A STUDY IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDEA
ON HERO RESPONSIBILITY IN TRAGEDY WITH EMPHASIS ON
A COMPARISON OF THE GREEKS AND ROMANTICS

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Tragedy is a very important literary form. It is brought about by a mistake in judgement on the part of the tragic hero. The hero must have a fatal flaw or he will be too pure and inhuman to be considered a real character. Very often this fatal flaw is pride. Usually tragedies seriously treat life-and-death problems. Then the reason there is tragedy is because the hero does not merely passively endure. However, and this is important, the tragic hero does come to realize that he has done wrong. There is a discovery through which he gains self-knowledge. After he knows that he has been wrong, he accepts moral responsibility for the tragedy that he has caused. He knows that the suffering was brought about by his decision. The choice to do what he did was originally his alone.

But this acceptance does not uniformly follow in all periods of drama. Maurice Maeterlinck, a nineteenth-century dramatist, wrote the play Pelléas et Mélisande in 1892. However, in this drama, one will not be able to find moral responsibility. Instead, the play presents "...the tragic conflict man wages against his apparently antagonistic, secret doom."¹ In creating this drama, the author is trying

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to suggest ". . . the eternal conflict between frail, shivering, even puerile human creatures, on one side, and cruel Fate, which lies in ambush to ensnare and destroy them, on the other."² This drama tells the story of Golaud who marries a young girl named Melisande. However, she falls in love with Golaud's younger brother, Pelléas. When Golaud finally realizes what has happened he kills his brother and wounds Melisande who dies a short time later of a broken heart. Golaud does not blame himself. He rather blames Fate or destiny—that unknown force that lies in ambush. He does not accept moral responsibility for what he has caused. Since there is no discovery, there is no self-knowledge, even though it was he alone who made the original choice. He has no idea of accepting responsibility for what happened: "Ce n'est pas ma faute, ce n'est pas ma faute!"³ Even his grandfather says to him: "C'est terrible, mais ce n'est pas votre faute. . . ."⁴ This idea, however, of not accepting moral responsibility is an idea almost exclusively peculiar to the nineteenth century. It is completely divorced from the idea of responsibility in classic Greek tragedy.

Classic Greek tragedy is patterned after Aristotle's laws of tragedy. According to these laws, the Plot is the

²Ibid., p. 61.
³Maurice Maeterlinck, Pelleas et Melisande, p. 71.
⁴Ibid., p. 72.
first essential of tragedy; characters come second. It is this second essential which reveals the moral purpose of the agents. As was said above, the tragic personage cannot be too good and pure, neither can he be completely evil. Rather they should be good, appropriate, like the reality, and consistent and the same throughout. If the tragic personages do not fit these criteria, he will not be able to evoke pity and fear from the audience. And as has been said, there must be a discovery, a change from ignorance to knowledge.

This discovery and acceptance of responsibility is very important. But beginning with the Greeks and coming up to the present, this idea takes many different forms. It is the author of this paper's point of view that this idea of responsibility is completely lacking in nineteenth-century drama, especially in the romantic era. Rather than blame themselves, the romantic heroes blame the unknown quantity that has been given many different names throughout literary history. Beginning with complete responsibility in the classic Greeks, this idea forms an interesting trajectory as it evolves and travels through the periods of literature. It is with this evolution that this paper will be concerned. Special emphasis will be placed on the comparison between the complete acceptance and the complete lack of ac-

6 Ibid., p. 360.
ceptance as seen in the Greeks and the Romantics.
GREEK CLASSIC TRAGEDY

According to Aristotle, there is tragedy in the action involving a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just but "... whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgement, of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity; e.g., Oedipus..." The change in the hero's fortunes must be from "...happiness to misery; and the cause of it must be not in any depravity, but in some great error on his part; ...").¹ Tragedy is centered in the hero's relations "...to his total environment, his position in the universe, the ultimate meaning of his life."² Tragedy must also be concerned with timeless, universal problems of life and death—the tragic story of Man.³ The tragic spirit is pessimistic.⁴

"...the hero of Greek tragedy is usually a proud man who suffers because of his pride; yet he is a hero and what makes him a hero is just this pride."⁵ He commits himself to a tragic choice. In his capacity for making this commitment, he is heroic. He is also heroic in accepting its full

¹ Justin D. Kaplan, The Pocket Aristotle, p. 357.
³ Ibid., p. 16. ⁴ Ibid., p. 17. ⁵ Ibid., p. 18.
Aristotle does not make room for fate in his laws of tragedy. There is not a word about fate in his remarks on tragedy.\footnote{Ibid., p. 22.} The hero must take responsibility. "Fate is given a name, and the elements are shown in the frivolous and reassuring mask of the gods. But mythology is only a fable to help us endure."\footnote{Gilbert Murray, \textit{Ten Greek Plays}, p. xv - xvi.} Fate has been essentially the same throughout literature. It has been the unknown force on which to blame the tragic actions. This fate has taken many forms. Outside and within man is this "otherness" of the world. "Call it what you will: a hidden or malevolent God, blind fate, the solicitations of hell, or the brute fury of our animal blood. It waits for us in ambush at the crossroads. It mocks us and destroys us."\footnote{George Steiner, \textit{The Death of Tragedy}, p. 5.}

Fate has been given many shapes throughout different periods of literature. The shape depends on the temper and beliefs of the people. The Greeks gave this unknown force a whole realm of invented myths and gods. They could always blame a tragic action on the will and wrath of some god or goddess. To the Neoclassic Racine, this element was a Christian god. Jean Racine was a Jansenist with very strict beliefs. He believed that man has a responsibility to do good,
not for any reward, but for love of God. Racine's writing is greatly affected by his Jansenist belief. He was a Christian classic. To the Romantics this force or unknown quantity was nature, providence, the evilness of society, or anything else they could blame for the tragic situation in which they found themselves. There was always some shape of fate for the hero to blame. To the moderns, fate is many different things. There are so many theories one would be foolish to try to sum them into one particular idea.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, man was making important discoveries in the realm of science. These discoveries affected the realm of ideas. These ideas affected the concept of responsibility in modern literature. Darwin and his idea of hereditary influence gave writers an excuse on which they could lay the responsibility of a tragic situation. Freud presented the idea that environment influences the way man acts. This gave dramatists another excuse for wrong doing. Biochemistry was another realm which offered an excuse to man. If a man has trouble physically; if his glands do not function properly or there is some chemical imbalance then he is not responsible for his actions. Some of the modern dramatists are affected by these ideas which attribute no responsibility at all to the hero. The fact of whether or not a modern dramatist creates tragic heroes who admit responsibility depends on the author and by what he is influenced. These new ideas in the realms of sociology,
psychology, and biochemistry had and have an important effect.

Fate, or whatever one calls it, did not cause the tragic action to commence. This is the importance. As has already been stated, Aristotle placed the cause in an error on the part of the hero. Therefore the hero himself is at fault. Fate may have helped the drama to unwind, but it is the flaw in the hero which started the tragic action. The Greek hero accepts this responsibility. Through some sort of discovery or self-knowledge, he realizes that he alone has been at fault, and he accepts the responsibility for his own acts. Racine's Neoclassic hero accepts the responsibility but not in such an open manner. He is filled with more passion and shame due to the Christian element. The Romantic hero does not accept this responsibility at all. He is always ready to blame the tragedy on something else. He never takes time to examine the fact that the tragedy has occurred through some fault of his. Since the idea of hero responsibility in modern drama depends on the individual dramatist, no one generalized theory of this period will be presented. Rather, the modern period will be considered through the ideas expressed by Henry Millon de Montherlant and Jean Anouilh. Through these writers, responsibility takes a different shape. There is self-knowledge involved but not responsibility. The heroes are presented with a choice. They may choose which way to take. Nothing is predestined. They have free will. At no time is there a pre-
vention of their changing their minds in the drama. But rather than choosing what is morally right, they choose what is the expedient thing to do. This idea will be explained and exemplified in the chapter on Modern Tragic Drama.

First of all classic Greek tragedy needs to be considered. Since no one has come up with anything new to add to the tragic laws of Aristotle, his definition should be given. "Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery."\(^{10}\) Joseph Wood Krutch offers the definition that:

Tragedy arises...when a people fully aware of the calamities of small life is nevertheless serenely confident of the greatness of man, whose passions and supreme fortitude are revealed when one of these calamities overtakes him.\(^{11}\)

Also in tragedy there is a clash. According to Frye, this clash comes as a contradiction of the idea that human values and standards are in opposition to the situations in real life that a man may encounter.\(^{12}\) This collision originates in a discrepancy between the hero's conduct and its consequences—between the favourable expectations raised by his action and the deplorable results that actually ensue from it.\(^{13}\)

It is also due to the discrepancy between his sense of fact

\(^{10}\)Justin D. Kaplan, The Pocket Aristotle, p. 349.


\(^{12}\)Proser Hall Frye, Romance and Tragedy, p. 98.

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 108.
and his conception of justice and right reason. 14

The Classic Greek conception of life itself has a great deal to do with the interpretation of the literature. Greek life is "... an illustration of moral principles, whose main interest is human and rational." 15 The Greek tragic poets assert that there are forces outside the governance of reason or justice which can shape or destroy their lives. 16 Here once again is that unknown element known as Fate. The gods and goddesses of Greek mythology sometimes provide a very convenient "scapegoat." Many times they didn't realize until too late that the error was in themselves. Then again the only flaw that the hero may have is his unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be "... a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status." 17 One can also see in Greek tragedy their love of a balanced score sheet, "... proving that in a well-ordered universe good balances evil and harmony prevails." 18 The Greeks also felt that in order to preserve the moral consistency of the world, the heroes must impute a moral accountability to their principles. "... man is answerable for what he does as well as for what he intends." 19

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14 Ibid., p. 95.  
15 Ibid., p. 51.  
16 Ibid., p. 6-7.  
19 Frye, op. cit., p. 173.
felt that the initiators were responsible for the act. 20 Therefore, the whole Greek conception of life illustrates the fact or law that Aristotle was trying to lay down for tragedy that the hero must take responsibility; that the tragedy is due to an error in judgement on his part.

The idea of hero responsibility, in order to be proven, must be shown in some of the Greek tragedies. The three greatest Greek dramatists were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. First of all one should consider Aeschylus. He can be called the pioneer. Although he sometimes wrote plays with happy endings, he is still a great tragedian, and the idea of responsibility can be found in his dramas.

Bound by a somewhat uncompromising conception of human responsibility to society, Aeschylus emphasizes the blood-guilt motive and its attendant vengeance, the inexorable dictates of situation and circumstance. 21

In the story of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound, the protagonist is Prometheus. He is a Titan and a divine power who was in existence before Zeus established himself as dictator of the gods. Prometheus had helped Zeus gain his power and had given fire to mankind. He had stolen this fire from heaven from the gods' perogatives. For this he was seized by Zeus, and this is where the play begins. Prometheus is advised to submit to the powers, but he rejects this

20 Ibid., p. 231.

21 L. R. Lind, Ten Greek Plays in Contemporary Translations, p. xix.
advice. He is strong in the possession of a secret. He
knows Zeus will, unless warned, make a marriage from which
will come a son mightier than the father, and Prometheus is
determined not to reveal the secret. 22 There are other ele-
ments added to the story, but the main point is the fact that
Prometheus is filled with pride.

By all human standards Zeus is behaving monstrous-
ly. Yet it is a fact that nature, and what the Greeks
called 'necessity' do not proceed in accordance with
human standards of justice and morality and, so Aes-
chylus seems to suggest, a failure to recognise this
is a dangerous and unjustifiable form of pride. 23

Though Prometheus is proud, he is heroic. Therefore, since
he is heroic and has the tragic flaw of pride, he can be con-
sidered a tragic hero according to Aristotle. But more im-
portant than that, he accepts responsibility. Aeschylus
makes no attempt to "gloze" his protagonist's fault.

Unmistakably as he sympathizes with Prometheus, it
is significant that he carefully refrains from justi-
fying him. On the contrary, he appears on one occa-
sion at least to have put an admission of guilt in-
to his mouth--'I erred, I shall not deny it.' Aeschy-
lus, Prometheus Bound, p. 268. 24

In this admission of guilt, Prometheus is clearly accepting
responsibility for the tragic action of the drama.

Of the three above Greek tragedians named, Sophocles
best illustrates the proposed idea of responsibility of the

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22 Ibid., p. 3. 23 Ibid., p. 4.
tragic hero.

To Sophocles, for instance, the course of human events would seem to have been regulated exclusively in accordance with some abstract principle of absolute justice, which provided automatically for the correction or suppression of the offender in proportion to the gravity and danger of his guilt. An offense once committed, it was as impossible for the offender to evade the moral responsibility by pleading the purity of his intentions as to escape the physical consequences; indeed, they were one and the same.25

There is also the element of fate in Sophocles. To him, it is fate which insures the moral order; it is fate which puts the moral order through.26 It is the tragic hero who temporarily upsets the moral order, and, in time, he accepts the responsibility. But fate is the force which causes the moral order to persist.

Sophocles’ drama *Oedipus Rex* is the story of Oedipus, king of Thebes. In order to rid the city of the plague, Oedipus is told by the gods to find the murderer of Laius, former ruler of the city, and avenge his death. Teiresias, the blind seer, warns Oedipus not to pursue his search or he will be driven from his land, and he will bring ill to his children. The seer also predicts the fate of Oedipus. But Oedipus is very hotheaded. Rather than listen to Teiresias, he gets very angry with him. He is also suspicious of his brother-in-law, Creon. As the seer predicts, Oedipus finds out that it was he who had killed Laius, his father, and he

25 Ibid., p. 52. 26 Ibid., p. 117.
who had married his own mother, Jocasta. She hangs herself, and Oedipus blinds himself with the brooch pins from her clothes. He leaves Thebes to die. 27

Oedipus is often considered the victim of fate. But one should examine which moves first, the hero or his fate. He killed an old man he should have revered, in a dispute over the right of way. Thus unknowingly, he slew his own father. 28 This hot-tempered, proud young man can hardly be called a victim of fate when it was he who began the tragic action. It was his fault, and no one else's. After he realizes what he has done, he admits that it was his fault, and he accepts the responsibility for his action. As he is striking his eyes, he shouts these words, "No more shall you behold the evils I have suffered and done." 29 Again when talking about his mother and father he says, "What I have done to them is too great for a noose to expiate." 30 Oedipus has never been surpassed as a figure of human responsibility. 31

For the Greeks, the idea of responsibility must be fused with the idea of self-knowledge. They must go hand-in-hand. This may be seen in Oedipus Rex. Oedipus realizes

27 Sophocles, Oedipus Rex, Ten Greek Plays in Contemporary Translations, ed. L. R. Lind.
28 Gilbert Murray, Ten Greek Plays, p. xv - xvi.
29 Sophocles, op. cit., p. 147.
30 Ibid., p. 149.
31 Frye, op. cit., p. 142.
his flaw, is aware of it, recognizes it; therefore, he has self-knowledge. And it is through this knowledge of his own flaw that he is able to accept the responsibility for the tragic situation which he has caused by his wrong-doing. But before he can have faced his responsibility, he must have discovered the flaw. There must be a discovery. There must be self-knowledge. The tragic hero must know that he has done wrong. It will be shown later in this paper that a tragic hero can know that he has done the wrong thing and yet not take the responsibility for what he has caused. However, this idea is not true with the Greek tragic heroes of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Both Prometheus and Oedipus knew that they had done wrong and that they had been at fault. But the important thing is that they both accepted the responsibility.

In Sophocles' Antigone one can see another example of the protagonist accepting responsibility. This protagonist is Creon, ruler of Thebes and uncle of Antigone. Antigone and Ismene are the daughters of Oedipus. Their brothers, Polynices and Eteocles, were given joint power to the throne after Oedipus was driven out of Thebes. The brothers were to rule Thebes singly for one year in alternate succession. However, at the end of one year Eteocles refused to give up the throne to his brother. Polynices came out of exile and sought to destroy the city. In the battle, both brothers were killed, and Creon became king. Creon buried Eteocles in honor, but he left Polynices to rot. He also published
an edict proclaiming that anyone who tried to give Polynices burial or rites would be put to death. Here is where the story begins. Antigone is determined to give honor to her brother by burying him—even against her uncle's edict. Antigone is the fiancee of Creon's son Haemon, and she knows she will lose much if she goes through with her task. However, she feels there are higher laws than man-made laws, and she must bury her brother.

The inevitable happens. She does give Polynices the burial rites, and she is caught. Creon makes no exception for Antigone, and he has her buried alive in a sealed tomb. She hangs herself by the cord she had around her waist. But Haemon, unknowingly was also sealed in the tomb. His moans are heard and the tomb is torn open. Haemon stabs himself. When Creon's wife, Eurydice, learns of Haemon's death, she kills herself. Creon is left alone. The real tragedy, in the end, has happened to Creon himself.  

In this drama Antigone appealed to the higher laws. Creon, however, appealed to the worldly laws and spoke like a statesman—as did Oedipus. The Greek Creon's devotion to his city was narrow, short-sighted, and suicidal. He was willing to sacrifice every advantage for this devotion. He was even willing to endure Antigone's contempt.

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32 Sophocles, Antigone, Ten Greek Plays in Contemporary Translations, ed. L. R. Lind.
33 Murray, op. cit., p. xv.
34 Frye, op. cit., p. 143.
Antigone had full knowledge of what would happen to her if she defied the edict of her uncle. But she also knew that she was right in her defiance. She knew that the moral laws are more important than the worldly man-made laws. Creon would only disrupt the moral order for a while, then according to Sophocles, fate would put the condition of things back into its moral order. Teiresias, the blind seer who tried to warn Oedipus, also tried to warn Creon. He tried to tell him that it was his deeds that had brought a sickness on the State. It was because he had allowed the birds and dogs to feed on the corpse of Polynices that the altars of their hearths had been polluted. The seer told Creon that all men are liable to err, but that these ills could be healed by wisdom. But Creon was too stubborn. He would not permit the burial. His fatal flaw was that of pride, stubbornness, and unwillingness to submit to the higher laws. After everyone dear to him had died and he was left alone, he knew that he had been wrong. He was filled with self-knowledge. But he also accepted the responsibility and said it was his fault, "I cannot escape the guilt of these things, it rests on no other of mortal kind. I, only I, am the slayer, wretched that I am--I own the truth."\(^{35}\) In accepting the guilt, he accepts the responsibility.

Euripides is the final Greek dramatist who will be considered. He has been left to the last because he is

different in many respects from Aeschylus and Sophocles. He has been called a rebel. He "...serves as a kind of transition between the serious drama of ancient and modern times." He began to shift from moral to psychological problems, from quality of actions to characters of men and activities of nature. Because of this shift to psychological problems he has perhaps more to say to the modern mind because his own so closely resembles it, and because he is more realistic. On one side of his literary being he is only an adapter of Greek tragedy. But he "...has so little appreciation of the morality of his predecessors that he tries to evade it, whenever he can, by some...ex machina interference."  
Responsibility and self-knowledge are much harder to find in Euripides' *Hippolytus* than in the dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles. This is because of the fact that Euripides represents a transition. His social and psychological dramas are very modern in some aspects. Self-knowledge is not as clear cut as in his predecessors. Even though self-knowledge is hard to find, *Hippolytus* is not a tragedy of fate. *Hippolytus* is the story of Hippolytus, the bastard son of Theseus, king of Athens. In the drama, Hippolytus gives all his devotion to Artemis, goddess of chastity. He pays no attention to the claims of Aphrodite, goddess of love.

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37 Ibid., p. 155.
38 Ibid., p. 175.
39 Donald Sutherland and Hazel E. Barnes, *Hippolytus in Drama and Myth*, p. 99.
He says that she was the worst goddess and he spurns brides and beds of love. Consequently, Aphrodite vows to avenge his slights to her. She causes Phaedra, wife of Theseus, to fall in love with Hippolytus. Phaedra's old nurse goes to Hippolytus and tells him of Phaedra's love for him and proposes an affair. The thought of this sort of impure love absolutely repulses him, and he goes into an harangue about the evils of wives. Because she has been turned down by Hippolytus, and because her pride has suffered a blow, she hangs herself leaving a note tied to her hand telling Theseus that Hippolytus made advances to her while he (Theseus) was away. Not even stopping to question what she has said, Theseus has a furious argument with his son. Hippolytus does not try to defend himself by telling the truth. The king then orders his son to get out of the kingdom. He pronounces him alien to the land. Theseus had called on Poseidon, god of the sea, to kill his son, Hippolytus. Poseidon had once promised three curses to Theseus. As a result of this call to Poseidon for vengeance, Hippolytus is killed. A sea monster scares his horses, and he is dragged to his death by the horses. Artemis then tells Theseus the truth. While Hippolytus is dying, he forgives his father.

One might think, after reading this play, that Hippolytus is an innocent victim of fate. However...

...the duty that he follows is but his own inclination in disguise. So warmly has he made himself a party to the traditional feud between two goddesses that he can not refrain from taunting Aphrodi-
te as a fly-by-night. Nor is Artemis' threat to have her revenge on Aphrodite at some future time by the slaying of Adonis or otherwise, particularly reassuring for the permanent establishment of righteousness.

"Thus it was in reality Hippolytus' self-righteous arrogance and Phaedra's pride of reputation which destroyed them. . ." Hippolytus is unpleasantly self-centered. He is thoroughly enjoying the fact that he is the center of attention of two goddesses. He does nothing to stop the feud. In this he is at fault for what happens. He can be recognized as criminal with respect to some of the most fundamental laws; the law of temperance, and the law of "...Know thyself and Think as a mortal." Hippolytus certainly did not think as a mortal. He considered himself to be so pure as to be above mortals. It is his conduct, not his motive, which renders him obnoxious. His fatal flaw which led to the offense which he committed unthinkingly consisted in his

...exclusive and hence excessive cult of Artemis to the neglect and disparagement of Aphrodite. Not that his devotion to Artemis is blameworthy in itself; but Aphrodite has her claims also.

The tragedy arises from his inability or unwillingness to

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40 Frye, op. cit., p. 154.
41 Barnes, op. cit., p. 82.
42 Frye, op. cit., p. 229.
43 Ibid., p. 232.
satisfy all just claims.\textsuperscript{44} One of Hippolytus' faults was indiscipline. Frye suggests that perhaps the reason one fails to recognize this fault today is because moderation has lost its authority.\textsuperscript{45} The crime of Phaedra was not her impure love for Hippolytus nor her suicide, but it was her false accusation of Hippolytus.\textsuperscript{46}

As has been previously stated, Euripides had little appreciation of the morality of his predecessors. Hippolytus did not have the same moral sense that Prometheus or Creon had. In one place, he says, "This, this is I, devout and reverent, this, this is I, above all others virtuous."\textsuperscript{47} He says this while he is dying. Because he does not feel the same moral sense as his predecessors, he feels no moral responsibility for what had happened. He may realize or know that he has done wrong, but does not admit it. In this way, the drama of Euripides is very modern. This will be shown in more detail in the discussion of Anouilh. Rather than put any admission of guilt into the mouth of Hippolytus, Euripides chooses rather to have him "killed off" by the sea monster in an \textit{ex machina} interference. In this way Euripides is admitting that Hippolytus was wrong. Why else would he have caused him to die in the drama? He would not have killed an innocent person. It all comes back to the Greek

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 233.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Barnes, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 89.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Sutherland, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 61.
\end{itemize}
love of a balanced score-sheet. If Hippolytus had not been at fault, he would not have been killed. Oedipus was wrong in his pride, and he ended tragically. In this, there is balance. Creon was wrong in his pride and stubbornness, and he ended tragically. In this there is balance. And Hippolytus was wrong in his egocentrism and arrogance, and he ended tragically. In this there is balance. The self-knowledge and responsibility is much more subtle in Euripides, but it is there—not in the mouth of Hippolytus, but it is there in his death. This is a new development in the idea of hero responsibility, and it will be developed later in the history of drama. However, in the course of the evolution of drama, responsibility will take other shapes. The idea of responsibility as seen in Aeschylus and Sophocles will be revived once again in the Neoclassic Racine. However, Racine's drama has many differences. Then the idea of responsibility will be completely lost in the Romantic dramatist. It will once again come to light with the modern writers Anouilh and Montherlant. But as far as the Greeks are concerned, the tragic hero is definitely morally responsible for the tragedy that occurs because of his tragic flaw. This is the Greek balanced score-sheet and their human and rational conceptions of life.
NEOCLASSIC TRAGEDY

The next period of tragedy to be considered is that of the Neoclassic drama. It is because of the plays of the French dramatist, Jean Racine that one can speak of a recovery of tragedy.¹ Tragedy had practically been lost between the time of the classic Greek tragedians and the seventeenth century French classic dramatists. This tragedy which was revived during the seventeenth century became known as Neoclassic tragedy. This new drama incorporated the classic laws of tragedy which had been outlined by Aristotle. But this drama was different too. It was a fusion of two cultures—the Greek culture and the French culture. This fusion with all its complicated discrepancies and contradictions is what constitutes the peculiarity of the neo-classic tragedy.² One of the neoclassical regulations of drama was the tendency to apply rational rather than imaginative standards. Babbitt states that this is perhaps the most striking feature.³ The

¹Will G. Moore, French Classical Literature, p. 70.
²Frye, op. cit., p. 158.
moderns, however, have only the task of discovering details and the luxury of refinement. The ancient tragedians did not leave much else for them to do because the laws of tragedy dealt with the universal. They applied to broad ethical truths.

The French during this period took the form of the Greek theater. They understood and imitated the simplicity and economy of means of the classic art. But they did not take the spirit. The spirit depends on the age itself in which the tragedy is written. The spirit of the drama is a reflection of the spirit of the people at that particular time. But the main purpose is to discuss Racine—his contributions to neo-classic tragedy and, more important, his relation to the idea of this thesis—hero responsibility.

Racine's principal contributions to the revival of classic tragedy in modern times were:

..the discovery of a congruous simplicity of treatment by the segregation of a synthetic or unitary action, and what is less momentous, the restoration of dramatic relief by the application of lyricism to tragic dialogue.

The reason it is so important to show how Racine resembles

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4 Frye, op. cit., p. 197.
and differs from the classic Greeks is to establish how he relates to their idea on hero responsibility. Racine comes perhaps nearest to imitating antiquity. He made the unities of time and place a dramatic reality instead of a theatrical fiction. He is reasonable and logical, even in the representation of passion's excess. He is realistic. In the fiery, passionate scenes of Racine's dramas, one is able to see the influences of Euripides. In his simplicity of plot, Racine is also classic. There is only one principal action in his plays. There are no secondary plots and subplots. Also his characters express universality. They are human, and in this humanity, they are universal. Through his characters, he wants to follow Aristotle's classic idea.

"Il veut exciter non plus comme Corneille l'admiration pour des héros parfaits, ni l'indignation ou l'horreur pour des monstres tout à fait odieux, mais la pitié et la terreur devant des êtres appartenant à la même humanité que nous tous."

...Ses héros sont "Êtres faibles, par conséquent, dominés par les passions ou tyrannisés par les circonstances; esclaves d'eux-mêmes, esclaves d'autrui également:...."

His leading characters are victims of their impulses,

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7Ibid., p. 175. 8Ibid., p. 207.

9Morris Bishop, A Survey of French Literature, the Middle Ages to 1800, p. 158.

which bring them into crime and disaster.\textsuperscript{11} Because the heroes of Racine are more passionate, the action of his dramas is internal, centered on these conflicting passions of the protagonist.\textsuperscript{12}

Racine reaches back to the Greek classic ideal of drama for many of the forms of his dramas. But in other ways he is preparing the way for the Romantics who were to follow. He has even been called the father of modern drama. One way in which he prepared the way was his language "... his characters, particularly his lovers, use the formulas of gallantry, they are burned with love's fires, pierced with his shafts."\textsuperscript{13} Also unlike the Classics his love is romantic and at times chivalric. For example, one can look at Phèdre. Racine has altered the whole sense of ancient legend by making Hippolytus sigh for the charms of Aricia.\textsuperscript{14} Another thing that was different, according to Babbitt, in Racine and in seventeenth century French tragedy, was the politeness and refined social convention. He also says that Racine was prone to identify human nature with forms of human nature peculiar to his own time.\textsuperscript{15} But then it is this very fact which makes neo-classic tragedy what it is. Again it may

\textsuperscript{11}Bishop, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{12}Muller, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 226.
\textsuperscript{13}Bishop, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{14}Babbitt, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 482.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 481.
be seen that each new age of tragedy is bound to reflect its times.

But Racine was greatly affected by another tradition. This tradition was strong enough to change and affect his whole life. This tradition was the Christian tradition—more specifically—the Jansenist tradition. Racine was raised in this tradition, and he, therefore, united in himself the two traditions of the Hellenic and Christian. It is because of this Jansenist tradition that one can see differences in Racine's dramas and the Hellenic dramas. It was this Christian tradition that caused him to completely leave the theater after he had written *Phèdre.*

One needed to have a tremendous sense of moral responsibility to follow the precepts of Jansenism. According to this tradition, man could be saved by God's grace alone.\textsuperscript{16} He could seek this grace by confession. Discipline was also an important factor in the Jansenist tradition. Because of this influence, Racine saw no hope for humanity. The influence of these ideas can plainly be seen in Racine's *Phèdre.* The fatality of Phèdre's passion "...is accounted for by the pitiless logic of Jansenism, which denied man free will and made salvation wholly dependent upon divine grace."\textsuperscript{17} And this terrible destructive power of elemental passion is

\textsuperscript{16}Helen Lamb, "The Jansenist Influence in Contemporary French Fiction as Shown in the work of Francois Mauriac," p.489.

\textsuperscript{17}Muller, op. cit., p. 227.

*Twelve years later in 1689 he returned to dramatic composition at the request of Madame de Maintenon. It is then that he wrote two religious dramas: Esther and Athalie—his last.
also like the tragedies of Euripides. Therefore, one can see the fusion of the two cultures.

Racine felt that the hero had to provoke both compassion and terror. He could be neither all bad nor all good. He was merely caught in a trap of circumstances. This, once again, is back to the old idea of Fate. But for Racine, this fate was the Jansenist God. One finds the following ideas in the preface to Phèdre:

En effet, Phèdre n'est ni tout à fait coupable, ni tout à fait innocente; elle est engagée par sa destinée et par la colère des dieux, dans une passion illégitime, dont elle a horreur toute la première; elle fait tous ses efforts pour la surmonter; elle aime mieux se laisser mourir que de la déclarer à personne; et lorsqu'elle est forcé de la découvrir, elle en parle avec une confusion qui fait bien voir que son crime est plutôt une punition des dieux qu'un mouvement de sa volonté.  

18 Félix Lemaistre, Théâtre Complet de J. Racine, p. 489.

The story of Phèdre is based on the same Greek legend on which Euripides based his drama, Hippolytus. But in Racine's drama, as the title suggests, the emphasis has shifted from Hippolytus to Phaedra. In this drama, Hippolytus is not responsible for the plight in which he is. Just as in Euripides' Hippolytus, Artemis and Aphrodite presided over human action; so here Racine uses Venus and Neptune. In this story, Phèdre is a middle-aged woman who has struggled for a long time against her humiliating passion, even to pretending hatred for Hippolytus. She only reveals this passion
after she has heard false rumors of her husband, Thésée's death. She is concerned with her reputation and the effect her passion might have on her children. Her fatal steps are instigated by her nurse. Phèdre allows her nurse to put the blame on Hippolyte after he scorns her and after Thésée has come back. As in Euripides' drama, the stepson refuses to reveal the truth and to accuse Phèdre. Phèdre, tortured by remorse, asks her husband to forgive his son. Thésée refuses. Phèdre indirectly hears from him that Hippolyte claims he loved Aricie. When she learns this, it excites her furious jealousy. Aricie wants Hippolyte to justify himself, but he refuses to reveal this insult to his father. Aricie finally reveals to Thésée that Hippolyte is innocent. Thésée sends for Oenone, Phèdre's nurse, but she has drowned herself. Thésée at last suspects the truth. Then a messenger gives an account of Hippolyte's death. His death was brought about by the same type of ex machina interference which had caused the death of Hippolytus of Euripides. Out of shame and moral responsibility, Phèdre finally confesses and dies. She has poisoned herself.

One could assume by the above preface to the play and by the play itself that there is no responsibility in Racine's Phèdre. But this preface was written after the play had failed, and after he had renounced the theater. It is true that Phèdre poisons herself as a way out of an intolerable relationship, and she tries to put all the blame on the gods and her nurse. But there is self-knowledge and responsi-
bility. However, it assumes a different form because of the underlying Jansenism. His type of love is totally un-Greek. His women are different. They don't accept their fate as the Greek women did.

The responsibility and self-knowledge in this play are felt by Phèdre more out of shame than from any real feeling that is was all her fault. Her sense of shame is the Jansenism influence. In the very beginning Phèdre had the choice. Her fate was not all predestined. It was she alone who made the initial choice to admit her lustful love for Hippolyte. It was she who let herself fall in love and be carried away by her passions. Fate carried the play along and eventually brought moral justice back to order by her death. But initially, she had the choice. However, Racine's drama is much more fatalistic:

...There is an evolution from an initial state in which Phèdre, because of her sense of guilt, wishes to die, to a final state in which her guilt reaches unbearable proportions and she must die.20

But her guilt is there. She has self-knowledge. She knows she has done wrong. But like Euripides' Hippolytus, she does not come right out and say that it is her fault. However, there is an acceptance of her responsibility in the fact that Phèdre dies by her own hand. In this play it is the Jansenism:

From the very beginning Phèdre's guilt is there. In lines 182-183 she speaks of her shame: "Oenone, la rougeur me couvre le visage: Je te laisse trop voir mes honteuses douleurs." She speaks of shame all through the play, but she never truly repents. Finally when death is the only ultimate consequence, she confesses to Thésée in the true Jansenist form. Since the Jansenists felt the only way to be saved was by the grace of God, she was confessing in order to be saved. She assumes the guilt that had been wrongly placed upon Hippolyte: "Les moments me sont chers, écoutez-moi, Thésée. C'est moi qui sur ce fils chaste et respectueux, osai jeter un œil profane, incestueux." According to Weinberg:

Racine thus endows his heroine with the kind of moral character, of high moral dignity, that she needs if she is to obtain the sympathy of an audience and awaken the kinds of emotions proper to a tragic heroine. Yet she does commit the crimes that lead to her death and she does . . . admit moral responsibility for the events that increase her guilt and for the death of Hippolyte. Her morality is thus not perfect, or at least, she permits sufficient deviations from her principles to put her into a posture of crime and guilt.

Thus responsibility and self-knowledge are much harder

21 Ibid., p. 257.
22 Peyre, op. cit., p. 93.
24 Weinberg, op. cit., p. 283.
to define, and they are not so clearly illustrated in the neo-classic tragedian, Racine. He is continuation of Euripides and a precursor of the Romantics. His form is classic. But in his language, the passions of his characters, and the realism, he is not classic. His responsibility is not so obvious. It is more of a Jansenist type of shame. Racine was definitely influenced by the classics, but he was also influenced by his Jansenist background. Responsibility is there, but it is evolving to the place to where it is not clearly so clear-cut. And in the next period of literature, this responsibility and even self-knowledge will disappear. One will be able to see a sort of boomerang. Beginning with the Greeks, one can find very obvious responsibility. But Euripides began to change this. It was further advanced by Racine. In the Romantics, responsibility will be completely gone. But responsibility begins to come back—not in the Greek style—but it does begin to reappear in the modern dramatists.
ROMANTIC "TRAGEDY"

For all practical reasons of continuity, this chapter has been given the title of Romantic "Tragedy." It will be shown below that what the Romantic dramatists wrote was drama, but it was not tragedy. In literary history, there were only four periods of tragedy: the ancient Greek of the fifth century B.C.; the Elizabethan, in the generation of Shakespeare; the French classical, in the generation of Corneille and Racine; and the modern, inaugurated by Ibsen. There are many good reasons as to why Romantic drama is not considered to be "tragedy." However, the most important reason for the purpose of this paper is the fact that the Romantic heroes did not take moral responsibility for their actions. They did not even have self-knowledge.

In the Romantic Era, science moved from the mathematical to a biological frame of reference. This type of change can also be shown to typify the literary developments during this period. This literary shift was from reasonable and logical action to passionate and irresponsible action. The authors themselves of these Romantic dramas often had the

1 Muller, op. cit., p. ix.
2 George Ross Ridge, The Hero in French Romantic Literature, p. 4.
same attitude toward responsibility as the heroes which they created. No subtle implications of responsibility are able to be inferred from the hero's death, as in the death of Euripides' Hippolytus. The Romantic hero tends to be the antithesis of classic balance and reason. The thinking of Romantic hero is subjective not objective. The cry of the Romantic hero is "Ce n'est pas ma faute. Ce n'est pas ma faute!" 

In the Romantic Era, the hero is no longer the universal-type of hero that the Greeks and French classicists created. The Romantic dramatist considers the hero an exception and an individual. The romantic hero is self-consciously unique; he knows that he is different from and does not belong to the herd, to society. He is in truth, outside society. It is in this respect that the romantic hero is the self-conscious hero, who differs from earlier hero-types.

And as has been said, the romantic hero is no longer "... held to strict accountability for his conduct to the extent of sharing impartially in the obloquy of his misdeeds." He is morally indifferent to his own instrumentality in the

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3 Ibid., p. 53.
4 Maeterlinck, op. cit., p. 71.
5 Frye, op. cit., p. 248.
7 Frye, op. cit., p. 245.
production of a catastrophe. In general Romantic drama is ". . . a tragedy of circumstances." It is also a tragedy of characters. It is no longer, as in Aristotle's definition, an imitation of action. Instead of wishing for action, the romantic hero rather wishes to passively endure the unfortunate circumstances that surround him. He seeks death rather than action. It is much more noble for the romantic hero to die passively. This romantic quest leads inexorably to death, which is but an avenue of escape and at the same time a gate to the infinite.

The literary era of Romanticism came into view as a reaction against the cold and rational neo-classic literature. More passion was felt to be needed--at least so some writers felt. But this is not uniformly true. It is practically impossible to give one set definition of Romanticism, and it would be foolish to try. "Romanticism is a world view in which the individual romantic works are rooted. . . . Romanticism disassociated itself from the classic ideal by a slow process and not by any clear-cut line of delineation. Romantic literature differs from classical literature primarily "...because it is conceived and nurtured in a different kind of society." Since one cannot make rules for Romanti-
cism and assert that they fit all Romanticists, individual writers will be considered and conclusions will be drawn from what they have written.

Another difficulty in defining Romanticism arises from the fact that there is more than one phase of Romanticism. Jacques Barzun defines four phases of Romanticism. The first phase, and what most people actually consider the Romantic Period, came of age between 1780 and 1830, and remained undisputed master of the field until about 1850. This was Romanticism as a European phenomenon.\(^\text{13}\) What Barzun was suggesting was that the first phase of romanticism was one of extraordinary, unremitting, "unspecialized" production in all fields. The next three phases were efforts at specialization, selection, refinement, and intensification.

Romanticism sounds all the themes of the century in its first movement. The next three movements develop one theme each. . .Each of these takes the form of a strong reaction against its predecessor, with the exception of Naturalism, which reacts against its own contemporary, Symbolism.\(^\text{14}\)

The second phase of romanticism came between the time of 1850 to 1885. The times are only roughly approximated. This phase of romanticism was called Realism. The other two phases of romanticism were contemporaries of each other. This phase came of age during the period of 1875 and 1905. These two phases of romanticism were called Symbolism and Natural-

\(^{13}\text{Jacques Barzun, Classics, Romantic and Modern, p. 98.}\)
\(^{14}\text{Tbid., p. 99.}\)
Romanticism did not die out in 1850 like many people believe. Rather it branched out under different names like a delta.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite inner conflicts the three main schools that followed romanticism were intensive developments of themes enunciated during the first half of the century by the romantics proper.\textsuperscript{17}

But no matter what name one gives to the romanticist, his argument is always the same—the social rule is oppressive and unjust.

He is therefore in the position of constantly—bewailing a condition for which he is solely to blame: Having refused help from all social conventions, his art, philosophy, religion are bound to remain diversified...and unsatisfying.\textsuperscript{18}

As has been stated, romanticism can not be defined in a simple statement of fact. This literary movement developed into what it was because of the time in which it was written. The temper and beliefs of the people, as in other literary periods, greatly affected the drama. But before specific authors and dramas are offered as proof of the lack of moral responsibility of the romantic heroes, more should be known about the type of person the romantic hero was.

According to Ridge, there are five types of romantic heroes. There is also a sixth type known as the anti-hero

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 99. \textsuperscript{16}Ibid. \textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 115. \textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 37.
which shall also be discussed. These five types of heroes are essentially similar. These types would better be called the five roles that the romantic hero as the self-conscious hero assumes. The first role he may assume is that of the seeker.

His sharp, critical self-awareness causes acute dissatisfaction with mundane reality, and his romantic sensibility impels him forward in search for ideality. This split between reality and ideality characterizes the romantic seeker.19

An example of the seeker is René in Chateaubriand's Lés Natchez. René wants too much. He's seeking ideality. He's reckless and destroys others. He can't harness and focus his energy.20

The second role the romantic hero may assume is that of the man of fate. He feels he is a mechanistic creature in a deterministic universe and has no free will. There are two basic aspects of this role.

First, he is a fated man when his character progresses toward a predetermined end in a given context. Second, he is a fatal man when he acts destructively. In this role he may wittingly or unwillingly destroy others, or his relationship with them somehow causes them to destroy themselves.21

Victor Hugo's Hernani is a man of fate. He will be discussed at greater length below. In addition to the above roles,

19Ridge, op. cit., p. 15.
20Ibid., pp. 18-19.  
21Ibid., p. 32.
the romantic hero may be both a fatal man and a fated man at the same time. At all events, he becomes a man of fate because: he is aware of his role in both society and the cosmos; and his hypersensitive response to this awareness results in a conflict between self and society, between self and cosmos. Chance may accelerate the movement of forces in play, "...but it cannot set into movement forces which do not already exist in the hero himself." 22

In the third role it is best to say that the romantic hero is always a man of hypersensibility, and whenever his patterns of hypersensibility are exaggerated enough, he may be called a pathological hero. 23 When he is ravaged by hypersensibility, only abnormal sensations can whet his jaded emotions. The pathological hero enjoys his cruelty. 24 Hypersensibility is a long, narrow road to knowledge that is fraught with many dangers. To these dangers, the pathological hero bears mute, and often vocal, testimony. 25

The fourth role which can be assumed by the romantic hero is the poet-prophet. This term is used either to refer to the author or his literary protagonist. However, both author and protagonist both feel that he is unique, and that he thinks more deeply. He may be separated from society by his hypersensibility or wisdom. He may seek refuge in an ivory tower. There are many variations to this type,

22 Ibid., p. 52. 23 Ibid., p. 53. 24 Ibid., p. 71
25 Ibid., p. 74.
but there are three main categories: solitary, leader, and visionary.\textsuperscript{26} Whatever the category, the poet-prophet feels he has no place in society. He feels insecure and isolated.\textsuperscript{27} A good example of the poet-prophet is Thomas Chatterton in Vigny's play \textit{Chatterton}. He thinks he has unusual powers and must use them for the benefit of man.

The fifth and last role that the hero can assume is that of the romantic rebel who personifies defiance. According to Ridge:

A caricature might well depict him as a superman standing upon a promontory during a storm and shaking his fist at God, or as a lonely genius convinced he is much too fine for this earth, or as a scornful dandy sullied by the people around him. And such a caricature \textit{stresses} his basic trait—egotism.\textsuperscript{28} He epitomizes individuality and his self-assertion always results in conflict with society.\textsuperscript{29} He may rebel against the cosmos or God "...as a metaphysical rebel, against society as a social rebel, or against both as a fusion of the two types."\textsuperscript{30} The dandy represents this fusion.

The anti-hero will be discussed below in connection with Alfred de Musset's drama \textit{On ne badine pas avec l'amour}.

In conclusion, it is very difficult to classify any romantic hero into one neat category or one particular role because the roles very often overlap. But whatever role he

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 75.  \textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 77. \textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 96
\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, \textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 96.
might play, he is completely recognizable because he is always self-consciously unique. He feels superior and is convinced that there has never been another like him. This romantic self-consciousness comes about from the addition of the two necessary elements of self-awareness plus romantic sensibility. He is not bound by reason, whereas the classic ideal man controls his emotions by reason. Instead, he follows "...the bent of his sensibility."31 Another difference from the classic hero is that the romantic hero is aware of himself in his role, (the element of self-awareness, as above stated.) The romantic hero watches himself struggle in a mesh of fate. The hero's reaction intensifies the struggle.32 He sees what is happening, but he does nothing. And, as has been said, he takes responsibility for nothing. Rather, he merely endures.

An important event in romantic drama came in 1830 with the first representation of Victor Hugo's Hernani. This was the first great romantic drama. The story of Hugo's drama is about Hernani, a Spanish nobleman, who becomes a bandit. He is a very colorful and romantic figure. He is a man of mystery as he steps from nowhere with his hat pulled down and his sword drawn. He has an uncertain past and a fatal future. He is in love with doña Sol, who is the ward of the old man, don Ruy Gomez. The old man is also in love with doña Sol. But there is a third suitor to complicate

\[31\text{Ibid., p. 11.} \quad 32\text{Ibid., pp. 32-33.}\]