

His confidant—Cléobule again—replies that Didyme is in fact not lucky either:

Ce malheureux rival dont vous êtes jaloux
En reçoit chaque jour plus de mépris que vous.

(1.1.101-2)

Didyme's entrance onstage—as distinct from mentions made about him earlier—is delayed until very late in the play, until the last scene of act 4. When he finally appears, we see him win out over Placide in their contest for Théodore. For it is he, not Placide, who has rescued the maiden from the brothel; and Placide himself ends up recognizing his rival's supremacy and voluntarily withdraws (4.5). Then, in act 5, we see Didyme finally win acceptance of a sort from Théodore, as the malevolent Marcelle consigns them both to a shared martyrdom:

**THÉODORE, à Didyme**

Ainsi de ce combat que la vertu nous donne,
Nous sortirons tous deux avecque la couronne.

**DIDYME**

Oui, Madame, on exauce et vos voeux et les miens;
Dieu... . . .

**MARCELLE**

Vous suivrez ailleurs de si doux entretiens.
Amenez-les tous deux.

(5.6.1715-19)

Didyme, I have said, makes his initial appearance on stage at the end of act 4. By that time he has been arrested for helping Théodore escape and is led in by a guard. Cléobule catches sight of him as he approaches and, turning to Placide, says the following:

Le voici qu'Amyntas vous amène à main-forte.

(4.4.1367)
Amyntas, the guard, has no lines to speak and no other function in the play than to usher in Didyme when Didyme appears for the first time. Conceivably the name could be without significance. Another guard, in Héraclius, will also be called Amyntas. But here in Théodore, in conjunction with a hero whose role, we have seen, is parallel to that of Aminta, the name is more likely to be the playwright’s way of acknowledging the two heroes’ filiation.

Let us turn now to Théodore. The world of Corneille’s play contains a wider spectrum of amorous possibilities than the Aminta, where, besides virginity, the only options for Silvia are union with the satyr (lust) or union with Aminta (marriage). Théodore has not only these two options but two other, higher ones as well—spiritual union with a mortal (Didyme) and spiritual union with God.3 The plot describes the proposals and counterproposals, the rejections and choices by which the heroine finally accedes to the highest of all these stages of love. Théodore’s two suitors both offer her a way out of her terrible predicament—Placide just before, Didyme just after, she is sent to the brothel. Placide proposes an escape to Egypt and eventual marriage; Didyme, an exchange of clothes that will allow the maiden to escape the brothel alone while he remains behind to be arrested in her place. On both occasions Théodore begins by resisting the offer and proposing instead that her suitor solve her problem either by killing her or by providing her the means to kill herself. Both men, of course, refuse her bizarre request, thereby forcing Théodore to come to terms as best she can with their original offers, aided always by her faith in the providence of God. In the first instance, she categorically rejects the idea of marriage to Placide, in terms that foreshadow the next, higher option that Didyme will soon offer her:

Vous n’êtes pas celui dont Dieu s’y veut servir:  
Il saura bien sans vous en susciter un autre,  
Dont le bras moins puissant, mais plus saint que le vôtre,  
Par un zèle plus pur se fera mon appui,  
Sans porter ses désirs sur un bien tout à lui.  
(3. 3. 946–50)

In the second instance, she hesitates, not because Didyme is demanding anything like marriage in return for having rescued her, but because she can escape only by leaving Didyme to suffer
arrest in her stead. As Didyme relates the incident in act 4, what resolved the dilemma for Théodore was the belief—illumination?—that it was God’s will that she take this means to avoid enforced prostitution:

Je m'apprete a l'echange, elle a la mort s'apprête;
Je lui tend mes habits, elle m'offre sa tete,
Et demande a sauver un si precieux bien
Aux depens de son sang, plutot qu'au prix du mien;
Mais Dieu la persuade, et notre combat cesse.
Je vois, suivant mes voeux, echapper la Princesse.

(4. 4. 1447-52)

A second “combat” is engaged between the couple, this time on stage, in act 5, when Théodore unexpectedly surrenders herself to the authorities (claiming that God has told her meanwhile that she will now not be placed back in the brothel, but rather martyred). In a reversal of the situation earlier inside the brothel, it is now she who proposes to die in place of Didyme, and it is now Didyme who resists. The providential solution is supplied this time through Marcelle, who determines to send them to death together. Théodore, like Silvia but on a higher ethical level, relents and accepts this shared martyrdom with Didyme: “Ainsi de ce combat que la vertu nous donne,/Nous sortirons tous deux avecque la couronne.” And Didyme, for his part, is more than satisfied to be joined with Théodore, not in earthly marriage, but in a common union with God: “Oui, Madame, on exauce et vos voeux et les miens” (1. 1717). The denouement is a rectified, Christian version of the pastoral denouement of the Aminta.

That these parallels might be accidental or unconscious would seem to be denied by a curious exchange early in act 5 between Didyme and Cléobule. Didyme is under arrest and is awaiting his sentence of death. Far from being saddened by the prospect, he is overjoyed; death will ensure him a martyr’s crown and eternal happiness in heaven. Cléobule, Didyme’s friend as well as Théodore’s cousin, urges another scenario with quite different implications. Théodore, he says, is hiding in his house. What is more, he insinuates that she is now ready to marry her Christian suitor, out of gratitude for what he did to save her from the brothel:
CLÉOBULE
Il faut vivre, Didyme, il faut vivre.

DIDYMÉ
Et j'y cours.
Pour la cause de Dieu s'offrir en sacrifice,
C'est courir à la vie, et non pas au supplice.

CLÉOBULE
Peut-être dans ta secte est-ce une vision;
Mais l'heure que je t'apporte est sans illusion.
Théodore est à toi: ce dernier témoignage
Et de ta passion et de ton grand courage
A si bien en amour changé tous ses mépris,
Qu'elle t'attend chez moi pour t'en donner le prix.

(5. 3. 1546–54)

What Cléobule describes here is the ordinary pastoral denouement wherein, as in the Aminta, the maiden finally yields to her suitor's demands in recognition of proofs he has given of his devotion to her. There is no reason to believe that Théodore has in fact entertained any of the notions put forth here by Cléobule. On the contrary, as soon as she discovers that Didyme has been arrested, she rushes to the palace to give herself up. Cléobule's proposal functions as a means of showing the superior strength of character and the higher intentions of Didyme. It shows him to be, morally speaking, superior to Aminta. And Didyme's steadfast rejection serves in turn to distance Corneille and the play he is writing from all the earthly pleasures that count for so much in the pastoral tradition:

Va, dangereux ami que l'enfer me suscite,
Ton damnable artifice en vain me sollicite:
Ce cœur, inébranlable aux plus cruels tourments,
A presque été surpris de tes chatouillements;
Leur mollesse a plus fait que le fer ni la flamme:
Elle a frappé mes sens, elle a brouillé mon âme;
Ma raison s'est troublée, et mon foible a paru;
Mais j'ai dépouillé l'homme, et Dieu m'a secouru.

(5. 3. 1579–86)

The "weakness" that Cléobule assumes will motivate the actions of both Théodore and Didyme is the "weakness" that pastoral poetry has as its very purpose to celebrate. In rejecting it, or in rising above it, through his two saintly characters, Corneille
rectifies the pastoral in general and the *Aminta* in particular. This is not to say, of course, that the playwright wished to condemn love and earthly marriage once and for all. Corneille was not himself a saint; nor was he interested in writing only about the saintly, as his later theater proves beyond all doubt. As I have suggested, however, he did want to measure himself against Tasso, and that emulation necessarily involved the attempt to advance beyond Tasso just as Tasso had advanced beyond Vergil. In the context of such an emulation, it would make sense for Corneille, in *Théodore*, to use a saint's story to rectify the pastoral *Aminta*. Tasso, in the *Discorsi*, had advocated the choice of a Christian subject and a perfect hero, but only for epic poetry. Corneille, we saw earlier, went beyond Tasso when, in *Polyeucte*, he introduced a perfect hero into tragedy. Similarly, if I am not mistaken, he wanted to Christianize the pastoral, as Tasso before him had Christianized the epic. And to make his accomplishment even more pointed, he chose to recall and reject the *Aminta* within the very framework of the Christian tragedy of *Théodore*.

There remains another homology that we need to consider, one having to do not with character or plot but rather with mode of presentation: namely, the use by both Tasso and Corneille of dramatic narration to convey the events surrounding the hero's rescue of the heroine. Taking the whole of the plays into account, one would have to say that in this case the homology is quite partial. For Tasso employs narration as a device throughout the *Aminta*, whereas Corneille restricts its use in effect to act 4. The narrated actions in the *Aminta* include, besides the incidents at the fountain, such incidents as Silvia's encounter with a wolf and Aminta's leap off a cliff. All these actions are inherently less stageable, from a practical point of view, than Théodore's incarceration in, and escape from, the brothel. The most important difference between the two plays, insofar as narration is concerned, centers, however, on the writers' attitudes toward narration, more particularly on their view of how narration fits into their overall aesthetic scheme. Tasso, it would seem, uses the device, and uses it frequently, primarily because he found that it blended in perfectly with the lyrical, reflective tone of the whole pastoral. Corneille, on the other hand, as one sees from his remarks in the Examen, would have preferred actually to
show the scenes in the brothel and fell back on narration as a necessary concession to bienséance.

The place of the Aminta in the history of bienséance is rather ambiguous. Guarini had taken Tasso to task for his too complaisant exaltation of sensual love, yet by Corneille's time, in France, the Aminta itself was being praised for its exemplary decency. Tasso profited in France from comparison with his early French translators and adaptors, most of whom failed to appreciate the lyricism of the Aminta and proceeded, presumably in the name of greater dramatic effectiveness, to turn the narration of the fountain scene into staged action with dialogue. In the process Tasso's delicacy and tact had been lost. The versions of Fonteny, Belliard, Du Mas, Rayssiguier, and Quinet all took this route and constituted a well-established tradition. Vion d'Alibray, an ally and possibly also a friend of Corneille's, broke with this tradition in 1632 and published a translation of the Aminta that made a point of restoring the narrations found in the original. In the Advertissement, which is one of the most enlightening of the period, d'Alibray not only praises the artistry of Tasso but, especially as regards the narrations, commends him also for his sense of decorum:

... Il est bon de soustraire à la connaissance de la veue beaucoup de choses qui sont incontinent après suffisamment racontées. C'est pourquoi on ne sauroit assez louer la modestie du Tasse de nous avoir caché l'insolence du Satyre & la nudité de Sylvie: Ce que l'honnesteté l'ayant contraint de faire, il ne pouvoit par consequent nous faire voir le coup dont Aminte s'alloit tuer sans le secours de Daphné. ... Joint que cette action de desespoir d'Aminte estoit de mauvais exemple pour le peuple, devant qui, comme un grand maistre a dit, il ne faut pas que Médee tue ses enfans. ... (No pagination)

Tasso's extensive use of narrations in the Aminta, as I have said, probably arose from other than ethical concerns. Still, d'Alibray's remarks and the history of the pastoral's translations in France provide a useful context in which to look at Corneille's own use of narrations in Théodore. For if, as is likely, the playwright thought that he was ensuring the decorum of his play by resorting to narration of the events in the brothel, then he made a rather serious miscalculation. For in fact act 4 succeeds only in subverting the purity that the other acts of Théodore make such a
point of establishing. Tasso devotes one long speech to rehearsing the events at the fountain. Corneille extends the narration of the scene in the brothel over most of a whole act. In order to make the narrations more effective dramatically, moreover, he distributes them among three different narrators—Paulin, Cléobule, and Didyme—who appear in ascending order of the importance of their information and of their closeness to Théodore. None of them anticipates the conclusion of the events, which serves to create suspense. Moreover, the narrations and the suspense they generate are directed at a vitally interested character, Placide. In fact, because Placide's honor is said to be linked directly to the fate of his beloved, the anguish that he experiences as he listens impatiently to the gradual unfolding of the story parallels the anguish that the virgin herself must have suffered but that Corneille could not show. The "diverses agitations" and the "troubles" that the playwright had so admired in Saint Ambrose's telling of the story in *De Virginibus*, through sophisticated use of narrations, has been transferred to Placide (whose name must surely be intended as ironic and counter-characterial, like that of Sévere). Act 4 is a miracle of technical virtuosity, and Corneille was in a way right to take pride in it in the Examen. He obtains this superior dramatic effectiveness at the expense of sacrificing restraint, however. For though he never depicts anything offensive—in fact, nothing offensive ever actually occurs in the brothel—he does show Placide repeatedly tormented by suspicions of the worst sort and frustrated at not having been able to prevent the presumed violation of Théodore. Dramatic it certainly is, but act 4 verges also on indecency, an indecency born, ironically, of an obsession with avoiding the indecent. The play purports to provide a kind of Christian rectification of the *Aminta*, and to some extent it does. But in its most striking part it succeeds only in reducing the ordeal of a virgin saint to an occasion for prurience.

HERACLUS AND TORRISMONDO

*Héraclius* bears much the same relation to *Torrismondo* as Théodore does to the *Aminta*, except that the parallels in this instance are of a somewhat more general nature. In fact, were it not for what we already know of Corneille's sustained effort to emulate the accomplishments of his great Italian predecessor,
the links between Héraclius and Torrismondo would probably not be construable as really significant. We are not approaching Héraclius as an isolated phenomenon, however, but as another, the last, in a series of related phenomena all of which in some way or another we can read as rectifications of or through Tasso.

With this in mind, let us begin by noting that the subjects of both plays for all practical purposes are invented. Both playwrights make obeisance in the direction of historicity, Tasso by designating his principal characters as members of the ruling families of several Scandinavian kingdoms, Corneille by preserving the real imperial succession linking Tibère to Maurice and Maurice, by way of the usurper Phocas, to Héraclius. D'Alibray, who also translated Torrismondo, credits Tasso's play with an "intrigue de Roman," and, as evidence of its lack of historical basis, points out that, between the first and the final versions, Tasso had reversed the nature of the relationship between the friends, Torrismondo and Germondo, making Torrismondo into a betrayer of friendship, whereas he had originally been the victim of betrayal. Corneille, for his part, readily confessed that Héraclius contained "encore plus d'efforts d'invention que ... Rodogune," a play that, as he had already indicated, made very short shrift of historical fact. Indeed, he looked on Héraclius as something of a cas limite, whose success should not, he thought, be taken as encouragement to proceed further in the same direction: "C'est beaucoup hasarder, et l'on n'est pas toujours heureux; et dans un dessein de cette nature, ce qu'un bon succès fait passer pour une ingénieuse hardiesse, un mauvais le fait prendre pour une témérité ridicule" (Au Lecteur).

Both plays also have plots that deal with a double substitution of infants and a series of ensuing complications years later, a type of plot popular in the theater and novel of the time, but one that Corneille himself had never exploited before. Alvida and Rosmonda, in the Italian play, have grown up in ignorance of their true identities. Alvida is assumed to be a Norwegian princess; in reality she was only adopted by the king of Norway following the death of his own daughter. The king of Norway had gotten the child from pirates, who had stolen her from agents of her real father. Alvida's real father had set all these developments in motion by sending his own daughter away from the palace and, in her place, substituting the daughter of a nurse—all in
hopes of avoiding a dire fate predicted by a nymph. The child he brought up as his own is known as Rosmonda. The real Rosmonda, however, is Alvida. The play involves in part the way in which the identities of these two women are sorted out.

Corneille's plot for *Héraclius* assumes a similar set of exchanges, but of male instead of female infants. Some twenty years before the play's opening, Phocas the tyrant killed the emperor Maurice and ordered that the emperor's infant son, Héraclius, also be put to death. In order to frustrate this heinous plan, a gentlewoman, Léontine, had played a complicated double trick on the tyrant. First, she substituted her own son for Héraclius, allowing her own child to be murdered in order to save the future emperor. As an added precaution, she managed later to exchange Héraclius for the tyrant's infant son, Martian. As a consequence of these switches, the young man whom Léontine has reared as a son is in fact the tyrant's son, and the young man who is presumed to be the tyrant's son is in reality Héraclius, the legitimate heir to the throne.

To the theme of mistaken identities, *Torrismondo* and *Héraclius* both also add the theme of incest. Torrismondo has traveled to Norway to bring Alvida back as a wife for his friend Germondo, but, like Tristan, has fallen in love with the woman himself. Indeed, on the trip home, the lovers have consummated their passion. Torrismondo's guilt is increased upon discovery later that Alvida is the real Rosmonda, thus his own sister. Corneille, for his part, stops short of actual incest and, instead, merely flirts with the idea of it. On the other hand, he adds the related themes of threatened parricide and infanticide. For at one time or another in the play, the action is headed in the direction of Héraclius's being married to Pulchérie, his sister; of Phocas's possibly killing his own son in ignorance of his identity; and finally of Phocas's real son thinking he is the emperor's son and planning to kill the tyrant, actually his father. As the foregoing partial summaries indicate, the plots of these plays are immensely complicated—so much so, apparently, that audiences found them difficult to follow. D'Alibray's translation, *Torrismon*, was produced at the Marais in 1635, with Montdory taking the title role, to great popular acclaim. In spite of this success in the theater, d'Alibray refers over and over to the excessive complication of the plot. In the preface to the published text, he
confesses not to have liked the play himself at first and says he came to admire it only later on when he had mastered the surface confusion. In order to help the spectators at the Marais, he had deleted certain unnecessary details in the original; and for the readers of Torrismon he supplies both a prefatory Argument and, in the text of the play, explanatory marginal comments as well. Whether one approached the play in the theater or through reading—and d'Alibray says he doubts Tasso ever intended it to be staged—it posed serious problems, as do all such works of great intricacy of plot. The danger, he says, is that the spectator or reader will be too busy deciphering the story line to experience any tragic emotion: "Il peut arriver que [de telles ouevres] travaillent davantage nostre esprit pour les comprendre, que nous ne sommes emeus à compassion par les accident qu'elles représentent." The only remedy, d'Alibray concludes, is to do as he himself had done in the beginning and to see or read the play more than once.

Corneille's remarks on Héraclius often seem to echo d'Alibray's preface to Torrismon. He readily grants the over-complication of the plot and, by way of help to the reader, provides, not a whole summary, but a list of the essential true and assumed identities of the characters. In the Examen he comments briefly on the reaction of spectators to the play: "J'ai vu de fort bons esprits, et des personnes des plus qualifiées de la cour, se plaindre de ce que sa représentation fatiguait autant l'esprit qu'une étude sérieuse." His conclusion, parallel to d'Alibray's, is that the only solution lies in repetition: "[La pièce] n'a pas laissé de plaire; mais je crois qu'il l'a fallu voir plus d'une fois pour en remporter une entière intelligence."

Rectification, I have said, involves two aspects: adopting a model, but then departing from it in some obvious way so as to correct it. Up to now we have seen only the elements that Héraclius can be said to have in common with Torrismondo: namely, a subject that is ostensibly historical but in fact totally invented; the related themes of mistaken identity, caused by a double substitution of infants and resulting in the commission or threatened commission of such horrible crimes as incest, parricide, and infanticide; and, finally, an attendant critical commentary that stresses the great complexity of the plot and its effect on audiences. What remains to be seen is how, in the context of
these likenesses, *Héraclitus* can be seen to "improve" upon *Torrismondo*, its presumed model.

The plot of *Torrismondo* suffers from defects other than its elaborateness. According to d'Alibray, Tasso had erred in cramming an inordinate number of essential revelations into act 4; the uneven distribution of information throughout the play, he thought, only raised more problems for the reader or spectator. Corneille seems to have been conscious of just such a danger in writing *Héraclitus*, and in the Examen he explains how he sought to meet it: "[Les narrations] sont éparisées ici dans tout le poème, et ne font connaître à la fois que ce qu'il est besoin qu'on sache pour l'intelligence de la scène qui suit." Another weakness of *Torrismondo* lies in its duplicity of action. The first three acts are built around Torrismondo's guilt at having betrayed his friend Germondo and his indecision about what course to take when Germondo arrives. Not only has he fallen in love with his friend's intended bride; he has slept with her also. What, in the circumstances, does he now owe his friend? Should he confess his crime? Or hand over Alvida as if nothing has happened? Or, perhaps, try to get Germondo to marry Rosmonda (Torrismondo's supposed sister) instead? Only in act 4 does the awful truth begin to emerge that Torrismondo's real sister is not Rosmonda but Alvida, so that his love for the latter constitutes not just a betrayal of friendship but, even more devastatingly, incest as well. The focus of the play shifts quite abruptly in this act, and with no forewarning Torrismondo, who appears first as a kind of male Phaedra, turns suddenly instead into a counterpart of Oedipus. Corneille, for all the complications of the plot he spins, is never in danger of violating unity of action in *Héraclitus*. In place of Tasso's two themes of betrayal of friendship and incest, Corneille has three: incest, parricide, and infanticide; but whereas it is only accident that connects the two themes of *Torrismondo*, the three themes of *Héraclitus* all derive from a single, central crux—the problem of obscure identity.

The most striking difference between the two plays lies, however, in the area of their conception of tragedy. *Torrismondo* corresponds perfectly to the views on the tragic genre expounded by Tasso himself in the *Discorsi*. The hero is of middling virtue: weak enough to covet his friend's fiancée, upstanding enough to feel guilt-ridden afterward. His fall is inevitable;
his father's attempts to avert the predictions of the nymph by abandoning his daughter only serve, ironically, to fulfill the predictions. It was fated that the royal line should be cut off; and at the end of the play, it is. Torrismondo and Alvida (actually Rosmonda), brother and sister, both kill themselves; and the throne of the Goths passes over to Germondo. Héraclius has to do with the fate of a royal line also, but the end result in this case is happy. For it is Providence, not fate, that prevails in Corneille's play. At the time of the emperor Maurice's murder at the hands of Phocas, Providence intervened, through Léontine, to conceal the identity of the heir, Héraclius, and so to save him. Twenty years later, when it is time for Héraclius to assert his rightful claim to the throne, and when ignorance of his true identity is on the verge of leading him into an incestuous marriage, Providence intervenes again to save him, this time by revealing who he really is. Léontine's word, inadequate by itself to guarantee the truth, is backed up, providentially, by the appearance of two crucial letters, one in the hand of the dead emperor, the other in that of his empress. (I am skipping over a number of vague premonitions said to come from "Dieu," "le ciel," or "la voix du sang.") In the end the good characters—that is, Héraclius, his sister Pulchérie, Léontine, and even the tyrant's son, whom Léontine has reared as her own—all survive, but Phocas, the evil tyrant, is killed. Through this double reversal at the denouement, the throne reverts, as it should, to Héraclius. Torrismondo adheres to the Tassoan conception of tragedy; Héraclius, obviously, to the Tassoan conception of epic poetry—transposed by Corneille to the genre of tragedy. This is not the first time that the French playwright so rectified the author of the Discorsi. In Polyeucte he had already appropriated for tragedy the perfect hero of epic, and, in Pompeée, the epic's dichotomous world view and the plot with a double reversal, both advocated, but only for epic, by Tasso. What marks the rectification in Héraclius as unusual is the fact that, as in Théodore, it is carried out on a play of Tasso himself.

Corneille had made his real assault on Tasso's fame in the Roman trilogy, where he had borrowed from epic poetry in order to forge a new concept of tragedy. The use of this concept later on to rectify Tasso's two plays (after first rectifying Electra in Rodogune) does not in itself represent a major advance in the progress of poetry toward the goal of ultimate perfection. At
most it serves only to validate or to reaffirm a position that the playwright had already laid claim to in earlier plays. As in the Roman trilogy, where the playwright and his heroes were both engaged in breaking through to new levels of truth, so here in the “trilogie des monstres” there is again a harmony between the playwright’s own situation, *qua* poet, and that of his heroes. For the heroes of the later plays no longer make new discoveries in the realm of heroic decorum; like the playwright who created them and who, in doing so, seems to have projected his own present preoccupations onto them, they are already in possession of their greatness at the outset of the play and are intent not on adding to it but rather on just defending it.

By juxtaposing Tasso and Corneille as absolute opposites, Scudéry had inadvertently issued a challenge that the author of the *Cid* had first taken up in the dedicatory letter for *La Sui­vante* and that in time led to the much more important emulation of Tasso in the Roman trilogy. *Horace, Cinna,* and *Polyeucte* constitute the playwright’s bold claim on the ultimate reaches of poetic fame; they are also his answer to, and his refutation of, the critics who had attacked him during the Quarrel. In writing the “trilogie des monstres,” Corneille no longer had the same need for Tasso that he had had before. The purpose for which he had originally sought to emulate the Italian poet had been met and no longer existed; Corneille was free henceforth to think about other things than the Quarrel. That he continued nevertheless to be preoccupied with Tasso may be attributed to either or both of two reasons. The playwright may have wanted to rectify *Aminta* and *Torrismondo* simply out of a sense of gratitude to Tasso, to whom he knew he owed so much. He may, on the other hand, have felt that same gratitude as something of a burden and sought to reduce it by demonstrating as directly as possible his own superiority to Tasso, at least as a playwright. However that may be, it is likely, I think, that Corneille felt himself square with Tasso after *Héraclius,* just as after *Polyeucte* he had had reason to consider himself free of the critics who had hounded him during the Quarrel.