I would like to return to the core of the French literary canon which is probably best represented by the 17th century and within it, by the theatre of Corneille and Racine from whose oeuvre I have chosen the two plays *Le Cid* (1637) and *Britannicus* (1667). At first glance these plays have not much in common: they do not play in the same society, they do not deal with the same theme, they are not written in the same style. What they have in common though is precisely what I want to look at: I want to examine how Corneille and Racine shape and constitute their characters in dialogue with the poetological tradition of their time, the Aristotelian *Poetics*, on which the *doctrine classique* is based. In order to that, I take the character of the king as an example, Don Fernand and Néron respectively, in the above-mentioned plays (which will of course also lead me to speak about the king's subjects). I will moreover include the prefaces of both plays, i.e. the *Examen* of 1660 for *Le Cid* and the first *Préface in Britannicus* and of course the Aristotelian *Poetics*. Texts that further helped me to shape my questions and set the focus of the argumentation, especially due to the cultural and historical impetus they provided regarding French 17th century court society were: Auerbach's “La Cour et la Ville”, as well as his chapter “Le Faux-Devot” in *Mimesis*, Jean-Marie Apostolidès' *Le Roi-Machine*, and La Bruyère's *Caractères* (“De la Cour”).

I have chosen *Le Cid* and *Britannicus*, because *Le Cid* has provoked the most intense *querelle*, which was triggered by Corneille's noncompliance with Aristotle. *Britannicus* is a play, which shows more weak spots then *Phèdre*, in the sense that Racine was accused by Corneille and his friends for having violated the rules regarding his conception of Néron. Moreover,

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1 See Gasté, *La querelle du Cid.*
Racine in his first preface to *Britannicus* in turn attacks Corneille and his conception of characters.

When La Bruyère in *Les Caractères* points out that Corneille “peint les homes comme ils devaient être » and Racine « tells qu’ils sont », this can also be read as a statement regarding the king and his relation to his subjects. What kind of king did the audience of the 17th century see onstage, i.e. *la cour et la ville*, according to Auerbach “the leading circles of the nation” – the court nobility and the upper bourgeoisie – “immediately before and during the reign of Louis XIV”? What is his relation to his subjects?

First, it is important to note that the historical frame is double in both plays: on the content side it is medieval Spain in *Le Cid* and imperial Rome in *Britannicus*, their historical context is the beginning of Absolutism (*Cid*) and its triumph (*Britannicus*). In the first case, the audience of the time is perturbed by witnessing a king who is “pas assez absolu” (Don Fernand), and in the second case the audience is perturbed by witnessing a king who is too strong, so that he can transform himself into a tyrant, a monster.

In chapter 8 of his *Poetics* Aristotle states that tragedy needs the “highly renowned and prosperous” character (a nobleman) who is however not too good, not too bad, not too virtuous, not too evil: she/he is flawed due to her/his hubris, or *hamartia* [error in judgement] and whose fortune changes from good to bad. It is only with a slightly flawed character that the audience can identify, which then enables catharsis, [i.e. pity and fear or *eleos* and *phobos*] on the side of the spectator and via the hero’s downfall purification of these feelings (with a purely virtuous character this change would be merely shocking, an evil character’s change of fortune would not satisfy the moral sense): “for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune of a man like ourselves”.

In the case of *Le Cid* and *Britannicus*, the identification of *la cour et la ville* should take place with the subjects to supreme powers, as Don Rodrigue and Chimène start out as the ‘tragic’ characters torn between devoir and love, Britannicus dies, and Junie symbolically dies by entering

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4 *Le Cid*, Examen, p. 703.
5 Aristotle, *Poetics*, XIII.
6 Aristotle, *Poetics*, XIII.
The Figure of the King in Corneille’s *Le Cid* and Racine’s *Britannicus*

The king as “pouvoir suprême” causes a change of their fortune. However, in *Le Cid*, Don Rodrigue and Chimène move from a bad to a good fortune, they can marry, which makes Corneille’s later renaming of the play as *tragédie* inadequate and identification impossible. Apart from the subjects, both Corneille and Racine explicitly refer to their designation of the king as ‘not too good not too bad’ characters in their prefaces, and it is precisely this conception which causes them problems on the side of their critics.

**Le Cid**

It is important to know that although *Le Cid* was staged for the first time in the théâtre du Marais in 1637 as *tragi-comédie*, it was renamed as *tragédie* as from 1648 and edited with an *Avertissement*. The *Examen* belongs to the re-written version of the 1637 *Cid*. In 1660, and after the *querelle du Cid* it mirrors stricter attitude regarding the rules, i.e. *vraisemblance* and *bien-séance*, and – more hesitantly – the three units. The *Cid* edition of 1660 is published one year before the beginning of the official reign of Louis XIV. Through Corneille’s re-writing, Don Fernand changes from a weak monarch to a stronger monarch at the birth of Absolutism under Louis XIV. In *Le Cid* Corneille creates a transition from the love-theme to the theme of the state, in the course of which he creates a transition from old to new subjects to the king, and from an old to a young generation.

In act I scene 3 Corneille shows the audience that the figure of the powerful and independent vassal (Don Gomez) to whom the king is mutually obliged is no longer possible; the old feudal society has come to an end. The place of the independent warlord will now be filled out by the “courtisan” (Don Diegue): Don Diegue wins the office of “gouverneur du prince”. For the Dauphin’s education, the king’s decision replaces “le métier de Mars” de Don Gomez, the concrete “bataille” as “l’exemple vivant” and ‘learning by doing’ with the “exemple” and “l’histoire de ma [Don Diegue’s] vie”, and ultimately by the instruction manual and wisdom that comes with age. With this scene, a weak king who “peut se tromper” now turns into the absolutist king: “on doit [...] respect au pouvoir absolu, / De n’examiner rien quand un roi l’a voulu”. The independent vassal (DG: “ce bras du royaume est le plus ferme appui”) becomes a courtisan: “Vous l’avez eu par brigue, étant vieux courtisan”. Or with the words of Apostolidès, the

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8 See: Schröder, “Junie, Auguste et le feu de Vesta”.

9 *Le Cid*, p. 10.

10 *Le Cid*, p. 11.
nobility replaces its weapons and strategies on the battlefield with court etiquette, intrigue and supervision. I think that this scene prefigures what will reach its peak around the time Britannicus is written. Don Diegue’s new office as gouverneur foreshadows the compliant Burrhus who instructs Néron through texts and writing, while being subject to court intrigue, whereas Don Gomes’ objection to the decision of the king is a clear act of insubordination.

The discussion of the king’s decision to change the warlord into a courtesan ends with a slap and provokes a duel which Don Fernand had prohibited. Thus, the “pouvoir suprême” of the king is questioned on both sides: Don Gomes has refused an apology and Don Rodrigue has to avenge his father. These two instances – the slap violating the bienséance, the duel the vraisemblance of the time – have provoked severe criticism. Corneille’s critics considered this as an affront to the king’s power and the state, and also Don Fernand states: “S’attaquer à mon choix, c’est se prendre à moi même / Et faire un attentat sur le pouvoir suprême” 12. Thus, Georges Scudéry states in his critique that Don Fernand should have send his guards to prevent the duel and the Académie confirms this later, but Corneille knows well that the action would have collapsed without the duel. In the Examen he tries to comment on the lack of vraisemblance (the king’s lack of intervention) and astonishingly explains it with Aristotle’s claim for a character that is not too good not too bad! For Corneille a weaker Don Fernand is a more vraisemblable character, and thus turns away from the reality of his time and to Guillen de Castro’s Cid: Don Fernand „étant le premier roi de Castille […] il n’était peut-être pas assez absolu sur les grands seigneurs de son royaume. […] C’est sur cet exemple que je me suis cru bien fondé à le faire agir plus mollement qu’on ne ferait en ce temps-ci” 13. In spite of his intentions, Corneille weakens the king on the basis of Aristotle.

However, the seeming lack of control over internal affairs finds compensation in the young generation, especially in Don Rodrigue. After the duel, he is re-appropriated by the king to fight the Moors, whose military success is then rewarded with marriage. Hence the abrupt change of topic of Don Fernand when confronted with the duel: “N’en parlons plus. Au reste, on a vu dix vaisseaux…” 14 etc. On the one hand, Corneille in Le Cid creates a profound transition, the old feudal relation of mutual obligation is canceled, the king reigns alone, and both Don Diegue and Don Rodrigue are his new integrated subjects. Don Rodrigue replaces Don Gomes (“ce qu’il [the king]
The Figure of the King in Corneille’s *Le Cid* and Racine’s *Britannicus* 103

perd au Comte il le recouvre en toi

15, with Don Rodrigue in battle and with Don Diegue in instruction – with them, the audience can perhaps identify. By means of the distribution of offices and particularizations of power he can dispose of more docile subjects and as servant to the state he defends its borders: “Je ferai seulement le devoir d’un sujet”\(^\text{16}\). What means the control of the borders means the loss of control in the inner realms of the state; the king cannot yet do both.

Don Rodrigue’s reward of exterior success and affirmation of the king’s superior power by marriage is however as *in-vraisemblable* and not *bienséant* as Don Gomes’ revolt. This is because the marriage is another recourse to old feudal law, according to which the woman belongs to the strongest man; she is the price for Don Rodrigue’s victory in battle: “Sors vainqueur d’un combat dont Chimène est le prix”\(^\text{17}\). This is an end, which was no longer possible during the reign of Louis XIII and after the Fronde, let alone during the reign of Louis XIV. During the time after the Fronde and the end of the old feudal system no noblewoman would or could marry the murderer of her father. For Corneille it is therefore important to make the end as *vraisemblable* as possible: he avoids staging the marriage by postponing it for a year in order to grant the couple time for re-consideration, and creates a moment of resistance in Chimène, who refuses to marry Don Rodrigue. This violates the Aristotelian poetics twice.

First, where Aristotle claims for dramatic closure *onstage*, Corneille – as he explains in the *Examen* – leaves the play end remains relatively open: “avec incertitude de l’effet; et ce n’était que par là que je pouvais accorder la bienséance du théâtre avec la vérité de l’événement”\(^\text{18}\). Second, as Corneille knows that the marriage is *in-vraisemblable*, he turns away from Aristotle’s claim for a character that should neither be too good nor to bad and makes Chimène stronger and more virtuous, and resisting the king’s will for marrying Don Rodrigue. In his *Examen* Corneille states that Chimène’s “haute vertu […] a quelque chose de plus touchant, de plus élevé et de plus aimable que cette médiocre bonté, capable d’une faiblesse et même d’un crime”\(^\text{19}\).

Since Corneille knows that the audience does not recognize the strong hero on stage anymore, and since every subject eventually has to succumb to the king’s will, Corneille explains Chimène’s silence at the end of the play as an act of opposition to the king: “Je sais bien que le silence passe

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\(^{15}\) *Le Cid*, p. 54.

\(^{16}\) *Le Cid*, p. 61.

\(^{17}\) *Le Cid*, p. 74.

\(^{18}\) *Le Cid*, Examen, p. 701-702.

\(^{19}\) *Le Cid*, Examen, p. 700.
d’ordinaire pour une marque de consentement; mais quand les rois parlent, c’en est une de contradiction: on ne manque jamais à leur applaudir quand on entre dans leur sentiments.” 20 The play finishes with Chimène’s identification of the new subject Don Rodrigue – „Rodrigue à l’Etat devient si nécessaire” 21 followed by her doubtful questioning of having to be his « salaire » and with her silence. It is Don Rodrigue who applauds the king’s decision, and the king’s last words could be Corneille’s own: “Le temps assez souvent a rendu légitime, / Ce qui semblait d’abord ne se pouvoir sans crime” 22. Although the postponement of the marriage is ultimately Don Fernand’s decision – “Laisse faire le temps, ta vaillance, et ton roi” 23 – what was supposed to be a strengthening of the monarch’s position is in fact another weakening.

Although in the Examen Corneille declares Le Cid as “une tragédie parfaite” 24, he takes away the audience’s basis of identification with Chimène and the king; they are invraisemblable. By depicting Chimène as purely virtuous, implicitly objecting the king’s decision, and her change of fortune as from bad to good, and Don Fernand as not strong enough to symbolize the absolute power which the characters cannot control, he invalidates his play as tragedy; in spite of his renaming and rewriting of the 1636 edition, it remains a tragi-comédie and out of time with his own present.

Thus, if the king of the version at hand (1660) is still weak, this is because he was already weak in the first version (1637). Corneille could not completely change the plot, if he wanted the play to continue existing. Between 1637 and 1660 the situation changes, the feudal lords (Don Diegue and Don Gomes) gradually lose their power and the monarch in 1660 realizes that he has to become an absolute king. Thus, Don Diegue accepts to become a courtesan and Don Gomes rebels against the king, threatens him (“un sceptre qui sans moi tomberait de sa main” 25) and becomes a criminal against the state. The difference between the two versions is that in the 1637 version the focus is on a feud between two clans, which is resolved by an appeasing king, and in 1660 Corneille focuses on disobeying feudal lords and felony (especially Don Gomes) who provoke the king and prefer to quarrel rather than unite their forces against invading Arabs. In 1660, it is only the young generation (Don Rodrigue and Chimène) who knows that

20 Le Cid, Examen, p. 701.
21 Le Cid, p. 84.
22 Le Cid, p. 84.
23 Le Cid, p. 85.
24 Le Cid, Examen, p. 700.
25 Le Cid, p. 19.
“quand un roi commande, on lui doit obéir”²⁶ (in spite of Chimène’s disagreeing silence, she however succumbs). But their obedience maybe has their love as its price, and the end remains vaguely open.

**Britannicus**

In *Britannicus*, written in the middle of Absolutism, Racine creates a different king from Corneille. Not the king of an emerging absolutist power, but the king at the peak of his power, and the fear it evokes in his subjects, which is the fear of tyranny. However, Racine, by presenting a (possible) period of transition, is, even if less drastically, confronted with a similar problem as Corneille was. Which is to create a newly emerging figure without transgressing the ‘old’ rules. In his first *Préface* Racine comments on his conception of Néron and implicitly refers to Aristotle: “Je leur ai déclaré [his critics] dans la *Préface* d’*Andromaque* les sentiments d’Aristote sur le Héros de la Tragedie, et que bien loin d’être parfait, il faut toujours qu’il ait quelque imperfection”.²⁷ He further states in his second *Préface*:

> Ainsi il [Néron] ne m’a pas été permis de le représenter aussi méchant qu’il a été depuis. Je ne le représente pas non plus comme un homme vertueux, car il ne l’a jamais été. Il n’a pas encore tué sa mère, sa femme, ses gouverneurs; mais il a en lui les semences de tous ces crimes. Il commence à vouloir secouer le joug (...) En un mot, c’est ici un monstre naissant (...)²⁸

Racine chooses the interim time of „un monstre naissant“²⁹, because he cannot stage Néron at the peak of tyranny, for reasons of bienséance (his too cruel deeds), neither can he stage a purely virtuous Néron for reasons of vraisemblance (Nero is after all a historical figure). Agrippine and Albine, through which Racine evokes two poles of rulership, render Néron’s prehistory in the exposition: Agrippine speaks of Néron as tyrant, Albine naively states that Néron has qualities of emperor Augustus. It is between these two extremes, that the unfolding of excessive power takes place.³⁰

Racine omits the time of Néron’s virtue and trust in his instructors Burrhus and Seneca and in his mother who could govern in his name. At the

²⁶ *Le Cid*, p. 84.
²⁷ All quotations from Racine’s work, if not otherwise stated, are from Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, 1, 6d. Forestier, the above quotation from the *Préface* of *Britannicus*, p. 373.
²⁸ *Britannicus*, p. 444.
²⁹ *Britannicus*, p. 372.
³⁰ Regarding the complex genealogy of the „monstre naissant“ Néron see the detailed analysis of Schröder in *La tragédie du sang d’Auguste*.
beginning of the play Néro has decided to govern on his own, and this is the time his true nature begins to break through. Unlike the moderate pouvoir of Don Fernand, Néro’s power is more excessive and founded on passion. He is a roi jaloux, he wants to deprive Britannicus of his lover Junie and then destroys him. He kills Britannicus (or has him killed) out of jealousy, and in order to possess Junie himself, and only in the second instance to secure his power against Agrippine.

Although the 17th century NEVER put the ‘real’ king on stage, I want to ask again what kind of king and what subjects did the audience recognize in Néro? First it can be said, that Racine shows his audience almost a sequel to Le Cid, or more precisely: what might have happened to the Dauphin, the son of Don Fernand. A now adult king liberates himself from the influence of his mother and his gouverneurs Burrhus and Seneca and is faced with his own absolute power. What was valid for Don Fernand should also be valid for him: “Un roi dont la prudence a de meilleurs objets / Est meilleur menager du sang de ses sujets : / Je veille pour les miens, mes soucis les conservent » 31. Don Fernand was at the beginning of the consolidation of absolute power, and Néro had already exercised it with virtue. Where Don Fernand took a step back from action to instruction (of the Dauphin) and began the taming of the noblesse at court, Néro leaves the realm of instruction and acts, or, he lets acts happen, and tyrannizes his noblesse.

Sadism

The play begins right after Néro’s first independent act, after he has sent his soldiers to kidnap Junie. Hitherto, Néro had never seen Junie and the night of the kidnapping falls in love with her, he desires her: “j’idolâtre Junie”32. He secretly observes the kidnapping, whereby her half-naked and captivated body and her tears provoke in him “un désir curieux”33. The birth of the monster is the birth of a sadist and of jealousy (“démon envieux”, “amant jaloux”34), and Britannicus turns from a political rival to a personal one. Britannicus’ offstage death is the beginning of Néro’s tyranny. For reasons of bienséance it remains in the realms of sadistic voyeurism. Néro is a king who from a hidden place observes his court, not only the kidnapping of Junie, but also the meeting between Britannicus and Junie, which he had arranged himself and during which Junie is supposed

31 Le Cid, p. 31.
32 Britannicus, p. 389.
33 Britannicus, p. 389.
34 Britannicus, p. 400; 414.
to revoke her love for Britannicus. Néron, before the actual scene, is sadistically looking forward to witnessing the suffering and pain of Junie and Britannicus: “Elle aime mon rival, je ne puis ignorer; / Mais je mettrai ma joie à le désespérer. / Je me fais de sa peine une image charmante, / Et je l’ai vu douter du coeur de son amante.”35 And even after the scene he longs for more. He tells Narcisse to further torment Britannicus: “Par de nouveaux soupçons, va, cours le tourmenter; / Et tandis qu’à mes yeux on le pleure, on l’adore, / Fais-lui payer bien cher un bonheur qu’il ignore.”36

In Britannicus and as opposed to Le Cid, Racine creates a movement of concentration; he moves from exterior threats to the most inner realms of the court. Whatever challenges absolutist power is held under immediate surveillance, and it is inseparable from personal rivalry, jealousy and court intrigues. Hence the court is an invisible net of eyes, it is a panoptical space at the center of which is the king. Thus, Junie states: “Vous êtes en des lieux tout pleins de sa puissance. / Ces murs même, […], peuvent avoir des yeux, / Et jamais l’empereur n’est absent de ces lieux.”37 In Britannicus the king is not alone; his power is embedded in the wider network of the court. He lets his soldiers and ministers act, he himself is physically passive. He passively observes, he does not touch Junie but fantasizes about her from a distance. Also, it remains unclear who gave the cup with the poisoned drink to Britannicus; as Burrhus’ report skips this. Interestingly, Burrhus describes the courtesans who are present at the death of Britannicus almost in the words of La Bruyère: “ceux qui de la cour ont un plus long usage / Sur les yeux de César composent leur visage.”38 People at the court of Néron are La Bruyère’s impenetrable statues: “la cour est comme un édifice bâti de marbre, […] composée d’hommes fort durs, mais fort polis;”39 they have mastered the art of dissimulation.

Certainly, the audience – la cour et la ville – must have been uncomfortably familiar with the specific figure of the king whom they saw embodied on stage by Néron. Louis XIV’s enthronization was followed by a period of jealousy and suspicion as regards the ambitions of his then minister of finance Fouquet, whom he expropriated and imprisoned until the latter’s death in 1680. The imprisonment of Fouquet was one of his first independent acts after his mother Anne d’Autriche and Cardinal Mazarin had entrusted him with the state affairs – a constellation reminiscent of the triangular power constellation between Néron, Agrippine and Bhurrus that

35 Britannicus, p. 401.
36 Britannicus, p. 401.
37 Britannicus, p. 400.
38 Britannicus, p. 433.
39 La Bruyère, Les Caractères, 10, “De la cour”.
is beginning to fall apart in the play. The play seems to moreover foreshadow the *affaire des poisons* – who put the poison in Britannicus’ cup, Néron himself, or one of the bystanders that belong to the wider network of the court? – and plays with the reality of courtly life as a life under constant surveillance.

Regarding Britannicus and Junie, Racine adhered to the Aristotelian *Poetics*. As he states in his first *Préface*, all his characters are based on Tacitus’ *Annals*, which according to the Aristotelian *Poetics* allowed him to slightly modify the characters. He makes Britannicus two years older than he really was, in order to render him more *vraisemblable*. Moreover, Britannicus is neither too good nor too bad, he disposes of “qualités ordinaires” (“beaucoup de cœur, beaucoup d’amour, beaucoup de franchise, beaucoup de crédulité”). His flaw consists in *hamartia* due to his naïve youth: he misinterprets the situation and does not believe, in spite of Junie’s warnings, that Néron will do him harm, and perishes. Also Junie is presented “plus retenue qu’elle n’était”; she is not the purely virtuous but incestuous character in Tacitus, which would be equally *invraisemblable* and not *bienséant* to the audience.

Let me conclude. Both, Corneille and Racine turn to historical subjects. The far past, i.e. the time of the Roman emperors and their power as whose heir Louis XIV considered himself was certainly more *vraisemblable* to *la cour et la ville* than medieval Spain and the old feudal society. However, seen from the perspective of the audience, both authors create kings and place them in a period of power transition. Corneille creates a king who is confronted with a strong noblesse that is in conflict with absolute power. While Don Fernand fails to successfully subject all his subjects to the *raison d’état* on an internal level (Chimène and Don Gomes), he nevertheless manages to do so on an external level: with Don Rodrigue Corneille puts a new subject on stage, i.e. the ‘public servant’ who acts in accord with the monarch’s will, who is no longer an independent warlord but integrated into the body politic of the absolute state. Whereas in *Le Cid* the full establishment of absolutist power is an affair of the future, in *Britannicus* absolutist power as an exercise of virtue and prudence belongs to the past. Néron has integrated his subjects into the body politic to such a degree that he perverts the one sided power relation between him and Britannicus and Junie. The suppression of their will no longer serves the benefit of the state and Néron’s power assurance, but they turn into marionettes of Néron’s desire.

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40 *Britannicus*, p. 444.
41 *Britannicus*, p. 373.
Amusement and plaisir, which, as Apostolidès in Le Roi-Machine explains, fills out the lack of military power of the noblesse in the 17th century after the Fronde is turned into a sadist and egocentric game at court, which is controlled by the panoptical gaze of the hidden king, and impenetrable courtiers.

I will conclude with the Aristotelian Poetics. As I tried to show, both authors (Corneille in the Examen and Racine in his Préface) justify their conception of not only the king’s subjects, but also of the king against the background of the norm, i.e. Aristotle’s Poetics, in order to make them vraisemblable to the audience of their own time, and Corneille fails and Racine succeeds. Almost 30 years earlier the Académie Française had set up the rules of the doctrine classique in order to protect the intellectual interests of the state; art should act in conformity with the authority of the monarch, the taming of baroque démesure led to classical mesure.

The question of the conception of characters in Le Cid and Britannicus is ultimately a question of Aristotelian mimesis, which is obliged to the principle of verisimilitude. This means that both action and character have to be credible for the audience. As I explained at the beginning, Aristotle therefore prefers a character who is morally neither to good nor too bad, and errs like Oedipus (hamartia) which then causes his downfall. Second, it means that the presented action does not have to be based on a historical event, but has to imitate an action such as it “may happen according to the law of probability and necessity” (IX).

Starting from the same poetic norm, Corneille and Racine go into opposite directions. What is remarkable is that both write (rewrite) their plays around the same time, for the same audience, and with the same norm (Aristotle’s Poetics) in mind, but the outcome is almost a chiasm. Racine’s slight distancing from and variation of the historical model (the Annals of Tacitus) is conformity to the rules and vraisemblable characters, whereas Corneille’s stricter adherence to the historical model inevitably leads to a breaking of the rules in the eyes of the audience and the Académie due to invraisemblable characters. Thus, Corneille’s depiction of the particular event is precisely NOT what he is supposed to do according to Aristotle, because it means the reduction of the poet to a historian, and a reduction of character that resists identification. Corneille’s narrow conceptualization of mimesis to the audience means vagueness of character, which are alien to la cour et la ville. Racine’s wider conceptualization of mimesis means confinement of character and is accompanied by a reduction of space (the panoptical court, an overpowerful king and impenetrable courtisans) (of course reinforced by

\footnote{Apostolidès, Le roi-machine.}
the three units] which leads to an explosion of the interior that is masked in
the everyday according to La Bruyère, but whose outbreak on the stage
finally produces the cathartic discharge of tension and anxiety on the side of
the audience, and makes both Néron and his subjects vraisemblable to the
present of la cour et la ville, while it reminds them of what they are
outwards and inwards: outside “hommes fort durs, mais fort polis”, “il
[leur] faut une disgrâce […] pour le[s] rendre plus humain[s]”43, and what
should never happen: the fall from the king’s favour.

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43 La Bruyère, Les Caractères, „De la cour”, 10 and 94.