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The Rhetoric of Space and Self in Racine's *Bérénice*

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This essay explores the ways in which Racine defines the physical and conceptual spaces which his characters inhabit in Bérénice, and illustrates the semantic complexity of some of the play's principal terms.

KEYWORDS rhetoric space self Racine Bérénice

> Il y a tant de détours & tant de replis dans le cœur de l'homme, qu'il est le plus souvent inconnu à l'homme mesme... *Que l'ame se trompe &* se seduit souvent elle-mesme; que ce qui nage sur la surface de la pensée est bien different de ce qui est c*aché dans le cœur.*[1]

In 2011 a particularly illuminating production of Bérénice was staged at the Comédie française, directed by Muriel Mayette and designed by Yves Bernard.[2] It exemplified a certain ideal of Racine: uncluttered and largely abstract; outwardly cool, yet inwardly passionate; visually luminous, clear, and elegant; the verse spoken with an intelligent mixture of formality and emotion. The style of this production contrasted with the mode of performance developed recently for seventeenth-century drama by Benjamin Lazar, drawing on the work of Eugène Green.[3] Lazar specializes in performances which, besides using seventeenth-century pronunciation, costumes and music, also make use only of candles for illumination: his actors sometimes inhabit separate pools of light in a surrounding darkness, as if they were figures in a painting by Georges de la Tour or Godfried Schalken. They also

[1] Antoine Arnauld, De la fréquente communion (Paris: Pierre Auboin, 1669), pp. 366-7 [Part II Chapter XII]. The second sentence is a quotation from St Gregory.
[2] The same team produced a visually similar and equally impressive production of Andromaque the previous year. Photographs from these two productions appear on the website of the Comédie française.
[3] There is a DVD (on the Alpha label) of Lazar's production of Molière's Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, and photographs from his productions of works by Théophile de Viau and Cyrano de Bérgerac can be found by searching the web under Lazar's name. Eugène Green has set out his interpretation of baroque theatre in La Parole baroque (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001).

address their words not towards other characters but outwards towards the audience, as if they were only partially connecting with those with whom they share the stage.

These contrasting styles of performance and, in particular, of lighting, call to mind the title which Henri Meschonnic gave to an essay on the French language which he published in 1997: 'Ce que la clarté empêche de voir'.[4] What is it that clarity prevents us from seeing? In the theatre, lighting creates and defines the spaces within which the characters exist. Bernard's lighting for the Comédie française creates a shared space in which everything is visible; it is, we might say, a rational lighting which prizes clarity. Lazar, by contrast, shows us individual characters illuminated by single candles which they hold or which are placed near them; these candles create spaces which are particular to each individual, and though there may be some footlights or sconces which generate a diffused background illumination for the stage, the overall impression is of individualized rather than collective spaces.[5] We might compare the sleepwalking scene in Macbeth (Act V scene i), when Lady Macbeth, holding a taper, goes back in her mind over the scene of Duncan's murder, caught in a peculiar loop of time which keeps returning her to that one crucial moment rather than allowing her to move forward; and the space which she inhabits at this moment, defined theatrically by her candle, is her own distinctive world to which the two attendants who observe her have no access. It is the light which she carries which helps to mark out the time and space which she inhabits as being her own particular world, observable by others, perhaps, but not one which they can enter. I have suggested in my book The Strangeness of Tragedy that we might borrow the scientific term 'singularity' for such occasions when the usual laws of time and space seem to be suspended around the tragic protagonist so that they no longer share the temporal and spatial dimensions in which other characters exist.[6] In the work of Racine it is perhaps Phèdre who most obviously inhabits a singularity, her present overwhelmingly defined by the coup de foudre when she first saw Hippolyte—a moment within which she is still, in some respects, enclosed; and the spaces of Phèdre are also distinctive and set apart from those of the other characters, whether we are thinking of the reluctance with which she emerges onto the scene at the beginning of the play, or the inner

[4] Henri Meschonnic, 'Ce que la clarté empêche de voir', Esprit, 230-231 (1997), 51-63.
[5] For contemporary or near-contemporary illustrations of the use of individual candles on the French stage see the plates in David G. Muller, 'Theatrical iconography, Jeu de Scène, and recognizing the 'Table Scene(s)' in Molière's Tartuffe', Seventeenth-Century French Studies, 35 (2013), 54-68.
[6] Paul Hammond, The Strangeness of Tragedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 126. The OED supplies this quotation from Nature to illustrate its sense 9e for singularity: 'In the physical world...we may take the phrase "space-time singularity" to mean a region in which space and time have become so locally distorted that the present laws of physics are no longer applicable'.

spaces of her own mind and body within which she feels the fires of Vénus. Phèdre inhabits singular forms of time and space.[7] In the present essay I would like to explore the singular and collective spaces which Racine's rhetoric creates in Bérénice, for in this play there is often an illusory clarity to the language, in that the key words may mark unbridgeable gaps of understanding between the characters instead of shared concepts and values.[8]

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In the course of the play characters are drawn out of their individual spaces into a dawning recognition of the spaces of others, even if those spaces cannot quite be shared. Indeed, some of the most poignant moments occur when someone realizes that such spaces will never be shared, or when we as an audience see that they are making a terrible mistake in assuming that they do share what cannot or will not be shared. The play is staged in a 'Cabinet' between the apartment of Titus and that of Bérénice,[9] and though we are told that

> ce Cabinet superbe et solitaire,
> Des secrets de Titus est le dépositaire.
> C'est ici quelquefois qu'il se cache à sa Cour
> Lorsqu'il vient à la Reine expliquer son amour. (1.2, 3-6)[10]

it is a liminal space where neither character is securely in possession, and neither ever crosses over into the enclosure of the other's world. The importance of the way this space is occupied is highlighted by an unusual break in the liaison des scènes when the stage is momentarily left empty as Bérénice takes flight from the approach of Titus: at this point there is no ground on which they can meet, no way in which the space which lies between them can be shared (4.2, 982).

In the theatre lighting defines space, but space is also defined by language. And one might argue that in this play we have the rhetorical equivalent of Lazar's candlelight rather than Bernard's even illumination: that is to say, Racine's characters are enclosed within their individual conceptual spaces, as isolated monads who may appear to speak the same language, but whose use of a shared vocabulary gradually comes to highlight their

[7] See The Strangeness of Tragedy, ch. 10, for a reading of Phèdre from this perspective.
[8] I acknowledge a general debt in this essay to Roland Barthes' Sur Racine (1963)(*Œ*uvres complètes, 5 vols (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), ii 51-174). For a different reading of the psychology of the characters see Charles Mauron, *L'Inconscient dans l'œ*uvre et la vie de Racine (Aix-en-Provence: La Faculté des Lettres, 1957), and for thoughtful studies of the problems of communication between Racine's characters see David Maskell, Racine: A Theatrical Reading (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Henry Phillips, Racine: Language and Theatre (Durham: University of Durham, 1994); and Mary Reilly, Racine: Language, Violence and Power (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005).
[9] For the significance of this 'Cabinet' see Maskell, pp. 25-6.
[10] Quotations are taken from Racine, *Œ*uvres complètes: I: Théâtre - Poésie, edited by Georges Forestier, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

irremediable apartness. We see their individual and incompatible understandings of key terms, and the incompatibility of the conceptual structures, the structures of feeling and of values, of which these terms are the shorthand signs. Racine, we know, uses a limited vocabulary, and it is this very limitation which draws us as an audience to become attentive to the repetition and the instability of key words, to the instability which comes through repetition, as each successive usage minutely reconfigures the semantic field of the term. In the case of Bérénice the list of such words might include amour (of which the whole play is, in effect, a definition), set against its analogue amitié: the amour of Antiochus for Bérénice is concealed for much of the play under the veil of amitié (1.4, 243-4), while Titus thinks that Antiochus is for Bérénice 'un Ami véritable' (3.1, 696; cp. 699) and imagines that he is consolidating the 'amitié si belle' between Antiochus and Bérénice by settling them in adjacent kingdoms (3.1, 761).[11] There is also the word *cœur*, played against its near-homonym and near-antonym cour, the demands of the heart and of the imperial court both pulling at Titus. The two words cœur and cour are brought into close proximity when Titus offers Bérénice 'l'espoir de régner et de vivre en mon cœur' while he remains 'Gémissant dans ma Cour' (3.1, 749, 752). And here it is the textual proximity of *cœur* and cour which signals the tragic gap which has opened up between them, signalling what will for Bérénice be an utopie, a no-space. *Cœur* is a word to which we shall return.

Then there is the gloire which also weighs upon Titus, and whose meaning seems to vary between the glittering rewards of empire and the unwelcome moral duty of rule.[12] Its semantic field includes:

> Honneur, loüange, estime, reputation qui procede du merite d'une personne, de l'excellence de ses actions ou de ses ouvrages…
>
> Il se prend aussi quelquefois pour Eclat, splendeur…
>
> Gloire, Se prend souvent en mauvaise part, & signifie, Orgueil, sotte vanité.[13]

[11] Cp. 1.4, 262-3, where Bérénice rebukes Antiochus for having declared himself her 'Amant', but promises that 'de mon amitié mon silence est un gage'; and 3.1, 757, when Titus says to Antiochus, 'Vous que l'amitié seule attache sur ses pas'. For an analysis of royal amitié in this period see Delphine Amstutz, 'Comment penser l'amitié royale à l'âge baroque?', Seventeenth-Century French Studies, 34 (2012), 26-37.

[12] Gloire signifying the moral duties of rule: 2.2, 392, referring to Antoine's neglect of 'gloire' for Cléopâtre; 3.1, 736, Titus saying 'cédons à notre gloire'. Gloire signifying the grandeur of empire: 3.2, 796, when Antiochus says that when she returns to the east, and is no longer within the orbit of the 'grandeur' and 'splendeur' of Titus, Bérénice may be susceptible to his own 'gloire'. In such examples the semantic field of 'gloire' also includes an element of 'reputation', because whether one is considering the duties or the splendours of imperial government there is usually an awareness of how one's conduct will appear to others. The meaning 'reputation' seems uppermost when Antiochus says, 'Ma gloire, mon repos, tout m'excite à partir' (3.4, 946).

[13] *Le Dictionnaire de L'Acad*émie françoise, 4 vols (Paris: La veuve de Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1694), s.v. gloire. Robert says that sense 'estime, honneur, réputation' is particularly common in the seventeenth century

Although Antiochus uses the word in a sense approximating to 'Eclat, splendeur' when imagining, early in the play, the life of a Roman empress upon which Bérénice seems about to embark (1.4, 187, 251),[14] Titus appears to be more conscious of gloire as an unwelcome burden:

> Et si je penche enfin du côté de ma Gloire,
> Crois qu'il m'en a coûté, pour vaincre tant d'amour,
> Des combats dont mon cœur saignera plus d'un jour. (2.2, 452-4)

And there is a poignant redefinition of gloire when he reflects on the moral and emotional education which he has received through loving Bérénice, and exclaims:

> Récompense cruelle!
> Tout ce que je lui dois va retomber sur elle.
> Pour prix de tant de gloire, et tant de vertus,
> Je lui dirai, Partez, et ne me voyez plus. (2.2, 519-22)

It is precisely because of her influence on him that he now understands the meaning and the demands of his 'gloire' and the need to exercise his 'vertus'. Yet gloire is also one of the attributes which Titus finds in Bérénice: 'Beauté, gloire, vertu, je trouve tout en elle' (2.2, 544), although ultimately the 'gloire' of Bérénice (which might be glossed as both her physical radiance and the radiance of her honourable conduct, since 'gloire' here is suspended between, and receives some of its meaning from, 'beauté' and 'vertu') will ultimately be powerless before the imperial gloire of Titus. It is gloire in the sense of 'power and the trappings of power'—rather than 'the moral duties of office' which Titus prefers to invoke—which Bérénice means when she turns on him in Act V, and says:

> Retournez, retournez vers ce Sénat auguste
> Qui vient vous applaudir de votre cruauté.
> Hé bien, avec plaisir l'avez-vous écouté?
> Êtes-vous pleinement content de votre gloire? (5.5, 1340-3)

And this use of 'gloire' may not be without an undercurrent of the sense 'orgueil'. Titus, however, sees 'gloire' almost as an implacable Fate pursuing him when he says that 'Ma gloire inexorable à toute heure me suit' (5.6, 1406). Through such usages, gloire, which as

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(Le Grand Robert de la langue française, second edition edited by Alain Rey, 6 vols (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2001), s.v. gloire).

[14] Cp. Bérénice's reference to the 'gloire' of the emperor in the context of her depiction of his 'éclat' (1.5, 307).

the power which draws Titus away from Bérénice one might have expected to retain a strong and stable meaning, is subjected to contested interpretations.[15]

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Important semantic and emotive work is also assigned to parts of the body,[16] notably the hands and the eyes which fashion spaces into which characters are invited, or from which they recoil. These are instrumental in defining the spaces which the characters inhabit, but they also open out questions of agency when parts of the body seem to act independently of the whole, or when they seem to be synecdoches for the self: who, exactly, is the subject who acts, and what coherence does this subject have? To console Titus for the death of his father, Bérénice 'm'offre sa main pour essuyer mes larmes' (2.2, 480) thus creating a space of compassion between the two lovers at precisely the moment when Titus himself is struggling to break silence. Titus himself, when late for a meeting with Bérénice, has to use his hand to wipe away her tears (2.2, 540). But when he insists on their separation, the hand which consoles becomes the hand which betrays by giving back her heart, and in the process even giving her death. She says:

> Ne l'avez-vous reçu, cruel, que pour le rendre,
> Quand de vos seules mains ce cœur voudrait dépendre?
> . . . . . .
> Je pouvais de ma mort accuser votre Père,
> Le Peuple, le Sénat, tout l'Empire Romain,
> Tout l'Univers, plutôt qu'une si chère main. (4.5, 1071-8)

These hands never join.

As for the significance of yeux (which appears more than fifty times in this play[17]), at several points the protagonists cannot bear to subject themselves to the gaze of another and to move into that space which the eyes define and control. The gaze which might be that of love (for the eyes are traditionally the means by which love is enkindled) is more often that of judgment. Sometimes the eyes themselves speak (Antiochus tells Bérénice, 'je fis parler mes yeux'(1.4, 201)), and for Antiochus it is particularly painful that Bérénice, absorbed in her love for Titus, sees him without seeing him: 'Je fuis des yeux distraits | Qui me voyant

[15] In this respect there is a contrast with Corneille's Horace, where the demands of gloire, honneur, and vertu are relatively unambiguous, even if they generate conflicted loyalties in those characters who acknowledge their force.

[16] For Racine's use of parts of the body see Jacques-Gabriel Cahen, Le Vocabulaire de Racine (Paris: Droz, 1946), pp. 49-53.

[17] Bryant C. Freeman, Concordance du théâtre et des poésies de Jean Racine, 2 vols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), s.v.

toujours, ne me voyaient jamais' (1.4, 277-8). He resolves to go 'loin de ses yeux' (1.2, 34), but when he does declare his love Bérénice is astonished that he dares to appear in front of her, that 'Il fût quelque Mortel qui pût impunément | Se venir à mes yeux déclarer mon Amant' (1.4, 261-2). When Titus asks Antiochus, 'Voyez-la de ma part' (3.1, 701) 'voir' seems to a weak verb (like the bland English equivalent, 'see her') until we understand from Antiochus' reply the pain which results from him seeing Bérénice, from coming within the orbit of those yeux which do not really see him: 'Moi? paraître à ses yeux?' (3.1, 701). Antiochus imagines, briefly, that if he did accompany Bérénice back to Palestine there would be a chance that 'Ses yeux même pourront s'accoutumer aux miens' (3.2, 790), and although that terrain would be full of her memories of Titus, 'Bérénice y verra des traces de ma gloire' (3.2, 796). But when Antiochus has told her of Titus' determination that they should separate, she rounds on him and replies to his tentative and incomplete suggestion, 'Vous pourriez ici me regarder…' (3.3, 913) with a definitive sentence of banishment from her sphere: 'Pour jamais à mes yeux gardez-vous de paraître' (3.3, 916).

Titus himself is well aware of the power of Bérénice's gaze. He cannot look at her, and turns aside into his own parenthetical space, causing her to say:

> sans me répondre
> Vous détournez les yeux, et semblez vous confondre!
> Ne m'offrirez-vous plus qu'un visage interdit? (2.4, 595-7)

He believes that his 'regards muets' (3.1, 737) over the past week will have prepared Bérénice for the news of his decision to leave her and embrace his gloire, but he knows that she will require a face-to-face explanation: 'Elle veut qu'à ses yeux j'explique ma pensée' (3.1, 740). Can he subject himself to her gaze?

> Soutiendrai-je ces yeux dont la douce langueur
> Sait si bien découvrir les chemins de mon cœur?
> Quand je verrai ces yeux armés de tous leurs charmes,
> Attachés sur les miens, m'accabler de leurs larmes,
> Me souviendrai-je alors de mon triste devoir?
> Pourrai-je dire enfin, Je ne veux plus vous voir? (4.4, 993-8)

These eyes are capable of uncovering the hidden paths of his heart.

Besides main and yeux, there is bouche, which sometimes only signifies the person who speaks, but more usually draws our attention to the importance of speech, its cost and its consequences. More than a synecdoche for the speaker, bouche reminds us of the physical

act of speaking, an act which all three characters find painful at times. When Bérénice forbad Antiochus to speak,

Votre bouche à la mienne ordonna de se taire.
Je disputai longtemps, je fis parler mes yeux. (1.4, 200-1)

His speech is only a brief moment between two long periods of silence (1.4, 209-10). He had hoped that

au moins jusqu'à vous porté par mille exploits,
Mon nom pourrait parler, au défaut de ma voix. (1.4, 213-14)

But it could not. Antiochus can no longer bear to hear her speak the name of Titus, 'Ce nom qu'à tous moments votre bouche répète' (1.4, 276). The speech of Titus too is troubled: many times in the past week, says Titus, he had tried to speak:

J'ai voulu devant elle en ouvrir le discours.
Et dès le premier mot ma langue embarrassée
Dans ma bouche vingt fois a demeuré glacée. (2.2, 474-6)

'Langue' hovers between meaning 'tongue' and meaning 'speech', the former physically blocked or frozen, the latter stumbling.[18] As we become more aware of the fraught significance of space, even such apparently simple words as 'devant' and 'ouvrir' take on a weight of meaning: in front of Bérénice is the intimidating space in which Titus cannot open that discourse which he has kept so tightly shut. Indeed, there is a special emphasis in Bérénice on secrecy, on the difficulty of drawing words out into the shared space: key words which recur to suggest this include 'secret' (15 uses), 'cacher' (8), 'silence' (9), and 'dérober' (3). And this drawing out is expressed through repeated words with the prefix 'ex-': 'exposer', 'exprimer', 'expliquer' (used 10 times), and ultimately 'exil'. 'Vous sûtes m'imposer l'exil ou le silence', says Antiochus (1.4, 204), but silence is itself an exile from the shared space.

The climactic speech of Titus to Bérénice in Act IV weaves a troubled redefinition of several key words, including raison, gloire, amour, and *cœur*:

Forcez votre amour à se taire,

[18] 'Embarras' has both physical and psychological senses: 'Rencontre de plusieurs choses qui s'empeschent les unes les autres dans un chemin, dans un passage', and 'L'irresolution dans laquelle on se trouve souvent lors qu'on ne sçait quel parti prendre, ny par quelle voye sortir de quelque difficulté' (Le Dictionnaire de *L'Acad*émie françoise, s.v. embarras). Furetière shows that 'embarras' can be something deeper than a social embarrassment: 'EMBARRAS, se dit aussi figurément des chagrins, des inquietudes de l'ame' (Antoine Furetière, Dictionaire Universel, 3 vols (The Hague: Arnout & Reinier Leers, 1690), s.v. embarras. Robert includes these relevant senses for embarrassé, one physical, one metaphorical: '2 Encombré, gêné dans ces mouvements' [citing this example]; '3a (En parlant du discours). Qui manque d'aisance ou de clarté' (Le Grand Robert, s.v. embarrassé).

Et d'un œil que la gloire et la raison éclaire,
Contemplez mon devoir dans toute sa rigueur.
Vous-même contre vous fortifiez mon cœur. (4.5, 1051-4)

But his 'gloire', 'raison', and 'devoir' are not concepts which Bérénice can readily deploy in the way that he wishes: she does not share his conceptual space. She cannot force her love to be silent, as if it were an unruly subject whose obedience she should be able to command. Nor can a lover's eyes—which have so powerfully configured that space around her into which Titus and Antiochus have hesitated to venture—be easily enlightened by what Titus terms 'gloire' and 'raison'. Such abstract nouns are an only intermittently valid currency in the exchanges between the characters; they are also protagonists themselves in the psychomachia within Titus. Nor are they entirely abstract, but—accompanied often by physical, indeed, visceral adjectives and verbs—they become unseen principals in the drama.

As an example of the mutability of such key words, let us return to *cœur*. (Since the word occurs seventy times in this play we can only consider a few examples.) Some critics have said that Racine's *cœur* is merely a synonym or synecdoche for the pronoun je,[19] but the heart is less than, more than, other than the self. Nor is the je constant: at moments of pressure, each time the pronoun recurs, its referent has changed slightly, for the instability of the speaking self has been experienced in a new way, even from line to line. One je is not completely co-terminous with another je from the same speaker. (Racine might have said with Montaigne, 'Je ne peinds pas l'estre, je peinds le passage… de minute en minute'.[20]) Often the verb turns back upon its subject, controls and redefines its pronoun.

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To explore further the troubling of the first person singular pronoun in Racine, let us turn aside for a moment to the speech in which Phèdre reflects 'Mon mal vient de plus loin'.[21] The passage begins not with 'je' (which occurs 27 times in these 41 lines) but with 'mon mal', which, associated with the verb venir, is briefly consolidated as an agent which may be acting independently of Phèdre and her will; or it may be one element in the complex

[19] e.g. 'Here mon cœur means not mon amour but simply je, or, more normally, je in an amorous context' (Peter France, *Racine's Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 80); 'La bouche, le cœur, les mains, les yeux deviennent souvent, chez Racine, de simples équivalents de pronoms personnels aux quels s'ajoutent de très faibles nuances de sens, la bouche désignant la personne dans la mesure où elle est capable de s'exprimer, le cœur en tant qu'elle aime et souffre, les mains en tant qu'elle agit, les yeux en tant qu'elle voit' (Cahen, p. 50). But it is precisely the animation of the verbs which Racine associates with these nouns which prevents them from being 'très faibles'. Phillips (pp. 96-7) comments on the importance of 'bouche' and 'cœur' in Bérénice.

[20] Essais, III ii, 'Du repentir' (Montaigne, Les Essais, edited by Jean Balsamo et al., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), pp. 844-5).

[21] Racine, Phèdre et Hippolyte, 1.3, 269-310.

definition of her will. If we consider the range of meanings which the Académie française recognized in the usage of the word mal, we find that her mal here could be physical or moral, could arise from within her or be imposed from without:

> Ce qui est contraire au bien…
>
> Defaut, imperfection; soit du corps, comme, la difformité, la privation de la veuë; soit de l'esprit, de l'ame, comme, l'ignorance, la legereté, la bassesse de cœur…
>
> On dit, Mettre une femme à mal, pour dire, La seduire, la desbaucher.
>
> Mal, signifie plus particulièrement Douleur… Maladie…
>
> Mal, se prend quelquefois absolument pour maladie venerienne…
>
> Mal, signifie aussi, Dommage, perte, calamité.[22]

My evil, my physical deformity, my sickness of the soul; my seduction, my disease, my pain; my calamity. 'This Thing of darkenesse, I | Acknowledge mine'.[23] For Phèdre to say 'Mon mal' acknowledges a link to (if not exactly a responsibility for) a complex condition which is at once physical suffering and moral failing. Her 'mon' does not simply qualify 'mal': it permits 'mal' in turn to be a partial definition of her. The sequence of three repeated first person pronouns in the line 'Je le vis, je rougis, je pâlis à sa vue' is followed by the appearance of 'un trouble' which 's'éleva dans mon âme éperdue' (1.3, 273-4). This 'trouble' seems neither autonomous of Phèdre nor within her control; it is something which arises in her soul, and in this respect Racine's psychology is closely aligned with the mindset of the Greeks, who when thinking about extreme states of mind considered their causation to be both internal and external, at once arising within the individual and attributable to divine intervention.[24] As we move from 'Je le vis' to 'Mes yeux ne voyaient plus' we understand how the body begins to estrange itself from Phèdre's control. When she says, 'Je sentis tout mon corps et transir et brûler. | Je reconnus Vénus, et ses feux redoutables,' (1.3, 276-7) the je feels her body as if it were not herself, and the burning is recognized as the fires of Vénus—a two-fold alienation. The je who built a temple to Vénus, and the je who searches in the entrails of the sacrificial victim for her 'raison égarée' are unstable versions of the self, a self from which reason has strayed. In vain her hand burnt the incense, in vain her mouth implored the goddess, for these were the actions of parts of the body which no longer acted as agents for an integrated and stable self, since the je was obsessed with Hippolyte: 'J'adorais Hippolyte… J'offrais tout à ce Dieu'. Her eyes saw Hippolyte when they looked at Thésée,

[22] *Le Dictionnaire de L'Acad*émie françoise, s.v. mal.
[23] Prospero speaking of Caliban in Shakespeare's The Tempest, 5.1, 275-6.
[24] See E. R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

and eventually ‘Contre moi-même enfin j'osai me révolter’. These pronouns ‘moi-même’, ‘je’ and ‘me’ look as if they are synonymous, but this deeply paradoxical utterance shows that they no longer coincide. Thereafter the je seems to act with resolution as ‘J’excitai mon courage… J’affectai les chagrins… je pressai son exil’. But when she saw him again, it was not the resolute je which acted, and there is a return to the vocabulary of a selfhood which has decomposed into disparate elements:

> Ma blessure trop vive aussitôt a saigné.
> Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée.
> C'est Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée.
> J'ai conçu pour mon crime une juste terreur.
> J'ai pris la vie en haine, et ma flamme en horreur. (1.3, 304-8)

Rimbaud, writing to Georges Izambard on 13 May 1871, famously said, ‘C’est faux de dire: Je pense. On devrait dire: On me pense… JE est un autre’.[25] Here in Racine’s poetry Phèdre does not quite become ‘un autre’, rather she becomes ‘des autres’, fragmented into hand, mouth, and eyes, taken over by the ‘feux’ of Vénus which she nevertheless acknowledges as ‘ma flamme’; and only with difficulty maintaining enough sense of her je for it to form the subject of those verbs. Who is thinking her?

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Let us return to Bérénice, and its rhetoric of the *cœur*. When Bérénice says that in seeking Antiochus she is trying to escape from the fair-weather friends of the Roman court, she seeks ‘un Ami, qui me parle du cœur’ (1.4, 138), but ‘parle du cœur’— speak from his heart, speak unfeignedly—is just what he cannot do unless he is to speak of his heart in a way contrary to her expectations. At the end of Act I Bérénice seeks a meeting with Titus at which she will say ‘tout ce qu’aux cœurs l’un de l’autre contents | Inspirent des transports retenus si longtemps’ (1.5, 325-6). But such reciprocity is soon shown to be illusory. She is sadly mistaken again in her reading of the hearts of others when she speaks to Titus and says that his companion Paulin knows the secret of their hearts:

> car je sais que cet Ami sincère
> Du secret de nos cœurs connaît tout le mystère. (2.4, 563-4)

Here ‘cœurs’ is a plural noun but ‘secret’ and ‘mystère’ are singular: she is assuming that there is a single shared secret, a single mystery which unites their two hearts, but of course

[25] Arthur Rimbaud, *Œ*uvres complètes, edited by A. Rolland de Renéville and Jules Mouquet, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 268.

she is unaware at this point in Act II that the heart of Titus harbours a secret quite different from hers.

In Racine's texts *cœur* is both a physical and an abstract noun; at times it can indeed seem to be synonymous with the entire person, but at other times it appears to be a quasi-autonomous agent. A striking instance of the way in which *cœur* is not simply a synonym for je occurs when Titus says to Bérénice in Act IV:

> Et c'est moi seul aussi qui pouvais me détruire.
> Je pouvais vivre alors, et me laisser séduire;
> Mon cœur se gardait bien d'aller dans l'avenir
> Chercher ce qui pouvait un jour nous désunir.
> Je voulais qu'à mes vœux rien ne fût invincible,
> Je n'examinais rien, j'espérais l'impossible.
> Que sais-je? J'espérais de mourir à vos yeux,
> Avant que d'en venir à ces cruels adieux.
> Les obstacles semblaient renouveler ma flamme,
> Tout l'Empire parlait. Mais la Gloire, Madame,
> Ne s'était point encor fait entendre à mon cœur
> Du ton, dont elle parle au cœur d'un Empereur.
> Je sais tous les tourments où ce dessein me livre.
> Je sens bien que sans vous je ne saurais plus vivre,
> Que mon cœur de moi-même est prêt à s'éloigner.
> Mais il ne s'agit plus de vivre, il faut régner. (4.5, 1087-1102)

The precarious integrity of the self at this point is signalled by the near-paradox of that first line: 'Et c'est moi seul aussi qui pouvais me détruire'. 'Mon cœur' in line 1089 seems to be the love of Titus for Bérénice which will not allow him to imagine any risk of their separation, and it is this version of his *cœur* which seems to define his je in the subsequent lines: the je acts in accordance with the wishes and the fears of the heart in love. Previously, he says, 'la Gloire' had not made itself heard with that forcefulness with which it speaks to the heart of an emperor. So is it the heart of an emperor which Titus now has, from which he now speaks? Whether 'cœur' is the heart of an emperor or of a lover, it no longer entirely defines the 'je' of line 1100, 'Je sens bien que sans vous je ne saurais plus vivre', where there is a significant doubling of the 'je' and a tragic gap between the two pronouns—the I in the present who recognizes that the distinct I of the future would not know how he could continue to live. When Titus then says, 'Que mon cœur de moi-même est prêt à s'éloigner'

we see that a division has opened up between heart and self, with the heart on the point of departing from the self.[26] After this expression of incipient self-division, Titus resorts to a wholly impersonal construction when defining his future in line 1102, where there is no room for 'cœur', and from which the first person singular has disappeared.

In her reply, Bérénice says:

Hé bien régnez, cruel, contentez votre Gloire.
Je ne dispute plus. J'attendais, pour vous croire,
Que cette même bouche, après mille serments
D'un amour, qui devait unir tous nos moments,
Cette bouche à mes yeux s'avouant infidèle,
M'ordonnât elle-même une absence éternelle. (4.5, 1103-8)

Bérénice seizes on his word 'Gloire', and her verb 'contentez' almost personifies it as if it were a rival mistress to be satisfied. (Indeed, the near-personification of Gloire as a lover has already appeared in Titus' line, 'Ah! Que sous de beaux noms cette Gloire est cruelle' (2.2, 499), 'cruelle' being part of the vocabulary of anguished courtship.) She ignores his attempts to define his predicament through the concept of his 'cœur', and instead reduces him to the faithless 'bouche' which used to swear a love which would unite their moments, implying a treacherous separation between mouth and heart. When Titus replies:

Que dis-je? En ce moment mon coeur, hors de lui-même
S'oublie, et se souvient seulement qu'il vous aime. (4.5, 1135-6)

the 'je' does not know what it is saying, and the 'cœur' forgets itself, recalling only that it loves her. What does it mean to say that the heart, 'hors de lui-même', 's'oublie' while simultaneously 'se souvient'? The linguistic paradoxes here eloquently express the inner dislocation of Titus. The heart has moved away from itself, forgetting its full identity, and reconfiguring itself exclusively through the recognition (but actually it is a recollection, a call to remembrance) of its love for Bérénice. When Bérénice tells him that 'De tous vos sentiments mon cœur est éclairci' (4.5, 1173) this is a tragic illumination of her heart.

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There is a disconcerting autonomy created by those reflexive verbs 's'oublie' and 'se souvient' which have 'cœur' as their subject. Elsewhere 'se rendre'(2.2, 447), 'se sentir' (2.4, 622), 's'expliquer'(3.2, 783), 's'effaroucher' (3.2, 835), 'se garder' (4.5, 1089), 's'éloigner' (4.5, 1101), 's'égarer' (4.8, 1242), and 'se troubler' (5.7, 1495) are all linked to

[26] Cp. 'Ce cœur que vous voyez tout prêt à s'égarer' (4.8, 1242); and 'Il fallait… renoncer à moi-même' (2.2, 464), 'moi-même' in this context being in effect the state in which Titus loved Bérénice.

'cœur'; 'se répandre' (2.2, 515) and 's'épancher' (3.1, 677) linked to 'main'; 's'accorder' (1.3, 128), 'se taire' (1.4, 200), and 's'avouer' to 'bouche' (4.5, 1107); and 's'accoutumer' to 'yeux' (3.2, 790). As well as these parts of the body, several abstract nouns govern reflexive verbs, including 'jeunesse' which is found with 's'égarer' (2.2, 507), 'amour' with 'se taire' (2.2, 450) and 's'importuner' (2.4, 573), and 'gloire' with 's'apprendre' (1.4, 251) and 'se faire entendre' (4.5, 1097). Not all reflexive verbs are reflexive in the same way, of course: some indicate an action which the subject performs on himself (e.g. 'je me lave'), while others seem to emphasise that the action serves to benefit or consolidate the subject (e.g. 'je me souviens', 'je m'échappe de l'ennemi'). But in each case the self-assertion or self-enclosing performed by the reflexive verb reasserts the agent. So when parts of the body are made the subjects of reflexive verbs, they acquire a degree of autonomy from the dramatic character; and when reflexive verbs are associated with abstract nouns they attribute agency to these concepts, so that 'gloire' or 'amour' momentarily become personified as players. Reflexive verbs thus consolidate forms of subjectivity around agents other than the principal characters, initiating miniature dramas such as the scenario implicit in the image 'un trouble s'éleva' in the speech from Phèdre. (Where did it arise from? Through what impulsion did it raise itself?) And once we become attuned to the complex miniature dramas created by these verbs, we are likely to see more clearly that in a statement such as 'moi seul trop prompt à me troubler' (4.4, 1005) the reflexive verb does not consolidate but dissipate the agent, the near-tautologies serving to map interior distances between 'moi' and 'me' which bring selfhood almost to the point of dissolution. And so the play could be read as an extended meditation on the reflexive self-betrayals signalled in my epigraph: '*Que l'ame se trompe & se seduit* souvent elle-mesme'.

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In the spaces of Bérénice we see the proximity and the distance between the characters through their use of shared and not-quite-shared language. But the spaces of the characters are also defined by silence—that form of exile from the shared space—sometimes because it is silence which leads one to wonder about the *cœur* which at such moments cannot find expression.[27] In Act I Antiochus turns aside from Bérénice and says to himself, 'Il fallait partir sans la revoir' (1.4, 182), in a stage silence which prompts her impatient demand to know the 'mystère' which this silence seems to be concealing. Titus too cannot quite bring himself to break the silence, and his stumbling 'Hélas!... Rome… L'Empire...' (2.4, 623)

[27] For an exploration of the uses of silence in Bérénice and other plays see Richard Parish, '"Un calme si funeste": Some Types of Silence in Racine', French Studies, 34 (1980), 385-400.

leads Bérénice to ask, ‘que dit ce silence?’ (2.5, 627). When Antiochus later brings himself to tell her that she and Titus must part, we see her enclosing herself in a singular space which arrests the movement of dialogue:

ANTIOCHUS

De vous déclarer
Qu'à jamais l'un de l'autre il faut vous séparer.

BÉRÉNICE

Nous séparer? Qui? Moi! Titus de Bérénice!

ANTIOCHUS

Il faut que devant vous je lui rende justice.
Tout ce que dans un cœur sensible et généreux
L'Amour au désespoir peut rassembler d'affreux,
Je l'ai vu dans le sien. Il pleure, il vous adore.
Mais enfin que lui sert de vous aimer encore?
Une reine est suspecte à l'Empire Romain.
Il faut vous séparer, et vous partez demain.

BÉRÉNICE

Nous séparer! Hélas, Phénice! (3.4, 893-903)

The second ‘Nous séparer!’ is both a response to Antiochus’ last line and a return to the end of his previous speech, the repeated ‘Nous séparer!’ locking Bérénice into a singularity in which her time and space are suddenly reconfigured by this tragic prospect. Though she nominally addresses Phénice, at this point her companion functions primarily as part of Racine’s theatrical language of the self, an inner interlocutor, and her notional, speechless, presence accentuates the solitude of Bérénice. This is a silence enclosed by fragments of soliloquy.

The repetition draws attention to that word ‘Nous’. (Is ‘nous séparer’ a reflexive verb with a single, coherent plural subject? Or is ‘nous’ the object of the verb, and some undefined agent its subject?) At several points in the play Bérénice has assumed that such a ‘nous’ exists. In Act IV she asks him,

Rome a ses droits, Seigneur. N’avez-vous pas les vôtres?
Ses intérêts sont-ils plus sacrés que les nôtres? (4.5, 1151-2)

But by this stage in the play—indeed, even, perhaps, from its beginning—the pronouns ‘nous’ and ‘notre’ refer to a unity which exists only in the imagination, or in the desire, or in the memory, of Bérénice. Improbably, she had imagined the Romans garlanding ‘nos

images' (1.5, 300),[28] and had equally misconstrued the public spaces of Rome when she spoke of the prayers of the Roman people for Titus and said,

> Je prétends quelque part à des souhaits si doux.
>
> Phénice, allons nous joindre aux vœux qu'on fait pour nous. (1.5, 321-2)[29]

But the Romans were never praying for such a 'nous', if, indeed, it ever existed.

Tense, strangely contoured spaces are created most poignantly in the final Acte, when Titus silently reads the letter which Bérénice had written, and she silently subsides onto a chair. Apparently in the first performance the actor playing Titus did indeed read aloud Bérénice's letter, but this was dropped in subsequent performances.[30] The silence is surely more effective theatrically, as it creates a parenthetical space of profound reflection beyond the power of the voice. Bérénice remains sitting, silent except only for one 'Hélas' (5.6, 1435), for more than a hundred lines, wrapped in her own world, until she rises and takes charge not only of the stage space but of the time and space of all three principals.

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Whether literally, or only in the mind's eye, Titus, Antiochus, and Bérénice have been monads moving in spaces illuminated by single candles. They have been separated by their shared vocabulary. In her final speech, Bérénice brings into a common light her heart and the heart of Titus. As for her, 'Mon cœur vous est connu' (5.7, 1487), she says: he knows that she has never wanted empire, she has only wanted to be loved. As for Titus, 'Votre cœur s'est troublé, j'ai vu couler vos larmes' (5.7, 1495). (The reflexive verb there is once again a notable psychological insight: his heart has troubled itself.) Bérénice acknowledges her mistake in imagining that Titus no longer loves her, and now confidently makes each of them the subject of the same verb: 'Je l'aime… Titus m'aime'. But such mutuality is illusory, for this not a complete quotation: the full line reads, 'Je l'aime, je le fuis. Titus m'aime, il me quitte' (5.7, 1512). It is almost too painful to recall the verbal echo here of her much earlier line: 'Titus m'aime, il peut tout, il n'a plus qu'à parler' (1.5, 298). What we have witnessed in the gap between these two lines is a deep education in the meaning of the verb aimer, conducted through a drama in which concepts such as *cœur*, gloire, and raison assert themselves, dissolve, and re-form, first within the individualized conceptual frameworks of each character, then within the shared and unshared spaces between the characters, and

[28] The reading 'nos images' is that of the first edition (1671); later editions from 1676 changed this to 'ses images', making the reference apply to the statues of Titus alone (*Œuvres complètes*, p. 1473).
[29] Again, Racine revised the text, removing the first person plural: from the 1697 edition the couplet reads: 'Que tardons-nous? Allons pour son empire heureux | Au Ciel qui le protège offrir aussi nos vœux' (*Œuvres* complètes, p. 1473).
[30] *Œuvres complètes*, p. 1482.

ultimately within the shared alienation of the ending, controlled and defined by Bérénice herself. This power of definition, of determining a final clarity, is all the power that remains to her.[31]

[31] This is a revised version of a paper presented at the conference of the Society for Seventeenth-Century French Studies in Cambridge in September 2013. I am grateful to the participants at the conference for their generous and constructive comments.

Biographical note

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