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DOMINIQUE JULLIEN

*Intertextuality as Labyrinth:
The Presence of Racine in Michel
Butor's L'Emploi du temps*

(comme tout cela à présent, malgré quelques grandes obscurités,
comme tout cela s'organisait à présent, malgré quelques grandes
lacunes!)

—Michel Butor: *L'Emploi du temps*

Michel Leiris noted that the rigorous construction of *La Modification* [*A Change of Heart*] both respects and evades the rules of French classical tragedy.¹ The same may be said about the earlier *L'Emploi du temps* [*Passing Time*].² Like the five acts of a tragedy, the five sections of the novel define and design the dramatic progression: *L'Entrée*, *Les Présages*, "*L'Accident*," *Les Deux soeurs*, *L'Adieu* [*First Steps*, *Portents*, *The "Accident"*, *The Two Sisters*, *Farewell*]. Each one of these five sections is divided into five chapters. This strong geometric frame obviously acknowledges the tragic model, while submitting the narrative form to the theatrical rule of the three unities. Unity of action: *L'Emploi du temps* tells the story of Jacques Revel's life in Bleston, the fictitious English city where he worked for a year, and his struggle against its hostile environment. Unity of time: the narration begins with Jacques Revel's arrival in Bleston on 1 September and ends with his departure, exactly twelve months later: ". . . maintenant mon départ termine cette dernière phrase" (299) [. . . and my departure closes this last sentence (288)]. The geometrical center of the year, 29 February, like the middle of a Racinian tragedy, is a turning point in the character's fate, and marks the beginning of his doom. Unity of

1. Michel Leiris, "*Le Réalisme mythologique de Michel Butor*," postface to *La Modification* (Paris: Minuit, Collection 10/18, 1957), 290–91.

2. Michel Butor, *L'Emploi du temps* (Paris: Minuit, 1957), 158; English translation by Jean Stewart, *Passing Time* (London: 1961), 154.

YFS 76, *Autour de Racine: Studies in Intertextuality*, ed. Richard E. Goodkin, © 1989 by Yale University.

place: Jacques Revel never once leaves the city, unable, it seems, to get away from its evil power:

Déjà les ruses de la ville usaient, étouffaient mon courage, déjà sa maladie m'avait enveloppé.

Jamais je n'ai renouvelé cette tentative de lui échapper en marchant droit devant moi, trop sûr que mes forces s'épuiseraient, que le temps de répit passerait, bien avant l'arrivée au paysage de mon désir, bien avant la délivrance, la certitude d'être sorti . . .

Jamais, ce qui montre bien à quel point je suis contaminé, à quel point ma volonté est droguée, je n'ai pris le train pour changer franchement d'air. . . . [36]

The town had begun to wear me down with its wiles, to stifle my courage; its disease was creeping over me already.

I have never again attempted to escape from it by walking straight ahead, knowing only too well that my strength would fail and the moment of respite lapse long before I could reach the landscape I dreamed of, long before my liberation, before I could be sure of having escaped . . . *

Never yet have I taken the train to get away, to breathe a different air, and this shows how deeply I am contaminated, how heavily my will is doped. . . . [34]

The unities of time and place are further linked as the twelve months that Jacques Revel spends in Bleston correspond to the twelve sections of the city. The narrator is trapped in this urban labyrinth. The struggle against the hostile city which destroys its inhabitants is itself the substance of the plot: Bleston becomes the incarnation of tragic fate. As in *La Modification*, the strict progression of the plot is combined with a complex "entrelacement" [interweaving], (to use Michel Leiris's term) of memory and images, which expand and evade the tragic unities. The outside world, which in a tragedy is brought into the neutral space of the chamber by means of a narration (Theramenes' account of Hippolytus' death, for example, or Theseus' exploits), in the novel appears in the form of images: the stained glass windows of the Old Cathedral and the tapestries in the museum were made in France; they show the stories of Cain and Theseus. Nature, banned from the industrial city, appears only in its parks, in the gloomy zoological garden, and in the uncanny sculptures of the New Cathedral. Above all, the documentaries which the narrator goes to see so regularly, in the never-ending rain of Bleston, offer a glimpse of lands of sun, but also of the land of tragedy:

un film en couleurs sur la Crète, le lieu d'origine d'Ariane et de Phèdre, l'île du Labyrinthe et du Minotaure, évoquée par la onzième tapisserie du musée . . .

Ah! qu'il doit faire jour dans ce pays-là. . . . [101]

a documentary colour-film about Crete, the home of Phaedra and Ariadne, the isle of the Labyrinth and the Minotaur, whose story is told on the eleventh tapestry in the Museum . . .

Day must be bright there. . . . [99]

These images exacerbate the narrator's hatred for the gloomy city, and they also bring him to superimpose the pattern of tragedy upon his own situation. Likewise, the temporal unity of the twelve months, linear, tragic time, is underscored by an increasingly complex temporal pattern as the narrator attempts to reunite in his diary the past events and the present of his writing. The five months during which he keeps his diary (from 1 May to the day of his departure from Bleston) repeat the five sections of the novel. Thus the struggle against Bleston is identified with the struggle against time, and the will to oppose the blind forces of time with the human forces of reminiscence. Even if tragic linear time, symbolized by the station clock on the last page, wins in the end, the very struggle against linear temporality takes on a tragic form, so that the tragic rule of temporal unity becomes the substance of the narration. The departure of the train seals the tragic hero's defeat. Not only has he lost his two successive loves, Rose and Ann Bailey, not only has he failed to penetrate the hostile city, which remains largely unknown to him,³ but he has failed to close the circle of his narration; the decisive date of 29 February remains forever an enigma, an empty center:

et je n'ai même plus le temps de noter ce qui s'était passé le soir du 29 février, et qui va s'effacer de plus en plus de ma mémoire, tandis que je m'éloignerai de toi, Bleston, l'agonisante, Bleston toute pleine de braises que j'attise, ce qui me paraissait si important à propos du 29 février, puisque la grande aiguille est devenue verticale, et que maintenant mon départ termine cette dernière phrase. [299]

and I haven't even time to set down something that happened on the evening of February 29th, something that seemed very important and that I shall forget as I move further away from you, Bleston, as you lie dying,

3. The narrator never finds the time to visit Saint Jude and the neighboring synagogue until it is too late (263; 254).

Bleston, whose dying embers I have fanned, for now the long minute hand stands upright and my departure closes this last sentence. [288]

Thus the very elements which disrupt the tragic unities by incorporating them into the more complex narrative form ultimately serve to reinforce the tragic meaning of the novel, bringing it as close as possible to tragedy.

However, on a more thematic level, the quest for Racinian intertextuality proves at first frustrating, for the reader is constantly lured into paths leading unexpectedly away from what seemed unquestionably Racinian. The novel repeats the pattern of classical tragedy—but perhaps not specifically Racine; it dwells explicitly on themes and stories which only point to one play or another before taking a different turn. The mythological figures to which *L'Emploi du temps* constantly refers, Oedipus and Theseus, belong not specifically to Racine,⁴ but also to Sophocles and Euripides, or more generally to mythology. Two figures act as guides in Jacques Revel's enigmatic quest, Theseus and Cain. The narrator identifies his destiny with that of Theseus, while Cain serves as a symbol of Bleston. The two episodes of the myth of Theseus which Jacques Revel singles out as relevant to his own situation are the descent into the Labyrinth and the betrayal of Ariadne, as becomes explicit during his visit to the museum with Lucien Blaise:

Il a écouté avec amusement toutes les explications que je lui fournissais sur chaque épisode, tout en me gardant bien de lui raconter que pour moi désormais Ariane représentait Ann Bailey, que Phèdre représentait Rose, que j'étais moi-même Thésée. . . . [173]

Lucien listened with amusement as I explained each episode, although I carefully avoided telling him that for me, henceforward, Ariadne represented Ann Bailey, Phaedra was Rose and I myself Theseus. . . . [168–69]

Jacques Revel is Theseus and Ann-Ariadne (whom he later betrays by falling in love with her sister Rose) symbolically leads him out of the labyrinth by selling him a map of the city on which the bus lines resemble an entangled ball of threads: "Elle m'a donné la petite feuille couverte en rouge, où le tracé des lignes municipales s'inscrit, semblable à un paquet de ficelles embrouillées . . ." (40). [She handed me the small sheet bound in red that contains the plan of the municipal bus routes, with all their bifurcations and crossings and the numbers side

4. Oedipus represents the beginning (*La Thébàïde*) and Theseus the end (*Phèdre*) of Racine's mythological tragedy.

by side along the same segment, looking like a tangled bundle of string (38–39)].

Cain, on the other hand, is an incarnation of the evil of Bleston, *Belli Civitas*, city of hatred and war, but he is also, in a more ambiguous sense, an urban allegory, father of the arts and founder of cities. So far, it seems, Racine is but a remote reference. Racine's two biblical tragedies, *Esther* and *Athalie*, do not deal with the story of Cain, while *Phèdre* focuses on a much later episode of the myth of Theseus. Indeed, the tapestries in the museum of Bleston obliterate the topic of the Racinian tragedy, which is mentioned only once, in the complete catalogue of the tapestries ("Phèdre et Hippolyte," 155), and never described. Therefore, in spite of the overall tragic structure of the novel, the text avoids direct reference to Racine. Racinian intertextuality is indirect: the novel and the play appear related by a common use of certain mythological characters.

But it is precisely at this point that we encounter Racine again, or rather Butor's interpretation of Racine. Butor's essay "Racine et les dieux"⁵ focuses specifically on Racine's use of mythology. Two themes stand out in the essay, and are also remarkably relevant to the thematic structure of *L'Emploi du temps*: the theme of blood ties and kin murder, and the theme of the destructive power of the city. Thus we have a kind of intertextual triangle, with the essay "Racine et les dieux" acting as a filter or a catalyst between the novel and the plays. The reference to Racine in the novel appears when read through the essay; Butor's understanding of Racine is inseparable from, and perhaps generated by, the novel.

Because they deal with mythological material, Butor and Racine share the obsession of kinship and blood ties. Jacques Revel's terrible loneliness as a foreigner contrasts sharply with the other major characters (with the exception, of course, of the black man Horace Buck, the epitome of the outcast), who are all set within a strong family frame: the Bailey sisters and their mother, George Burton and his wife, James Jenkins and his mother. Jacques Revel's loneliness is increased by the fact that the reader knows nothing about his past or his family. Revel neither writes letters to nor receives letters from France; he exists only within the limits of Bleston, and the only ties he forms (or fails to form) are with the people of Bleston. But for him, kinship develops on a

5. "Racine et les dieux" [Racine and the gods], *Répertoire* (Paris: Minuit, 1960). Translations of this essay will be mine. It is interesting to note that the dates of the essay and the novel (1960, 1957) are very close. Pages references will henceforth be cited in the text.

metaphorical level. With all the male characters, he establishes fraternal relationships. James Jenkins who introduces him to the city is an older brother, a role which Revel later plays for his younger countryman Lucien Blaise. George Burton, another guide, is both a brother (in his quality as a fellow writer) and a father, since he is older and more experienced. Horace Buck is also a brother, and shares with the white foreigner the hatred of Bleston: "ce qui m'unissait à ce nègre, c'était que je retrouvais en lui ma propre haine noire à ton égard, Bleston . . ." (284) [what bound me to this negro was the fact that I recognised in him my own black hatred towards you, Bleston . . . (274)].

The intricacy of these family patterns draws the novel closer to tragedy. The relationships between the characters belong less to the novel than to tragedy, where the very closeness of blood ties generates conflict and violence. In *L'Emploi du temps*, although no real acts of violence are committed,⁶ the thematic underscore is one of parricide, fratricide and arson. Uniting these crimes is Oedipus, epitome of the tragic hero and origin of the detective novel: in this respect *Le Meurtre de Bleston* [The Bleston Murder], the novel-within-a-novel that plays such an important role in the development of events, is an intertextual crossroads, interweaving parricide and fratricide like the Oedipus myth. It tells the story of a fratricide, thus allowing simultaneously a detective clue (the "real" murder of Richard Tenn's brother) and an esthetic clue (Cain's Window, symbol of Bleston). But it also points to the metaphorical fratricide of which Revel becomes guilty by betraying Hamilton's identity and exposing him to death. According to George Burton's theory, the murder is fratricide; the investigation amounts to parricide:

tout roman policier est bâti sur deux meurtres dont le premier, commis par l'assassin, n'est que l'occasion du second dans lequel il est la victime du meurtrier pur et impunissable, du détective qui le met à mort . . . par l'explosion de la vérité. [147]

Any detective story is constructed on two murders of which the first, committed by the criminal, is only the occasion of the second, in which he is the victim of the pure, unpunishable murderer, the detective, who kills him . . . by the explosion of truth. [143–44]

The theme of fratricide, illustrated by Cain, is interwoven into the theme of parricide whose symbol is Oedipus: "Le détective est le fils

6. The only bloody acts are the fictitious murder in the detective novel, and the subsequent attempted murder of the author himself, which may after all be only an accident: surprisingly few crimes indeed, for a big industrial city.

du meurtrier, Oedipe, non seulement parce qu'il résout une énigme, mais aussi parce qu'il tue celui à qui il doit son titre . . ." (148). [The detective is the true son of the murderer Oedipus, not only because he solves a riddle, but also because he kills the man to whom he owes his title . . . (p. 145)]. Ultimately (and not unexpectedly) Oedipus seems to become the father of Cain, as the sixteenth-century bishop who commissioned Cain's Window, beaten and chained to his throne under the window by the angry crowd, becomes blind after the riot (80; 78).

The entanglement of biblical mythology and Greek mythology dominates the whole question of Racinian intertextuality. Like paths in a labyrinth, intertextual lines lead into one another and are active only by their interplay. Thus Racine is unquestionably an essential reference, but indirectly, as the biblical figure of Cain points to his Greek *Thébaïde*. Racinian intertextuality is indirect. The figure of Theseus points indirectly to *Phèdre*, Cain's Window is an indirect reference to *La Thébaïde*. What Butor writes about Hector's function in *Andromaque* may be said also of Oedipus in *La Thébaïde*, and ultimately of Racine in *L'Emploi du temps*: "on pourrait prétendre que dans *Andromaque*, c'est l'ombre d'Hector qui, avec la complicité du dieu Amour, décide de tout en inspirant son épouse fidèle Andromaque" ("Racine et les dieux," 35). [One could claim that, in *Andromache*, it is Hector's ghost who, in complicity with the god Eros, decides everything by inspiring his faithful wife Andromache]. The power of Racinian tragedy as an indirect intertextual reference for Butor's novel mirrors Racine's own dramatic use of invisible characters.

The compelling closeness of blood ties, real in tragedy as in mythology, is metaphorical in the novel, thus allowing greater freedom for mythological *contaminatio*. With respect to Racinian intertextuality, *contaminatio* operates on two distinct levels. On the one hand, the Bible and Greek mythology are blended together. The sibling rivalry between Cain and Abel mirrors the hatred between Eteocles and Polyneices; Oedipus begets Cain. The stained glass window acts as a labyrinthine reference to *La Thébaïde*. The second level of *contaminatio* remains within Greek mythology alone, forming two couples: Theseus and Oedipus, for one, and Phaedra and Persephone. The basis for the first association is the theme of parricide and fire:

Que de similitudes, en effet, rapprochent ces deux enfants trompés sur leur naissance et sur leur race, élevés loin de leur ville natale, tous deux tuant les monstres qui en infestaient les abords, tous deux résolvant des énigmes, libérant la voie, tous deux meurtriers de leur père (Thésée, non

par le fer, mais par la négligence, bien plus coupable à la vérité . . .) (. . .) tous les deux obtenant ainsi une royauté précaire, tous les deux chassés finalement de leur trône, assistant à l'embrasement de leur ville. . . . [174]

Their destinies indeed had much in common, each was brought up in ignorance of his birth and race, far from his native city; each slew the monsters that threatened that city, cleared a road, solved riddles, and each killed his father (Theseus not with the sword but through negligence, which was far more criminal indeed . . . and each by this means won a precarious throne, each at last was driven from this throne, each witnessed his city in flames. . . . [169–70]

This again leads back to the detective novel and to Revel's own "crime": "George William Burton . . . que j'ai failli tuer par négligence" (175) [whom I have nearly killed through negligence" (171)].

The confusion between Phaedra and Persephone ("Rose, ma Perséphone, ma Phèdre, ma Rose qui s'est ouverte dans ce marais de paralysie et de gaz lourds . . ." [208]) [Rose, my Persephone, my Phaedra, my Rose blossoming in this marshland, amongst its creeping miasmas . . . (203)] brings us closer to Racine, for the two episodes of the rape of Persephone and the labyrinth are the ones highlighted by Racine in the crucial scene between Phaedra and Hippolytus. The identification of Rose Bailey with Persephone (no longer, as before, with Phaedra) results from the obvious identification of Bleston with hell,⁷ but above all, it echoes Phaedra's own delirious *contaminatio*. Why, indeed, does Phaedra choose the rape of Persephone, the one episode in which her husband was not unfaithful to her, since he only acted as an accomplice of Pirithous (*Phèdre*, III, 5, 957–59)? A strange choice, in the wide array of Theseus' love affairs, "non point tel que l'ont vu les Enfers . . ." [not the man that Hell has claimed]⁸: since Theseus' death has not been confirmed at this stage of the play, Phaedra's use of the *passé composé* is the equivalent of wishful thinking, especially when opposed to the "tel que je vous voi." By substituting Theseus for Pirithous, by associating them in guilt, she is indeed sentencing him to death ("Et l'avare Achéron ne lâche point sa proie";

7. The identification of Rose to Persephone may also be related to the organizing principle of the novel: as Persephone spends six months in Hell and six months on earth, so, in Revel's diary, the date of narration and the date of the event itself are often separated by six months. Thus writing becomes the metaphorical equivalent of a return from Hell—which leads us back to Ariadne's thread.

8. *Phaedra*, in *Jean Racine: Four Greek Plays*, translated by R. C. Knight (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[Harsh Acheron is grasping and holds fast his prey]], and preparing the final, and delirious, *contaminatio*:

Il avait votre port, vos yeux, votre langage,
 Cette noble pudeur colorait son visage,
 Lorsque de notre Crète il traversa les flots,
 Digne sujet des vœux des filles de Minos.
 Que faisiez-vous alors? Pourquoi sans Hippolyte
 Des héros de la Grèce assembla-t-il l'élite?
 Pourquoi, trop jeune encor, ne pûtes-vous alors
 Entrer dans le vaisseau qui le mit sur nos bords?
 Par vous aurait péri le monstre de la Crète,
 Malgré tous les détours de sa vaste retraite.
 Pour en développer l'embarras incertain,
 Ma soeur du fil fatal eût armé votre main.
 Mais non, dans ce dessein je l'aurais devancée:
 L'amour m'en eût d'abord inspiré la pensée.
 C'est moi, Prince, c'est moi dont l'utile secours
 Vous eût du Labyrinthe enseigné les détours.
 Que de soins m'eût coûtés cette tête charmante!
 Un fil n'eût point assez rassuré votre amante.
 Compagne du péril qu'il vous fallait chercher,
 Moi-même devant vous j'aurais voulu marcher,
 Et Phèdre au Labyrinthe avec vous descendue
 Se serait avec vous retrouvée, ou perdue.

[*Phèdre*, II, 5]

. . . those eyes, that voice, were his,
 That generous red of virtue in your cheek,
 When first he drove across the Cretan foam,
 Meet meditation for the virgin dreams
 Of Minos' daughters. You, where were you then
 Among the flower and chivalry of Greece?
 Where was Hippolytus—alas, too young—
 The day his vessel grounded on our shore?
 You would have slain the terror of the island,
 The monster lapped in labyrinthine wiles,
 Into your hand my sister would have thrust,
 To unweave those riddling and deceitful ways,
 The thread of life and death. But no, she would not—
 Love would have found a readier wit in me,
 And I, Prince, I, devoted and assured,
 Could have resolved the devious Labyrinth;

What would I not have done for that sweet head?
 How could a thread content your fearful lover?
 Half-claimant in the peril that you claimed
 I would have walked before you in the way,
 And Phaedra, steadfast in the Labyrinth,
 Would have returned again with you, or else
 With you remained.

The father is replaced by the son, the elder sister by the younger sister; finally the thread is eliminated as Phaedra goes into the labyrinth herself, that is, the labyrinth is contaminated with the descent to hell. Past and present have become indistinguishable; chronological order and genealogical order have been subverted into a labyrinth. Mythological *contaminatio* is intimately related to the mental disorder created by incestuous desire. Mythological disorder is the sign and the language of incest, which disrupts the order of desire. Phaedra's speech is a labyrinth through which she leads the horrified Hippolytus to his death. Sister of the Minotaur, Phaedra is herself a labyrinth, as is shown by the image of the poison circulating through her veins, and the long descent to hell:

J'ai voulu, devant vous exposant mes remords,
 Par un chemin plus long descendre chez les morts.
 J'ai pris, j'ai fait couler dans mes brûlantes veines
 Un poison que Médée apporta dans Athènes.

[*Phèdre*, V, 7]

I chose the slower path. I chose to pour
 Into your ears before I joined the dead
 The chronicle of my remorse. I have drained
 And mingled with my burning blood a draught
 Medea left in Athens.

Therefore, Rose Bailey, the Blestonian Phaedra, also carries a labyrinthine allusion to Racine's *Phèdre*: although she is formally associated with the early episodes of the myth (Revel-Theseus' betrayal of the elder sister and love of the younger sister), she points to the later part of the myth, the incestuous love on which Racine's play is based. Initially attracted to Jacques Revel, Rose Bailey falls in love with Lucien Blaise, suggesting a new identification of the young Frenchman with Hippolytus. For his countryman, Revel is thus, metaphorically, both a brother and a father, a genealogical monstrosity characterizing not Theseus, but Oedipus: these two mythological figures, however,

are explicitly related through the tapestries which show the encounter of the heroes. Revel's interpretation of the encounter between Theseus and Oedipus substitutes its original political and religious meaning, as found in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, with a thematic identification based on parricide. Lucien Blaise's role is to extend the identification to the theme of incest: the complexities and paradoxes of Oedipus' genealogy indirectly contaminate that of Theseus. The shifting couples of *L'Emploi du temps* (Revel and Ann, Revel and Rose, Rose and Lucien) hold up a complex set of mirrors to their intertextual counterparts. Butor's treatment of intertextuality aims at creating a labyrinth in which references and models lead endlessly into one another. "Phaedra and Hippolytus": significantly, this tapestry, which could allow for a direct acknowledgement of Racinian intertextuality, remains undescribed. Instead, the reader is led through indirect paths in which mythological heroes and tragic references open into one another. Oedipus' oblique genealogy (a junction between fatherhood and brotherhood, between the verticality of the genealogical tree and the horizontality of the fraternal link) becomes the very image of intertextuality as an indirect relationship to the model: the law of intertextuality is a kind of *contaminatio*, neither a direct influence—a relationship to the past, a paternal relationship expressed in terms of inheritance—nor a simple parallel development, a fraternal relationship by which two works would bear a resemblance.

Intertextuality, like the city itself, offers an infinite number of crossroads. Jacques Revel, the narrator, reader of the city, decipherer of the tapestries and of the stained glass window, is cast as the master of the labyrinth. It is he who weaves references together, and who brings together the separate groups of characters.⁹ The final encounter at the Burtons', in which the newly formed couple and their hosts are symbolically reflected in the living room mirror, bears witness to Revel's paradoxical situation as a unifying outsider. As all the characters embodying his different visions of Bleston finally come together, Revel, whose reflection appears "tout près du bord, minuscule" (287) [close to the edge, a tiny image (276)], is the only one left out.¹⁰ The unified city locks him out. All of Revel's attempts at breaking the spell of Bleston by linking the separate aspects of it prove to be against him

9. Another resemblance to Theseus, the mythical unifier of Attica.

10. With the exception, again, of Horace Buck. The horrified expression on James Jenkins's face when Revel introduces him to his black friend (284; 273) attests to the irreparable cleavage of the city along racial lines, in addition to foreshadowing Revel's own destiny as an outcast.

in the end. Sophocles' Theseus is a unifying power; he offers Oedipus a reconstitution of integrity, a political redemption for his personal disintegration. Theseus, by adopting Aricie, puts an end to the cycle of Racine's mythological tragedies which had begun with an expulsion (Oedipus expelled from Thebes). But Revel is simultaneously Theseus and Oedipus: he unifies the city through the "thread" of his writing, but by excluding himself in the process, like Oedipus.

In the overwhelming power of the city we see another aspect of Racinian intertextuality. Revel's battle against Bleston is a modern transposition of the tragic hero's struggle against the gods, which is Butor's interpretation of Racinian tragedy. Butor's essay "Racine et les dieux" radicalizes the tragic question of divine justice and human guilt by defining tragedy as a blasphemy against the gods: "L'un des thèmes fondamentaux du théâtre racinien, et l'un de ceux sans doute par lesquels nous pouvons le mieux y pénétrer, est la haine des dieux, ou si l'on préfère le blasphème" (29). [One of the essential themes of Racinian theater, and one which undoubtedly best enables us to penetrate it, is that of the hatred of the gods, or in other words blasphemy].

Revel is ultimately overcome by the evil power of the city, even if the heroic and hopeless struggle is a victory in itself. "L'homme innocent se trouve le jouet des dieux coupables; il ne peut leur répondre que par un défi dans lequel il atteint à sa plus haute existence" (32). [The innocent man is the toy of the guilty gods; he can answer them only in a challenge by which he attains his highest existence]. Revel's diary, although conceived as a way of making sense of the city and dominating it, ironically turns against him. Revel is cursed with the tragic hero's blindness: Rose's engagement to Lucien and Ann's engagement to James Jenkins, which take him completely by surprise, cast a bitter doubt on the validity of his diary as an instrument for interpreting reality: "J'avais l'impression que du même coup toutes ces pages venaient de tomber en poussière. A quoi bon maintenant continuer cet immense, cet absurde effort pour y voir clair, qui ne m'a servi qu'à mieux me perdre?" (189). [And I felt at the same time that all these pages had crumbled to dust. What is the good, now, of pursuing this immense, absurd attempt to see things clearly, which has only served to ruin me more utterly? (184–85)].

Indeed, this very diary, conceived as a weapon against Bleston's deadly lethargy, is ironically what makes the narrator ultimately vulnerable to his enemy, by leading him further into solitude. After he buys the sheets of paper he does not see Ann again (199, 194). On one crucial evening, he chooses to come home to his diary, leaving Rose

with Lucien: “[Lucien] m’a quitté pour aller retrouver les Bailey, me proposant de l’accompagner (et moi, stupide, refusant pour venir m’enfermer ici devant ces feuilles blanches)” (169). [Lucien went off to see the Baileys, inviting me to accompany him; I, like a fool, refused, choosing rather to closet myself with these blank pages (165)].

Revel’s diary opposes a wall of words to the dirty brick walls of Bleston,¹¹ shielding him against the coldness of the city, but also against any possible happiness. The diary, in which he is just as hopelessly trapped, becomes a replica of the sordid labyrinth of Bleston. His imprecations against the city, like those concluding Racine’s *Bérénice*, are the only victory granted the tragic hero. As Butor puts it in “Racine et les dieux”:

Il ne reste plus à nos deux héros qu’à admettre leur sort et à se lamenter. Soulignons le fait que rien ne peut leur interdire cette lamentation. Les dieux peuvent exiger l’obéissance, mais leur pouvoir doit s’incliner devant celui de la parole (44).

Our two heroes can only accept their fate and weep. Let us emphasize the fact that nothing can forbid them this lamentation. The gods may command submission, but their power must yield to the power of speech.

But in *Bérénice*, the power that destroys the happiness of Racine’s heroes is not the injustice of abstract “gods,” but the very real pressure of Rome, which will not accept *Bérénice* for an empress: here the resemblance between novel and tragedy is no longer simply metaphorical. What Butor reads in, or into, Racine, is the incarnation of divine power into the city. The essay on “Racine et les dieux” shows the abstract force of the gods being incarnated into an increasingly personified power which takes the form of *urbs*, the city, the “goddess Rome.” Thus, in *Britannicus*, Nero will ultimately suffer punishment for his sin against “ce dieu qu’est Rome” [this god, Rome] (“Racine et les dieux,” 39). *Bérénice* goes one step further:

Dans *Britannicus*, nous avons vu que Rome exprimait son refus violemment par les mille poignards de ce peuple qui se soulève pour protéger Junie, dans *Bérénice*, tout s’intériorise; c’est dans le silence de son appartement que Titus entend la voix de Rome lui interdire son mariage. [41]

We saw in *Britannicus* that Rome violently expressed its refusal by the thousand daggers of the people rebelling in order to protect Junie, but in *Bérénice*, everything is interiorized; it is in the silence of his chamber that Titus hears the voice of Rome prohibiting his marriage.

11. A later essay in *Répertoire V* bears the title “La Ville comme texte.”

The city, human embodiment of the tragic gods, precludes human happiness by forbidding the marriage: this explains Jacques Revel's denial of love.

(Je me retenais pour ne pas m'approcher d'elle, pour ne pas trop laisser transparaître le plaisir que j'éprouve à la regarder, à lui parler, l'intérêt qu'elle m'inspire de plus en plus, cet intérêt qu'elle pourrait fort bien interpréter, si je n'y prenais pas garde, comme une sorte de passion, ce qu'il n'est pas, ce qu'il ne doit pas être, cet intérêt qui pourrait fort bien, si je n'y prends garde, se transformer en une véritable passion; heureusement, elle ne s'en doute pas encore; je crois que nous passerons le cap sans encombre). [117]

(I restrained myself from drawing near her, from showing too clearly the pleasure I find in looking at her and speaking to her, the increasing interest she inspires in me, an interest that she might easily interpret, if I were not careful, as a sort of passion, which it is not and must not be, an interest which might easily, if I am not careful, become a genuine passion; fortunately she suspects nothing yet; I think we shall round the cape in safety). [114]

Indeed, this mysterious self-denial, never explained, becomes understandable in the light of Racinian intertextuality: "moi, volontairement, je les néglige, j'évite cette Rose dont le parfum me tente et m'entête, cette Rose qui parle maintenant si délicieusement français" (149). [I deliberately neglect them now, I shun Rose with her teasing fragrance and her pretty way of speaking French" (146)].

After Rose is lost to Lucien, Revel writes in desperation: "je me défendais de l'aimer" (194). The self-imposed interdiction is the interiorized voice of Bleston, which once more intervenes in human feelings by condemning the narrator's attempt to rescue his former love. The closed restaurant where Revel superstitiously reads the doom of his romance with Ann is much more than a symbol of lost opportunity; the city itself is actively opposing the hero.

'C'est un simple retard auquel je n'ai que trop tendance à attacher de l'importance; mais ce serait jouer le jeu de la ville qui veut m'empêcher de vous atteindre, vous qui devez redevenir mon Ariane (oh! j'ai bien reconnu sa ruse!). . . . [240]

It is only a postponement, the importance of which I tend to overestimate, thus playing into the hands of Bleston, which is trying to keep me from you (I recognise its wiles!), from you who must become Ariadne for me once again . . . [232–33]

Ironically, the narrator convinces himself that it is more important to resume the writing in his diary than to spend the evening with Ann—and he writes about the documentary on “imperial Rome.” The Racinian reference casts Revel as a parody of Titus, since his sacrifice is not rewarded by an empire, but rather, by a loss of love he loses even the right to remain in the city. Therefore the self-denial of love amounts to a misinterpretation of the tragic conflict: far from awarding him the mastery of Bleston, the useless sacrifice seals the doom of the outcast. Revel’s failure is twofold: he fails as a lover, and as a writer, since he fails to close the circle of his diary. His writing becomes an alternative to his staying in the city—ultimately he is expelled as a narrator. Revel’s fate, in this sense, is more tragic than Titus’, and comes closer to that of Mithridates, which combines the themes of the outsider and of incest. “C’est peut-être dans *Mithridates* que l’aspect religieux de la ville de Rome, que sa relation avec les dieux apparaît de la façon la plus explicite” (“Racine et les dieux,” 47) [Perhaps the religious aspect of the city of Rome, its relationship to the gods, appears most explicitly in *Mithridates*].

Like Revel, Mithridates is an outsider, an enemy of a city which he vainly attempts to resist. The overwhelming power of Rome “apparaît comme une fatalité” over which victory is impossible to the extent that the planned war does not take place, just as in *L’Emploi du temps*, Revel’s narration is a year-long preparation of a decisive clash, or revelation, which does not happen. Mithridates is defeated, Butor writes, “parce que la dissension est dans son camp,” caused by the triangular rivalry around Monime. The competition for the same woman between the brothers and the father bears a close resemblance to Revel’s amorous competition, tinged with the tragic themes of incest, parricide and fratricide. The intertwining of rivalry and war ultimately crushes the hero before the city he had hoped to conquer. Mithridates’ failure as a lover causes his defeat as a warrior. In Revel’s case the betrayal of love becomes the very sign of his defeat against the city.

Racinian intertextuality permeates the novel through the double identification of Bleston with Athens and with Rome. Rome, however, is not only *Urbs*, the imperial city of Antiquity, but also the center of Catholicism. Racinian rebellion against the gods, in Butor’s view, ultimately extends to blasphemy against Catholicism. Mithridates’ protest against Rome, whose destiny “is so linked to the establishment of the Catholic religion, as was perfectly felt, not only throughout the Middle Ages, but also under the reign of Louis XIV” (50), echoes the protest against the cruelty of human sacrifice in *Iphigenia*:

Dans l'esprit du spectateur nourri d'histoire sainte, un tel thème ne peut manquer de réveiller certains souvenirs: celui du sacrifice d'Isaac par Abraham pour commencer, mais aussi, plus sournoisement, celui d'un autre sacrifice humain dont celui-ci, selon les Pères, était la figure, et qui, non seulement se commémore, mais, nous assure le dogme catholique, se renouvelle, se perpétue chaque jour sur les autels de toutes les églises. Le caractère extrêmement scabreux de ce meurtre n'a certes pas échappé à Racine. [51]

In the mind of the spectator, impregnated with sacred history, such a theme cannot fail to evoke certain memories: first of all Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, but also, more insidiously, another human sacrifice of which, according to the Fathers of the Church, it was the figure, a sacrifice which not only is commemorated, but, Catholic dogma assures us, is perpetuated every day on the altar of every church. Racine was certainly not unaware of the extremely shocking connotations of this murder.

Indeed, Butor calls the Jewish god in *Athalie* "singulièrement cruel, singulièrement sanguinaire et retors" (59) [uncommonly cruel, uncommonly bloody and wily].

Butor sees in Racine a violent anti-Catholic attack, to the extent that it caused the poet's downfall by the failure of his two most scandalous plays, *Phèdre* and *Athalie* (60). This interpretation appears to have an obvious thematic link with the two novels contemporary to the essay, in which the failure of the characters is in part due to their rejection of religion. Both for Delmont in *La Modification* and for Revel in *L'Emploi du temps* personal failure is associated with cultural incomprehension. Delmont fails (indeed, refuses) to acknowledge the Catholic heritage of Rome; Revel, under the misleading influence of an insufficient guide, George Burton, fails to understand the beauty and meaning of the New Cathedral.¹² Symbolically, he loses Ann to James Jenkins, the grandson of the New Cathedral's sculptor.

Thus the unifying thread in Butor's interpretation of Racine (rebellion against divinity, incarnated both in ancient mythology and in the City's oppressive power) becomes itself an object of interpretation in the novel. Revel's tragic flaw, culminating in existential failure, is hermeneutical deficiency, a lack of intertextual awareness.

Butor's analysis of Racinian "blasphemy" ultimately stresses the necessity to translate and superimpose references. Mythology, as

12. In this respect, the fact that Revel "forgets" to visit Saint Jude and the Jewish neighborhood is to be interpreted as another symbol of his cultural limitations: he fails to take into account the Jewish element of Bleston's soul.

Butor interprets it, is a metaphor; Racine is cast as a translator, both literally and figuratively.¹³ The status of Racinian intertextuality in *L'Emploi du temps* corresponds to a major concern of Butor's work: the necessity for the artist of dealing with the "mythological disorder" of our age, caused by the encounter of civilizations.¹⁴ Greek mythology in Racine's plays, says Butor, is a metaphor for Christian faith; meaning is disclosed within a maze of echoes and mirrors. Revel's struggle is a hermeneutic attempt to grasp the city's meaning, fragmented like a jigsaw puzzle. In Butor's work, writes Roland Barthes, "c'est en *essayant* entre eux les fragments d'événements que le sens naît"¹⁵ [it is by *trying* together the fragments of events that meaning is created].

The dialogue between mythology and Christianity in Racine is continued and amplified in the novel by the dialogue between mythological and biblical allusions; references to Racine are one of the paths of the intertextual labyrinth which the reader, following the hero, must explore, but without the hope of emerging from it like Theseus, for the labyrinth of meaning is infinite. In *Passing Time*, as in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, "real" references (Racine, for example) and "fictitious" references (*The Bleston Murder*, *Cain's Window*, the Theseus tapestries) interact on the same level and become indistinguishable, endlessly creating "des champs de métaphores réciproques"¹⁶ [fields of reciprocal metaphors].

13. By contrast, the insistence on Revel's incapacity to master English shows him to be an antimodel.

14. "Le roman et la poésie," *Répertoire II* (Paris: Minuit, 1964), 17.

15. "Littérature et discontinu," *Essais critiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 186. Translation mine.

16. "Les Oeuvres d'art imaginaires chez Proust," *Répertoire II*, 268.