10

# RACINE

## *Phèdre*

In *Phèdre* Racine shows us a tragedy of double displacement. In prey to her passion for her stepson Hippolyte, Phèdre herself no longer inhabits space in the ways that other characters do; she moves in her own, strangely-contoured world, and her ventures into the spaces shared by others are catastrophic. She herself has become more and less than herself: her mind and body fragmented by, or into, passion, she is no longer simply Phèdre but she is the daughter of Pasiphaé, she is the victim of Vénus; she is part *veines*, part *flamme*, part *raison*, part *cœur*. The multiplication of influences and the play between abstract and physical nouns decompose her integrity.[1] This

*Phèdre* is quoted from the most recent Pléiade edition, Racine, *Œuvres complètes: I: Théâtre-Poésie*, edited by Georges Forestier (Paris, 1999), which calls the play *Phèdre et Hippolyte* following the first edition (1677); it was retitled *Phèdre* for the second edition in 1687. To avoid confusion I have used the customary, revised title. Other classical French plays on the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus are Robert Garnier, *Hippolyte* (1573); Guérin de La Pinelière, *Hippolyte* (1635); Gabriel Gilbert, *Hypolite* (1647); Mathieu Bidar, *Hippolyte* (1675); Jacques Pradon, *Phèdre et Hippolyte* (1677). For Garnier see *Œuvres complètes de Robert Garnier: Marc Antoine, Hippolyte*, edited by Raymond Lebègue (Paris, 1974); the plays by La Pinelière, Gilbert, and Bidar are reprinted in *Le Mythe de Phèdre: Les Hippolyte français du dix-septième siècle*, edited by Allen G. Wood (Paris, 1996); and Pradon's play is reprinted in *Théâtre du XVIIe siècle: III*, edited by Jacques Truchet and André Blanc, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, 1992). All translations in this chapter are my own.

[1] Roland Barthes suggestively calls *Phèdre* 'une tragédie nominaliste': *Sur Racine* (1963), in *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Éric Marty, 5 vols. (Paris, 2002), ii 148. In Seneca's *Phaedra* much use is made of the terms *amor* and *furor* to describe Phaedra's passion, nouns which (like the *furor* which impels Atreus) appear to denote a force which is at once within and without the character.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

tragedy shows us something which ought to have remained hidden being brought to light, and this is much more than the revelation of a guilty passion: what is brought to light is the fragility of the *Heimat*, which in this case is the sense of self, its possession of space and its self-possession, its wholeness within secure boundaries.

Racine shows us the tragic isolation of Phèdre from the characters around her, but in the shaping of her tragedy it is also the unwelcome and inescapable connections which bring about her fate.[2] She is first referred to in the play not by her own name, but as the daughter of Minos and Pasiphaé,[3] and is thereby immediately linked to a mother who was notorious for her monstrous sexual desire for a bull. No mythical character can be properly identified without an account of their lineage, but here the mapping of Phèdre's ancestry is a preliminary mapping of the terrain of her actions, the limits of her will. Is Phèdre an autonomous and coherent individual with the power to free herself from such a link? Is she an *unheimlich* double of her mother, as the same crime of illicit passion is repeated from one generation to the next? Much is made of the ways in which characters are linked to others, or try to escape such links. Hippolyte, we are told, joins the ranks of the rest of mortals by falling in love with Aricie ('vous mettant au rang du reste des mortels', says Théramène, 'putting you on the same plane as the rest of the human race'[4]), and it is notable that Racine plays down the classical tradition of Euripides and Seneca, continued by Robert Garnier, which made Hippolytus a virginal devotee of Artemis and located him in the wild, natural spaces which symbolize a life untainted by desire or by the court.[5]

[2] Georges Poulet sees the continuity of the past with the present, and the repetition of the past in the present, as distinctive features of Racinian tragedy ('Notes sur le temps Racinien', in his *Études sur le temps humain: I* (Paris, 1952; reprinted 1997), pp. 148–65, esp. pp. 149–51).

[3] Racine, *Phèdre*, I i 36.

[4] *Phèdre*, I i 63.

[5] In Euripides (*Hippolytus*, ll. 73–87) Hippolytus offers Artemis a garland which has been plucked from a virgin meadow, the meadow being a metaphor for his own virginity; Seneca metamorphoses the space of Hippolytus into a terrain where he pursues a life free from the corruptions of the city and re-creates the golden age (*Phaedra*, ll. 1–84, 483–539).

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

Racine, comparatively, integrates him into the life of the court, and courtly notions of honour, even though he is always on the point of leaving. Phèdre, however, through her passion, becomes isolated from the world of the court and appears rather to join the ranks of her monstrous ancestors. Hippolyte, mindful of his father's history as a womanizer, is wary of being 'lié'[6] ('joined', 'linked', 'chained') in love or in sexual passion. Phèdre, by contrast, has, according to Œnone, cut herself off from her husband, her children, her servants, and from the gods:

> Vous offensez les Dieux auteurs de votre vie.
> Vous trahissez l'Époux à qui la foi vous lie.[7]

> You offend the gods, authors of your life; you betray the husband to whom your vow binds you.

Once again we have the verb *lier*. Racine often delicately italicizes his tragic ironies through his rhyme words; in Hippolyte's speech 'lié' had been rhymed with 'humilié', for he had seen an erotic link to another human being as a form of humiliation; here in Œnone's words to Phèdre 'lie' is ominously rhymed with 'vie'. Those bonds, she suggests, constitute life; we know that another, stronger, connection will bring death. Racine's rival Jacques Pradon, who staged his own *Phèdre et Hippolyte* a few days after Racine's, made Phèdre only the fiancée of Thésée, but Racine strengthens the bond of obligation by making her his wife. Yet for Phèdre, the marriage pledge which binds her to Thésée is as nothing compared with the involuntary bonds of ancestry and desire. Racine carefully does not make it simply a matter of inheritance, of an inherited guilt which might absolve her of moral responsibility, and leaves open the question of exactly how this ancestral connection constrains her. He gives us multiple maps of her psychology, and therefore of her responsibility for her passions and her actions. Moving between mythological and physical vocabularies, Phèdre says, 'Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée. | C'est Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée' ('It is no longer a desire

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

[6] *Phèdre*, I i 95. [7] *Phèdre*, I iii 197–8.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

hidden within my veins, it is Venus completely attached to her prey').[8] Racine reworks the Greek double psychology whereby the same passion may be figured by external or internal causes, but his intricate movement between languages leaves us not knowing whether this is, on Phèdre's part, recognition or evasion.[9]

Phèdre's connections tie her to a world elsewhere, and provide a kind of space which she alone inhabits. In his preface to *Bajazet* Racine argued that the tragic protagonist should be distanced from the world of the audience;[10] in the case of Phèdre this distancing is extreme and intricate. The word *lieu* ('place') resonates through the play,[11] as we watch Phèdre's struggle to live in or to escape from a place—both Trézène and her own state of mind—which has become intolerable since the arrival of Hippolyte. Roland Barthes proposes that the Racinian tragic conflict is a crisis of space, in which characters cannot share space with a rival, but must either possess or destroy the other.[12] Yet in *Phèdre* the primary space which the protagonist occupies is a largely mental, largely mythic one, from which she is driven into an awkwardly conducted and only temporary use of shared stage spaces when she speaks to Œnone, Hippolyte, or Thésée. Hers is a space which excludes other mortals, but which is peopled by her own ancestors.[13] She is the descendant of the sun-god. One of Racine's predecessors, Guérin de La Pinelière, makes the Nurse tell Phèdre that her lofty social position exposes her to the gaze, and the judgement, of gods and men, and that the gods who are her ancestors

[8] *Phèdre*, I iv 305–6.

[9] For a discussion of Racine's treatment of Phèdre in the light of contemporary philosophical and religious thought see Lucien Goldmann, *Le Dieu caché: Étude sur la vision tragique dans les 'Pensées' de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine* (Paris, 1959, reprinted 1976), pp. 416–40. Subsequently there has been an extended debate over Racine's Jansenism, and the question of whether his characters are conceived through an Augustinian understanding of human corruption and lack of freewill: for an overview see John Campbell, *Questioning Racinian Tragedy* (Chapel Hill, 2005), pp. 205–44.

[10] 'On peut dire que le respect que l'on a pour les Héros augmente à mesure qu'ils s'éloignent de nous': Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Forestier, p. 625.

[11] It occurs seven times in the singular and seventeen times in the plural: see Bryant C. Freeman and Alan Batson, *Concordance du théâtre et des poésies de Jean Racine*, 2 vols. (Ithaca, NY, 1968), *s.v.* The concept is also important in Garnier's play.

[12] Barthes, ii 59–61, 78.

[13] *Phèdre*, IV vi 1273–6.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

will see and punish her crime.[14] In this version, the Nurse thus acts as the external voice of moral conformity—one vigorously rejected by La Pinelière's Phèdre, who retorts that the gods themselves have pursued illicit affairs, and that queens like her are gods on earth. Racine's Phèdre, however, internalizes this ancestral judgement, largely through the imagery of light and dark. Light creates a particular kind of space for her.[15]

Under the pressure of Phèdre's passion, as the world becomes *unheimlich*, the various words for 'light' (*lumière*, *jour*, *clarté*) become unstable signifiers, since light does not mean the same for Phèdre as it does for the other characters. Since at this period the word *jour* means both 'day' and 'daylight', each occurrence of *jour* is liable to remind us that this special form of light exists only for the crucial single day which neo-classical tragedy occupies: this is light rethought *sous le signe* of tragedy. When she first appears, Phèdre cannot inhabit a single place: she both wants and does not want the light. Phèdre, according to Théramène, is 'Lasse enfin d'elle-même et du jour qui l'éclaire' ('weary finally of herself and of the day which lights her'), and yet Œnone says that Phèdre wishes to see the light, and orders the removal of others.[16] She thus creates a space within a space, a light which is for her alone. But it is oppressive. Her eyes are 'éblouis'[17] by this unaccustomed light: it means 'dazzled' or 'blinded', but the semantic field of this word in the seventeenth century also includes 'wronged', 'cheated', 'seduced'[18]—as if the ancestral light itself is her enemy and her seducer. As the descendant of the sun, there is nowhere for her to hide: 'Où me cacher?'[19] is a purely rhetorical

[14] *Le Mythe de Phèdre*, pp. 94, 92.

[15] Racine may have taken this imagery from Euripides, who repeatedly refers to light in his *Hippolytus*, though neither Euripides nor Seneca suggests that Phaedra experiences light and dark in a distinctively different way from the other characters; it is Racine's imagination which creates a particular form of light for her. For details of Racine's use of Euripides and Seneca, see the notes in the Pléiade edition.

[16] *Phèdre*, I i 46; I ii 149–50. [17] *Phèdre*, I iii 155.

[18] *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, edited by Alain Rey, 3 vols. (Paris, 1992, reissued 1998), *s.v.*

[19] *Phèdre*, IV vi 1277.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

question. The character created by Robert Garnier brazenly invokes the ruler of the heavens, and the sun which sees into men's hearts, to witness that she has been outraged by Hippolyte.[20] But Racine's Phèdre, with a stronger moral awareness, feels the full weight of the ancestral light, and cannot summon it to endorse a lie. Being in the light, in that light, is painful. She is surprised that she can still sustain life, if it is life: 'Et je vis? Et je soutiens la vue | De ce sacré Soleil, dont je suis descendue?' ('And do I live? And do I endure the sight of this sacred Sun from which I am descended?').[21] It is the sun's gaze on her which is almost insupportable. In seventeenth-century French *soutenir* is a strong verb: not just 'sustain' but 'undergo the assault of', 'resist', 'endure'.[22] Again, the influence of the ancestors and the gods upon her seems to be a form of violence. But neither is there any escape to the darkness of the underworld, since her father Minos is judge there.[23] Once again a public space—in this case, the collectively mythologized darkness of Hades—has been turned into a singularity, a part of her own mythic space.

But other characters stand differently in the light: they seek enlightenment, they seek to bring matters to light. Thésée thinks that his (and anyone's) sight would be misled by the outward appearance of Hippolyte into thinking him virtuous; Hippolyte maintains that his heart is as clear as day: 'Le jour n'est plus pur que le fond de mon cœur'.[24] Thésée asks the gods to cast light on his trouble, but eventually laments that things have become all too clear.[25] Aricie implores Hippolyte to enlighten Thésée, but he refuses to 'mettre au jour' Phèdre's crime.[26] Aricie also asks Thésée why he cannot see Hippolyte's innocence, when it is so plain to other observers.[27] As used by this group of characters, these are familiar metaphors for the transparency or opacity of the human heart, for the ease or difficulty of reading character from appearance; but Phèdre stands apart from

[20] Garnier, IV 1715–26. [21] *Phèdre*, IV vi 1273–4.
[22] Jean Dubois et al., *Dictionnaire du français classique: Le XVII$^{e}$ siècle* (Paris, 1992), *s.v.*
[23] *Phèdre*, IV iv 1277–88. [24] *Phèdre*, IV ii 1035–6; IV ii 1112.
[25] *Phèdre*, V vii 1647. [26] *Phèdre*, V i 1339–40.
[27] *Phèdre*, V iv 1430–2.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

this group, enduring a mythologized light, inhabiting a singular conceptual space. So much of what is shown in this light is monstrous: Racine's vocabulary keeps insisting on the etymological connection between *montrer* and *monstre*.[28] Phèdre herself thinks of Hippolyte 'comme un Monstre effroyable à mes yeux' ('like a monster which is fearful to my eyes'), and Thésée also calls him 'monstre'.[29] Thésée asks the gods, 'éclairez mon trouble, et daignez à mes yeux | Montrer la vérité' ('clear away my doubt, and show the truth to my eyes').[30] Thésée has killed monsters, including Phèdre's half-brother the Minotaur, but fatally misrecognizes Hippolyte, and brings about his death through Neptune's sea-monster. This eruption of the uncanny which destroys Hippolyte is a metaphor for—or rather a metonymic manifestation of—the destructive power of Phèdre's desire.

Phèdre may move in and out of the spaces defined or occupied by others, but she is much preoccupied with, and mentally dwells in, imaginary spaces elsewhere. She torments herself by envisaging the times and places in which she imagines Hippolyte and Aricie to have met.[31] When Œnone explains that they are lovers, Phèdre exclaims 'Depuis quand? Dans quels lieux?' ('Since when? In what places?'), but this is more than a question about mundane arrangements, it is an exclamation of her own despair at being unable to possess Hippolyte in any time or place except that of her imagination. She thinks that 'Tous les jours se levaient clairs et sereins pour eux' ('Every day dawned clear and serene for them'), unlike the contaminated daylight in which she lives. Their days are imagined as plural, even though we know that they have only just declared their mutual love. In her eyes, they will always enjoy their love, even if they are physically separated. A train of reflexive verbs describing the love of Hippolyte and Aricie envisages a mutuality which Phèdre cannot attain, and these verbs—some

[28] The link goes back to the Latin *monstro* (to show) which derives from *monstrum* (monster, prodigy), which in turn is connected to *moneo* (to warn).

[29] *Phèdre*, III iii 884; IV ii 1045.

[30] *Phèdre*, V ii 1411.

[31] *Phèdre*, IV vi 1232–56.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

in the imperfect tense of repeated and habitual action—create a series of metaphysical spaces and hypothetical times in which the love of the couple unites them in a dimension which is not defined by physical limitations:

> Ils s'aiment! . . .
> Comment se sont-ils vus? Depuis quand? Dans quels lieux?
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> Les a-t-on vus souvent se parler, se chercher?
> Dans le fond des forêts allaient-ils se cacher?
> Hélas! Ils se voyaient avec pleine licence.[32]

> They love each other! . . . How did they see each other? Since when? In what places? Were they often seen talking together, looking for each other? Did they go to hide themselves in the depths of the forests? Alas! They were seeing each other with complete freedom.

Œnone assures Phèdre that 'Ils ne se verront plus' ('They will see each other no longer'), but Phèdre retorts, 'Ils s'aimeront toujours' ('They will love each other for ever'). This leads into her asking 'Où me cacher?' ('Where can I hide myself?')[33]—using the same verb which she had just used for the erotic meetings of Hippolyte and Aricie—and realizing that there is nowhere for her to hide in a universe which is peopled by her ancestors.

*Quis hic locus?* One spatial image is laminated upon another. She dreams of sitting in a forest or watching a chariot in the dust—in other words, of inhabiting spaces used by Hippolyte, yet not quite sharing these spaces with him, for these are spaces in which she could gaze unrestrainedly upon him.[34] This idea derives from Euripides,[35] where his Phaedra longs for the refreshment of pure water and the excitement of the hunt, and the insistence in Racine upon the work of the eye forms a remarkable contrast with Garnier's version, in which Phedre envies the forest streams for their erotic contact with the sweaty Hippolyte who kisses them when drinking after the hunt.[36] Racine's protagonist sees only an alternative space for another kind of

[32] *Phèdre*, IV vi 1232–7. [33] *Phèdre*, IV vi 1277. [34] *Phèdre*, I iii 176–8.
[35] Euripides, *Hippolytus*, l. 208. [36] Garnier, III 1025–46.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

sight. Her sight is too creative. It doubles characters, or it reduces all signifiers to the one signified, for everything spells 'Hippolyte'. In the temple where she sacrificed to Venus, she had thought only of Hippolyte, seeing him continually even while standing in front of the altar.[37] She looked at Thésée, but saw only Hippolyte; looking at Hippolyte she sees a younger Thésée.[38] She imagines an alternative past in which she would have guided Hippolyte through the labyrinth instead of Ariadne guiding Thésée.[39] And this alternative myth of Hippolyte killing the Minotaur turns into a poignant image for Phèdre's passion:

> Et Phèdre au Labyrinthe avec vous descendue,
> Se serait avec vous retrouvée, ou perdue.

> And Phèdre, having descended into the labyrinth with you, would with you be recovered, or lost.[40]

Now we have moved from one kind of hypothetical space—part of a parallel mythological narrative—into another kind of space, the labyrinth of Phèdre's psyche, the dangerous and intricate space created by her desire. The maze is a place of unreason, of multiple deviations. To descend into this space with Hippolyte would lead, would have led, to her being either rescued or lost. 'Se serait retrouvée' here is richly suggestive: it means both that (if Hippolyte surrendered to her) she would find her way again after having lost it, and that she would be in possession of herself again. But such a recovery and repossession are cast into a conditional tense whose realization depends upon Hippolyte reciprocating her desire, and this labyrinth too will remain an unrealizable space which cannot be entered. A lamination or intercalation of spaces is at work: a privately imagined space overlaying and qualifying her apprehension of that commonly perceptible space in which others move. And as with space, so too with time: the present is repeatedly disturbed by her mind dwelling in alternative scenarios of the past, or parallel versions of the present.

[37] *Phèdre*, I iii 279–88.
[38] *Phèdre*, I iii 290; II v 628–9, 640.
[39] *Phèdre*, II v 645–62.
[40] *Phèdre*, II v 661–2.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

Phèdre does not know where she is: 'Insensée, où suis-je? . . . Où laissé-je égarer mes vœux, et mon esprit?' ('Mad, where am I? Where have I let my vows and my spirit stray?').[41] In the 1677 edition of the play, 'laissé' is spelt 'laissay', which could be either present or past tense: [42] 'where *have* I let my desires and my spirit stray?' or 'where *do* I let my desires and my spirit stray'? The ambiguity of tense is productive, as Phèdre's 'je' inhabits past and present simultaneously—and so dwells in neither. Momentarily there is a fracturing of the self, as the form of self figured by the first-person pronoun imagines that its 'vœux' and its 'esprit' have strayed. 'Vœux' and 'esprit' seem briefly to be granted agency, acting autonomously from that 'je' which seeks to assert its control and so its stability. *Esprit* is one of Racine's multiply suggestive words: perhaps 'soul' or 'spirit', but also 'intelligence'. *Vœux* in this period has the particular sense of 'sexual desires', specifically, 'desires seeking to be reciprocated', but also retains the originary meaning of 'vows made to a god', 'votive prayer';[43] so even within the semantic field of the single word there is in Phèdre's speech a doubled field, a overlayering of sexual desires upon prayer. When Phèdre prays to Vénus for relief from the torments of love—'Par des vœux assidus je crus les détourner, | Je lui bâtis un Temple' ('By assiduous prayer I thought to turn them aside, I built her a temple')[44]—the word 'vœux' clearly means 'prayers' but carries within it the trace of another meaning, the desire for Hippolyte; so too, in 'Je lui bâtis un Temple' 'lui' could mean 'him' as well as 'her': she is building a temple to Vénus, but is it not rather a temple to Hippolyte?

If *lier* ('bind') is one of Racine's repeated motifs in this play, another is almost its opposite, *égarer* ('stray'): 'Où laissé-je égarer mes vœux, et mon esprit?' 'Que fais-je?', she says, 'Où ma raison se va-t-elle égarer?' ('What am I doing? Where will my reason stray?') with another unsettling switch of tenses from present to future. When

[41] *Phèdre*, I iii 179–80.

[42] As Forestier points out (Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Forestier, p. 1646).

[43] Dubois and Rey, *s.v.*

[44] *Phèdre*, I iii 279–80.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

speaking to Hippolyte, she says that she seems to see Thésée: 'Je le vois, je lui parle, et mon cœur...Je m'égare, | Seigneur, ma folle ardeur malgré moi se déclare' ('I see him, I speak to him, and my heart...I wander, Sir, my mad desire in spite of myself declares itself').[45] The strain of speaking ostensibly about Thésée while thinking about and addressing Hippolyte is too much, and she breaks off. 'Je m'égare': she loses herself syntactically in her aposiopesis, but she is also straying morally in thus indirectly confessing her love for Hippolyte. Her 'folle ardeur' speaks in spite of herself, 'malgré moi'. But when it is 'ardeur' which speaks, who is this 'Je' who is wandering, who is the 'moi' in 'malgré moi'?[46] Who speaks? The self decomposes in this tense utterance. Ultimately, when she has taken the poison, her completely alienated eye, 'Son œil tout égaré',[47] no longer recognizes her servants. When hesitating where to begin the story of her own passion, she diverges into speaking of the 'égarements' into which lust led her mother.[48] She wanders in an eternal return, experiencing a 'doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self'[49] as she seems to be repeating the stories of her mother and her sister. When Œnone laments that they ever landed at Trézène, and Phèdre replies 'Mon mal vient de plus loin',[50] she is both locating the origin of her passion in another country and thinking spatially about its etiology. Her imagination seems to delve into a layered psyche, looking into the past, and in foreign places, for an explanation of the spaces of her own desiring self. The *heimlich* self is shown to be built upon an *unheimlich* foundation. As she sacrificed to Vénus,

> De victimes moi-même à toute heure entourée,
> Je cherchais dans leurs flancs ma raison égarée.

> Myself surrounded by victims at every moment, I sought in their entrails my strayed reason.[51]

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

[45] *Phèdre*, IV vi 1264; II v 629–30. [46] Cp. Barthes on Racine's pronouns: ii 86.
[47] *Phèdre*, V v 1476. [48] *Phèdre*, I iii 250.
[49] See Freud, quoted on p. 5 above. [50] *Phèdre*, I iii 269.
[51] *Phèdre*, I iii 281–2.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

She sought (imperfect tense: an incomplete or vainly repeated action) her strayed reason outside herself in the entrails of these sacrificial victims.

In startling images such as 'Je cherchais dans leurs flancs ma raison égarée' the decomposition of Phèdre's self-coherence is mapped as the boundaries keep shifting between the abstract and the physical, offering us multiple readings of this divided individual. She feels 'une flamme si noire',[52] and although 'flamme' is a conventional term for 'love' in this period,[53] and 'noire' is obviously 'black' in a moral sense, the visual image in 'noire' reawakens the literal meaning of 'flamme' to create a weird locution akin to Milton's 'darkness visible'[54] and to make desire conceptually estranged. Similarly in Hippolyte's 'Phèdre toujours en proie à sa fureur extrême' ('Phèdre still a prey to her extreme rage')[55] the routine phrase 'en proie à' is energized by a recollection of 'Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée', so that the savagery of that image returns physicality to the dead metaphor, and existential force and a degree of personification to 'fureur'. 'Et l'espoir malgré moi s'est glissé dans mon cœur' ('And hope, in spite of myself, has slipped itself into my heart'),[56] she says, giving the abstract noun a physical verb, and once again signalling in 'malgré moi' the fissured self and the invasive power of desires which apparently have some external origin and are beyond her control. Or again:

> Je le vis, je rougis, je pâlis à sa vue.
> Un trouble s'éleva dans mon âme éperdue.
> Mes yeux ne voyaient plus, je ne pouvais parler,
> Je sentis tout mon corps et transir, et brûler.
> Je reconnus Vénus, et ses feux redoutables,
> D'un sang qu'elle poursuit tourments inévitables.[57]

I saw him, I blushed, I grew pale at his sight. A disturbance arose in my deeply shaken soul. My eyes no longer saw, I could not speak, I felt my whole body both pierced and burning. I recognized Venus and her powerful fires, the inevitable torments of a blood which she pursues.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

[52] *Phèdre*, I iii 310. [53] Dubois, *s.v.* [54] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, i 63.
[55] *Phèdre*, III vi 989. [56] *Phèdre*, III i 768. [57] *Phèdre*, I iii 273–8.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

What coherence is now left, what power of agency, to that emphatically reiterated 'je' which is so split between 'trouble', 'âme', 'yeux', and 'corps', the 'feux' of Vénus, and the 'sang' which seems to oscillate between meaning 'blood', 'sexual passion', and 'family'? Through the multiple possibilities of that word Racine holds back from providing a single aetiology of passion. We see here Phèdre's unavailing struggle to understand her own self spatially, to map the physiology and psychology of desire; the result is a confession of radical tragic incoherence and powerlessness.[58]

Although Œnone laments that they ever came to Trézène and its 'Rivage malheureux' and 'bords dangereux' ('unhappy shore', 'dangerous coast'),[59] it is not the geographical place called Trézène which is the truly dangerous terrain. Repeatedly characters struggle with the boundaries of their world and what may lie beyond them. Phèdre's very first line says that she will go no further: 'N'allons point plus avant. Demeurons, chère Œnone' ('Let us go no further. Let us stay, dear Œnone').[60] She is referring at once to her inability to walk further in her enfeebled state, her desire to end her life, and, kept within the silence of her heart for a few minutes longer, her desire to go further and broach her love to Hippolyte. Phèdre's use of the first person plural creates a shared agency, but this cannot last. 'Demeurons': but where? The ground on which she stands is unstable, its boundaries labile. The word 'bord' and its cognates echo through this play.[61] Thésée is said to be unable to return across the frontiers ('bords') of the underworld; Hippolyte thought that he could watch safely from the shore ('bord') as other men experienced the storms of passion; Phèdre wants Thésée not to limit his vengeance on Hippolyte.[62] Phèdre recognizes that 'De

[58] Her uncertain state of mind is much more delicately figured by such semantic fluidity than in Pradon's clumsy list of the abstract nouns which his Phèdre says have torn her apart: 'Gloire, honte, dépit, douleur, rage, pitié, | Raison, haine, fureur, jalousie, amitié, | Tous déchirent mon âme en ce désordre extrême' (Pradon, IV iii 1241–3).

[59] *Phèdre*, I iii 267–8.

[60] *Phèdre*, I iii 153.

[61] The word 'bords' occurs 11 times, 'bornes' twice, and 'bornant', 'borne', and 'bornera' once each.

[62] *Phèdre*, II i 388; II ii 534; IV vi 1261.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

l'austère pudeur les bornes sont passées' ('The boundaries of austere modesty have been crossed').[63] In speaking to Hippolyte, Phèdre herself has crossed a fatal Rubicon, for she cannot take back her speech, but throughout the play she crosses and recrosses the strange boundaries between her inner space (the terrain configured by her desire) and the outer space in which other characters move.

It is an estranged language that creates Phèdre's inner space and that separates her from the other characters. Within Phèdre's language there is an undertow of *différance*[64] which displaces her into a world elsewhere (or into a series of perhaps impossible worlds beyond the reach of others). Words such as *vœux* slide away from their intended meaning. Phèdre cannot name Hippolyte herself, but uses a circumlocution which makes Œnone produce his name, to which Phèdre replies, 'C'est toi qui l'as nommé' ('It is you who have named him'),[65] as if this shifts responsibility onto Œnone not only for speaking the name but for bringing Phèdre's passion into the outer world. Silence guards the inner world, and contributes significantly to the tragic plot, for it allows something from the unspoken world to be construed or misconstrued, while evading responsibility for such constructions. Silence creates a series of spaces in which fatal narratives can be generated. Much of the tragedy depends on untimely speech or on silence: Phèdre suppresses speech within her, and then speaks too soon, for her husband is not dead; her enigmatic words and ominous silence when Thésée returns foster in him an anxiety which Œnone exploits with her false story of Hippolyte's attempted rape of his stepmother; then, when Phèdre is about to acknowledge her guilt to Thésée, she learns of Hippolyte's love for Aricie, and keeps silent. Hippolyte refuses to denounce Phèdre, and so his father construes his silence as guilt. Théséé curses his son too soon, and cannot withdraw his words. Œnone dies without confessing her lie. When Phèdre finally speaks, it is too late.

[63] *Phèdre*, III i 766.

[64] Jacques Derrida, 'La différance', in his *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris, 1972), pp. 1–29.

[65] *Phèdre*, I iii 264.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

Where does Phèdre end? In Euripides, after Phaedra has killed herself, her body is displayed along with a tablet on which she has written that she has been raped by Hippolytus. It is an extraordinary, uncanny moment. The dead woman speaks—lies—through writing, through a writing which Theseus pauses to read silently, so creating a space of private communion with the dead within the more public stage space. When he reads the words aloud, they are not spoken but sung, a most unusual dramatic italicization. Words which are physically dissociated from their author take on a new kind of substantiality. In Garnier's play, Phedre, the Nurse, and These all at various moments think that they are already feeling the punishments of Hades, as the space of the human world begins to turn, in their imagination, into the space of eternal punishment.[66] La Pinelière gives Phèdre a private scene in which she laments in her chamber over a casket into which the remains of Hippolyte have been gathered. Pradon grotesquely imagines a union in which Phèdre stabs herself so that her blood spurts out over the body of Hippolyte. All these dramatists think about how the special spaces of Phèdre might finally be integrated with, or separated from, the space occupied by the other characters. After a drama in which the self is multiplied or fissured, multiplied *and* fissured, and the words which define the sources of our identity become floating, even contradictory signifiers, Racine's conclusion moves towards the stabilization of time, space, and language. Racine brings Phèdre into the presence of Thésée at a point when she has already taken the poison, and so her words come from an *unheimlich* source, from one on the borders of death, a more unsettling form of speech even than the words on the tablet in Euripides. In a play which has been so much concerned with *bords* ('boundaries', 'limits', 'edges'), Phèdre's final speech is spoken on the ultimate boundary. At the beginning of the play she is, we are told, on the point of death; at the end of the play that death is accomplished: her life in the course of the play is therefore suspended in parentheses between death and death, between its announcement and its arrival,

[66] Garnier, IV 1891–8, V 2249–56, 2309–22.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.

between signifier and signified. In her final speech she speaks of having stained the daylight:

> Et la Mort, à mes yeux dérobant la clarté
> Rend au jour, qu'ils souillaient, toute sa pureté.[67]

> And Death, taking clear sight from my eyes, restores to the day, which they had stained, all its purity.

Here, as the clarity of physical vision fails her, death restores purity to the light (or the day) which she has contaminated simply by looking upon it. Three near synonyms—'clarté', 'jour', and 'pureté'—three kinds of light, are returned into normal usage, purged of their implication in the *unheimlich* spaces of Phèdre.

[67] *Phèdre*, V vii 1643–4.

Copyright © 2009. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Hammond, P. (2009). The strangeness of tragedy. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
Created from gmul-ebooks on 2022-10-25 09:12:21.