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ON CORNEILLE'S *HORACE*

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The drama of *Horace* is played against a background of allusions to Rome's origins. Behind Corneille's harshly illuminated characters appear the shadows of Romulus, the Sabine women, and Camilla of the Volsci. All that happens is under the auspices of the divine promise of empire made to Aeneas. Critics who have noticed this background and reflected upon it seem to agree that its function is to provide a framework of analogies to the characters and action of the play itself. [1] What happens in *Horace,* these critics claim, is like what happened in Rome's earliest history. And by bringing together and expanding the scattered remarks made in a number of recent essays, one might synthesize a view of the play as a kind of recapitulation, reduced to its essential pattern, of Rome's legendary foundation.

Horace, one might begin, is in its own right a play about political foundation—not about the foundation of a state, to be sure, but about the foundation of an empire. The conquest of Albe is the first of those conquests by which, as we are frequently reminded, Rome is to spread its empire over the earth. But the conquest of Albe is also a parricide, for Albe is said to be Rome's "mother" (56). In the light of the play's allusions to Romulus (see II.52-54, 1532, 1755-58), then, Horace appears to be reenacting the parricidal role of the state's founder when he destroys Albe and kills his brothers-in-law and sister in the process. [2] Camille, of course, plays the role of victim in this dramatic recapitulation. Her name (which is not found in the sources) and her curse, calling for

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[1] See, for example, Peter Newmark, "A New View of *Horace*," *French Studies,* X (1956), 1–10; J. W. Scott, "The 'Irony' of *Horace*," *French Studies,* XIII (1959), 11–17; Lawrence E. Harvey, "Corneille's *Horace:* A Study in Tragic and Artistic Ambivalence," *Studies in Seventeenth-Century French Literature,* ed. Jean-Jacques Demorest (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), 65–97; Serge Doubrovsky, *Corneille et la dialectique du héros* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), pp. 181–82; and Walter Albert, "The Metaphor of Origins in *Horace*," *The French Review,* XL (1966), 238–45. Harvey appears to have been the first critic to point out the allusions to the Sabine women and to Camilla (pp. 87–89).

[2] Throughout this essay I use "state" rather than "city" to refer to Rome. Although the latter would be more appropriate from a Roman point of view (e.g., Livy's), the former is Corneille's word in the play. It is one of the ways by which he draws attention to the relevance of his material to seventeenth-century France. (See note 11.)

the annihilation of Rome by an army of its neighbors (1305-06), suggest that Corneille saw her as a reincarnation of the tragic and heroic spirit of Camilla, the warrior maiden who led her Volscians along with the other Italian cities and tribes against Aeneas and died in the hopeless attempt to throw him out of Italy. Camille's fate reminds us of the tragic suffering that seems destined to attend the harsh process by which states are founded and expanded. And Sabine (who is not in Corneille's sources at all), the daughter of Albe married to a Roman, who threatens to throw herself between her husband and her brother to prevent their parricidal combat (659-62), recalls those Sabine women who interceded in a similar situation during Rome's earliest days. The spirit of mediation she represents is no less essential to political foundation than the heroism and parricide of the founder or the tragic suffering of those who cling to the old ways. Through all these allusions, one might conclude, Corneille seems to be telling us that to become and stay great, states must occasionally return to their beginnings; the aggrandizement of states requires the same unholy crime, tragic suffering, and capacity for mediation that are necessary when states are founded.

No doubt Corneille does mean to suggest that Rome's founding and the founding of its empire followed similar patterns. Stress on the analogical function of the play's historical allusions, however, obscures another function, which is perhaps even more important but which commentators have altogether neglected. For in addition to revealing the similarities, *Horace* also makes clear the fundamental differences between the foundation of the empire and the foundation of Rome itself. Horace, Camille, and Sabine live in very different times from Romulus, Aeneas, Camilla, and the Sabine women. The times of the founders were simpler; the foundation of the empire is torn by uncertainty and paradox.

Although the new imperial state comes into being under the sign of a prophecy from the days of the founders, the new state also has its own prophecy, and a comparison between the two reveals how far Rome has come from heroic simplicity. In the beginning, the gods spoke directly and unambiguously to Aeneas. Although the destiny they foretold was hardly easy, it could not be doubted and ultimately promised a glorious reward for suffering. In contrast, the prophecy made to Camille by a nameless Greek living at the foot of the Aventine is a deceptive riddle, at best the source of fitful moods of hope and, when it finally proves true, pointing the way only to death. Similar changes, moreover, lie behind the allusions to Camilla and the Sabine women. The fact that Camille, unlike her namesake, is not an external enemy of Rome but part of the city itself, and not only part of the city but part of Horace's own family, tends to increase our sense of the paradoxical harshness of Rome's great destiny. The imperial undertaking to conquer others apparently also involves a kind of self-destruction. And while the desperate stratagem of the Sabine women was successful in effecting a reconciliation and in preventing parricide, the similar effort of Sabine is fruitless. Her entreaties are soon

silenced by her husband, who orders his father to keep her locked in the house while the parricidal combat runs its course. At the end of the play she is reconciled to her husband in Rome not because she has prevented bloodshed but in spite of the fact that she has failed to do so.

These changes in connection with Camille and Sabine are in accord with Corneille's general expansion of the theme of parricide until it touches every aspect of the action and constitutes perhaps the central theme in the play. For the founders of the city, at least as they appear in the play's historical allusions, parricide was limited to a single instance—the murder of Remus—and did not taint every deed, was even specifically averted in the war between the Romans and the Sabines. But for the founders of the empire parricide occurs at every turn; it infects everything. Accordingly, one must look to that theme and to its protagonists, the parricidal founders, Romulus and Horace, in order to understand what I take to be at once the most important difference between the founders of the city and the founders of the empire and the key to the play's deeper political meaning.

According to one of the most interesting recent interpretations of *Horace,* parricide can be understood as an expression of the need felt by all heroes to destroy their origins.[3] The hero's impulse is to stand alone, to assert a godlike independence, and his aspiration toward divinity drives him to destroy any ties that bind him to the common lot. Of these, the family tie is especially galling because it reminds him of his radical dependence upon his origins; he is not self-created. Parricide in some form or other consequently becomes a heroic necessity. Horace's part in the parricidal destruction of Albe and his murder of his sister, then, like Romulus's murder of Remus, can be seen as inevitable consequences of heroic aspiration.

One can agree that the account of Romulus's murder of Remus given by Livy (I.vii), Corneille's main source, might be interpreted in the light of this analysis of heroism. At least one careful reader of Livy, Machiavelli, reserves his highest praise for Romulus precisely because his *virtù* made him radically independent of his origins. Romulus, Theseus, Moses, and Cyrus are the four greatest princes for Machiavelli because they were able to break absolutely with the past and to found truly new states.[4] Of course it was an accident of birth that freed Romulus from many of the ties that bind men to their origins, but when Fortune failed him, as when she burdened him with a twin brother, his heroic *virtù* provided the remedy.

To see Horace's parricide as the expression of a similar, heroic effort to liberate himself from his origins, however, is unconvincing. On the contrary, Horace's parricide appears to be an affirmation and defense of his origins as he understands them. For if Horace is sternly ready to

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[3] Doubrovsky, pp. 133–84; esp. pp. 151–52.

[4] See *The Prince,* ch. 6.

commit sororicide, a kind of fratricide (killing his brothers-in-law), and a kind of matricide (as the Roman who kills Rome's "mother"), the play also makes it clear that he is not about to complete the gamut of parricidal crimes and make a clean sweep of his origins. Patricide and that form of parricide that involves crimes against one's *patrie* are unthinkable to him. Father and fatherland remain sacred, and his other parricides are in fact dedicated to them precisely because it is in them that he feels his origins lie.

After murdering Camille, Horace meets three characters in quick succession: Procule, Sabine, and his father. Against the reproaches of the first two, Procule and Sabine, Horace unflinchingly defends the "justice" (1323) of what he has just done, and if Sabine manages temporarily to upset his equanimity, it is rather by the pathos of her request that he kill her too than by any doubt she throws upon his opinion of Camille's deserts. There is no convincing evidence in these encounters, or anywhere else in the play, that Horace's conviction of the justice of his deed is ever shaken. But when his father accuses him, not of injustice, but of having dishonored himself, his submission is immediate and utter. And the terms in which he proffers it are revealing:

Disposez de mon sang, les lois vous en font maître;
J'ai cru devoir le sien aux lieux qui m'ont vu naître.
Si dans vos sentiments mon zèle est criminel,
S'il m'en faut recevoir un reproche éternel,
Si ma main en devient honteuse et profanée,
Vous pouvez d'un seul mot trancher ma destinée:
Reprenez tout ce sang de qui ma lacheté
A si brutalement souillé la pureté.
Ma main n'a pu souffrir de crime en votre race;
Ne souffrez point de tache en la maison d'Horace.

(491-92)

First it is important to note that it is not clear that Horace agrees with his father's accusation any more than he agreed with the reproaches of Procule or Sabine. The words *"Si dans vos sentiments . . ."* and the conditional clauses that follow suggest that Horace's "sentiments" are different from his father's. And later, before the king, when Horace asks for permission to kill himself to save his honor, he does not speak of expiation for Camille's murder or for any particular dishonor already incurred. He admits that he is *"en péril de quelque ignominie"* (1584), but the vague *"quelque"* indicates that he is not thinking specifically of Camille but generally of the future dishonor that may come to him simply because he will be unable to live up to the expectations created in *"le peuple"* by his exploit against the Curiaces. The point is that Horace submits to his father, not because he agrees with him, but out of piety. *"Reprenez tout ce sang,"* says Horace, and in the original version of 1641, he said *"Reprenez votre sang."* In either case the implication comes

through clearly enough. "You have a right," Horace is saying, "whether I agree with your judgment or not, to take *back* this blood because it was yours in the first place. You gave it to me. You are its origin, the origin of my life."

Furthermore, behind this fundamental piety felt for his father as the origin of his blood lies an even deeper piety felt for Rome.

Disposez de mon sang, les lois vous en font maitre;
J'ai cru devoir le sien aux lieux qui m'ont vu naitre.

Horace will surrender his blood to his father, not only because his father gave it to him in the first place, but because his father's right to it is decreed by Roman law. Roman law recognizes fathers rather than mothers as the origin of blood. Horace never even mentions his mother in the play, nor would he, one can be sure, be moved by Sabine's argument that Rome should not attack Albe because Albe is Rome's "mother" and its "origin" (55-56). To the extent, then, that Roman law is the origin of Horace's opinion about his origin, the origin of his piety for his father, Roman law might be said to be the origin of Horace's origin.[5] But Rome also figures in Horace's piety for his origins in another, much more direct way. Rome is the place where he was born, his place of origin. And the power that this idea of Rome has for him is evident in the fact that it was to this place of origin that he felt he "owed" Camille's life. Indeed, he even warned Camille, just before killing her, to remember *"Ce que doit ta naissance aux intérets de Rome"* (1300). It is not surprising, therefore, that Horace considers himself, as he tells us within the first five lines of his first speech in the play, one of Rome's "children" (375) or that he feels that King Tulle, as the head of the state, has as much right to his blood as his father does. In his long final speech, Horace reveals that he would already have committed suicide to save his honor were it not for his belief that he does not have the right to shed blood that "belongs" to the king:

Mais sans votre congé mon sang n'ose sortir:
Comme il vous appartient, votre aveu doit se prendre;
C'est vous le dérober qu'autrement le répandre.

(1586-88)

From a passage such as the one just mentioned, in which Horace speaks of committing suicide to save his honor, some critics have concluded that he is primarily motivated by personal glory.[6] The important point, however, is that in spite of his desire Horace will not kill himself unless he

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[5] Cf. Aristotle's *Politics,* 1275b, 26–30 (III.i.9).

[6] See, for example, Doubrovsky, p. 149 and note 134 on p. 539; Émile Droz, "Corneille et l'*Astrée,*" *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France,* XXVIII (1921), p. 371; and W. H. Barber, "Patriotism and 'Gloire' in Corneille's *Horace,*" *Modern Language Review,* XLVI (1951), 368–78.

receives the king's permission. In other words, here, as elsewhere, he definitely subordinates his personal glory to his fatherland. In fact, it may even be doubted whether Horace has any conception of his glory as a distinctly individual quality separate from his origins. When he speaks of saving his honor and glory, he is also thinking of protecting his "name" (1569). The three words are interchangeable, and the sense of "name" that characterizes him throughout the play provides another illustration of the piety that binds him to father and fatherland. Horace has two names, and the very first reference to him in the play couples both of them around the verb "to be" as around an equal sign. "Horace est Romain" (25). "Horace" and "Roman": these are his names, and it is important that they are also names that he shares with others; they constitute a heritage and a bond with others that give him his sense of identity. He tells his father that he killed Camille, not only because he felt he "owed" her life to Rome, but because *"Ma main n'a pu souffrir de crime en votre race,"* and in the next line he urges his father to kill him rather than suffer a stain *"en la maison d'Horace."* The rhyme carries the emotional weight; the name "Horace" is the name of *"votre race,"* and it is the name of this race rather than a merely individual name that Horace is concerned to protect, as when he asks Tulle's permission to kill himself. Horace's name and honor are practically indistinguishable from the name and honor of his race. It is even possible to wonder whether the play's title refers to him or to his father or to the race in general. Certainly Horace would not have been offended by the attaint to his honor as an individual that is implicit in such a doubt.

Horace regards with similar piety the name that comes to him from Rome. He is humbly aware that the fact that he is "named" (see II.307, 331, 368, 372, 502) by Rome as its representative against Albe offers him glory that he would never have acquired through personal merit alone. Although no one doubts his worth, his "naming" nevertheless comes as a surprise in the play. There may be some assumed modesty, but there is also fundamental sincerity in his reply to Curiace's compliments:

> *Loin de trembler pour Albe, il vous faut plaindre Rome,*
> *Voyant ceux qu'elle oublie et les trois qu'elle nomme.*
> *C'est un aveuglement pour elle bien fatal*
> *D'avoir tant à choisir, et de choisir mal.*
> *Mille de ses enfants beaucoup plus dignes d'elle*
> *Pouvaient bien mieux que nous soutenir sa querelle.*
>
> (371-76)

By Rome's unexpected favor Horace and his brothers have become the children of Rome, Romans *par excellence*. *"Hors les fils d'Horace, il n'est point de Romains"* (354), exclaims Curiace. *"Fils d'Horace"* has become practically identified with *"fils de Rome,"* and Horace accepts the burden of his new name eagerly:

Contre qui que ce soit que mon pays m'emploie
J'accepte aveuglément cette gloire avec joie.

It does not gall him that Horace become a glorious name because *"Horace est Romain"*, that his glory will remain in significant part a reflected glory. *"Si vous n'etes Romain, soyez digne de l'etre"* (483), he admonishes Curiace when we might have expected him to say, had he been a different kind of hero, *"Si vous n'etes Horace, soyez digne de l'etre."* [7]

Now we are in a position to state more fully the difference between Horace and Romulus. If the founding of the state called for heroic independence, the founding of the empire is a work of radical dependence. Both kinds of foundation involve crime, particularly the most terrible crime of parricide; but for Romulus parricide was the necessary means to something new, whereas Horace commits his parricide for the sake of something old, in the name of family and state, as well as for the new empire. Romulus was impious, and Horace is impiously pious. His impiety is limited by an almost simultaneous piety for *pater* and *patria,* and the patriotism that is so often attributed to him is precisely defined by the paradoxical union of these two qualities.[8] The founder of an empire must be the profoundest kind of patriot. His task is to renew his fatherland by committing all the crimes necessary to political foundation except the ultimate crime against the fatherland itself. He is a paradoxical creature in whom nearly utter ruthlessness is joined to the deepest piety. By contrast, of course, the founder of a new state cannot be a patriot. His energies cannot be devoted to the preservation and aggrandizement of the state of his origins; he must be prepared to commit any crime, even against his origins, to accomplish his task. He respects no father or fatherland and becomes instead the father of a new land, the father of his state rather than, like Horace, one of its most eminent "children." [9]

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[7] Horace is also conscious of owing his "name" partly to fate; at one point he reminds Curiace that it is *"Le sort qui de l'honneur nous ouvre la barrière"* (431). This recognition of fate's role suggests that Horace does not identify himself completely with father or fatherland. At the same time, however, his feeling for them is clearly much stronger than his piety for fate or the gods. When he leaves Camille for the encounter with the Curiaces, his last advice to her is:

Querellez Ciel et terre, et maudissez le sort;
Mais après le combat ne pensez plus au mort.

(529–30)

In other words, he will allow her to curse heaven, earth, and fate; but when she curses Rome, he will kill her.

[8] "Patriotism" is a word often used rather loosely in studies of *Horace.* That the play leads us to discover the roots of the concept in Horace's piety has never been pointed out.

[9] Cf. Abraham Lincoln's "Address Before The Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield" (1838) on "the perpetuation of our political institutions."

The idea that Romulus, as founder, is the father of Rome is never explicitly stated in the play but is unmistakably implied by the passage, already mentioned, in which Sabine argues that Albe is Rome's "mother" and "origin." She is trying to persuade Julie that Rome should respect its maternal origin:

> *Mais respecte une ville à qui tu dois Romule.*
> *Ingrate, souviens-toi que du sang de ses rois*
> *Tu tiens ton nom, tes murs et tes premières lois.*
> *Albe est ton origine: arrete et considère*
> *Que tu portes le fer dans le sein de ta mère.*
>
> (52-56)

I have commented upon Sabine's failure to understand Roman patriotism. We have seen that the Roman patriot's piety does not extend to mothers. Horace is animated by *"une male assurance"* (379; cf. 1069). But at the same time Sabine's words lead us to reflect that if Albe is Rome's mother, Rome's father must be Romulus. Indeed, it is much more directly from him than from Albe that Rome received its "name," "walls," and "laws." According to the legend recounted by Livy, Romulus raised the city's walls, and although he followed Alban usage for certain religious laws, the political laws that he established were apparently of his own devising. The name that he gave his creation was, of course, his own.

Thus Romulus gave to Rome all those things that Horace is conscious of having inherited from it: walls (the *"lieux qui m'ont vu naitre"),* laws *("Disposez de mon sang, les lois vous en font maitre"),* and name *("Roman").* If Rome stands behind Vieil Horace as Horace's origin, Romulus stands behind Rome. Romulus is the origin of Rome and therefore ultimately the origin of Horace. In a certain sense the founder of a state is indeed the origin of its citizens, of the people who grow up in his state and are formed by the influence of the name, walls, and laws that he created. Now we can perceive the final irony of the play's allusions to Romulus. To equal Romulus (and make the play's allusions to him truly analogies to Horace), to destroy his origins and found something new, Horace would have to destroy Romulus. Horace could not do this literally, of course; he would have to do it indirectly by attacking Romulus's creation, his namesake, Rome. Horace the patriot would have to turn on Rome, destroy the name, walls, and laws of Romulus, and create new ones of his own. *Roma* would have to be replaced by *Horatium.*[10]

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[10] Beyond this, one might detect the suggestion that for *Roma* to be replaced by *Horatium,* it would also be necessary for Horace to destroy the gods. They have promised an imperial destiny to Rome, and any attack upon it by Horace at this point would run counter to their designs. More generally, does it not follow that the hero who wants to be truly independent of his origins will have to destroy the gods, or at least the old gods? Machiavelli hints that founders of states may have

That Horace's triumphs might have led to such a conclusion is not inconceivable. In fact Valère's demand, in the last act, that Horace be put to death for Camille's murder is based on the assumption that he is the kind of man who wants to and now can, unless checked immediately, make Rome his own. Valère admits the outstanding merit of Horace's victory, but he also sees him as capable of the most outstanding crimes and therefore warns Tulle:

Mais puisque d'un tel crime il s'est montré capable,
Qu'il triomphe en vainqueur et périsse en coupable.
Arretez sa fureur, et sauvez de ses mains,
Si vous voulez régner, le reste des Romains:
Il y va de la perte ou du salut du reste.

(1487-91)

"*Quel sang épargnera ce barbare vainqueur?*" (1501) he goes on to ask.

Faisant triompher Rome, il se l'est asservie;
Il a sur nous un droit et de mort et de vie;
Et nos jours criminels ne pourront plus durer
Qu'autant qu'à sa clémence il plaira l'endurer.

(1507-10)

As Valère sees it, Horace has acquired a power of life and death over Rome, a power over blood that belongs to fathers alone, and Valère closes with the frightening analogy:

Sire, c'est ce qu'il faut que votre arret décide.
En ce lieu Rome a vu le premier parricide;
La suite en est à craindre, et la haine des Cieux:
Sauvez-nous de sa main, et redoutez les Dieux.

(1531-34)

Tulle, of course, comes to see that Valère's understanding of Horace is false. After listening to Valère, Tulle listens to Horace and realizes that Rome has nothing to fear from the hero who would already have committed suicide to save his name were it not for his belief that his blood belongs to the state. "*Vis pour servir l'État*" (1763), Tulle commands while he pardons, confident that Horace would not live for any other reason. And whereas Valère sought to condemn Horace by comparing him to Romulus, Tulle dares to turn the same analogy to flattery:

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to do something like this when he characterizes them as "armed prophets" (*The Prince,* ch. 6), and Livy informs us at length about Romulus's establishment of a new religion in Rome (I.vii). *Horace,* however, contains no allusions to these activities of Romulus, and unlike the possibility that Horace might attack the state, the possibility that he might rise to an assault upon the gods remains only the remotest of suggestions, if it is in the play at all. (See note 7.)

De pareils serviteurs sont les forces des rois,
Et de pareils aussi sont au-dessus des lois.
Qu'elles se taisent donc; que Rome dissimule
Ce que dès sa naissance elle vit en Romule:
Elle peut bien souffrir en son libérateur
Ce qu'elle a bien souffert en son premier auteur.

(1753-58)

The flattery lies in the implication that the parricide committed by the state's *"libérateur"* is like that committed by its *"premier auteur."* If Tulle really believed in that implication, we can suppose that he would put Horace to death. The "first author" of a state is not the servant of a king. He does not preserve other kings but becomes one himself.

Horace saves himself, paradoxically, by asking permission to kill himself. If he had not revealed his piety so clearly, Tulle would have had to accept Valère's point of view. Horace's success against the Curiaces has made him the greatest man in Rome, and he stands temporarily even above the king himself, as Tulle recognizes when he admits that it is due to Horace that he is *"maitre de deux États"* (1742):

Sans lui j'obéirais où je donne la loi,
Et je serais sujet où je suis deux fois roi.

(1745-46)

What could be more natural for Valère or for any other Roman in his position than to conclude that a man of such greatness, who has also just ruthlessly killed his sister, is potentially a Romulus? For Valère, Romulus's outstanding virtue joined to his parricide provide the only precedent from Roman history to explain Horace. How could Valère, who, when he accuses Horace, has not had the audience's opportunity to observe the intensity of his patriotism, be expected to understand it? It is unprecedented in Roman history.

No doubt there were Roman patriots of a kind before Horace. Vieil Horace seems to be one. But Horace is the first clear figure of a patriot in Livy, and Corneille's Horace carries his patriotism undeniably further than did his father. Camille suspects that Vieil Horace prefers the state to his family (255), but we actually see Horace act out the implications of that preference. To be ready to die for one's *patrie* is, as he says, a common form of patriotism; one must also be ready to kill one's nearest and dearest (437-52). Horace is the first Roman to go that far; in him, for the first time in Roman history, the piety felt for the fatherland as origin is exposed in all its impious power. Perhaps Corneille shared Machiavelli's belief that the common, respectable forms of political behavior are misleading. In any case, it appears that *Horace* turns to the extreme case in order to define the limits and essence of patriotism.

Corneille is telling us that to understand patriotism we must strip away its blandly pious garb of every day; we must lay bare the terrible paradox, the impious piety hidden in its heart.[11]

[11] As every student of the play knows, *Horace* was dedicated to Cardinal Richelieu in terms of the warmest admiration, and there has been much speculation about the meaning of this tribute. See, for example, the edition of the play edited by Pol Gaillard for Les Petits Classiques Bordas (Paris: Bordas, 1967), pp. 22–23, or Jacques Maurens, *La tragédie sans tragique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), pp. 198–242. I suspect that a connection may exist between the impious piety of Horace's patriotism and the doctrine of *raison d'état* that guided the great cardinal's policy. Such a connection, however, is not readily demonstrable beyond a certain point. One would have to trace the pedigree of *raison d'état* back to its origins in Machiavelli, and that would be the subject of another essay.