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THE DRAMATIC PORTRAYAL OF SEMIRAMIS IN VIRUES, CALDERON AND VOLTAIRE

by

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INTRODUCTION

The study of themes, Stoffgeschichte, makes it possible to trace the literary representation of a legend, myth or historical figure through times and by this procedure to determine its significance. In the process it is also feasible to establish its essence and what makes it attractive and relevant for many centuries.

Raymond Trousson, in his book Un problème de littérature comparée: Les études de thèmes, classifies the study of heroes in two vast categories: le thème de héros and le thème de situation.[1] For Trousson the main difference between these two categories is that in the theme of a situation the hero does not have an independent existence, but is rather defined and determined by a given context or societal role; ("Ce n'est pas la personalité individuelle de l'héroine qui fait la situation ce qu'elle est, c'est une situation donnée qui d'une quelconque jeune fille, fait une Antigone"); and in the theme of heroes, their names are sufficient to evoke in the audience or reader a series of responses that pertain more to their symbolical meaning than to their particular deeds; ("le protagoniste dépasse la situation, la fait contingente ou la crée: qui dit Prométhee pense liberté, génie, progrès, connaissance, révolte").[2] Oedipus and Medea are examples of the former and Hercules and Orpheus of the latter.

Because the theme of situation requires a certain lengthy exposition to recreate circumstances, drama has been its most frequent medium, while the theme of heroes is appropriate to shorter literary forms and to just

mere phrases. The individual events and circumstances in which Antigone, Medea and Oedipus find themselves are fairly uniform; what varies is the treatment by the author and the reaction by audiences in different eras.

The legend of the powerful, beautiful and lustful queen of Babylonia Semiramis, initially seems to belong to Trousson's theme of situation. It appears impossible to think of Semiramis in any other terms than as queen of Babylonia; on the other hand her name has become synonymous with power, lust and glory and the circumstances of her reign are not always identical. There is a polyvalence in her legend that is not present in the legend of Antigone or Oedipus.

With the exception of some brief references in literary works in the Middle Ages, the Semiramis legend belongs to the world of drama, and more specifically to tragedy. Although Virués, Calderón and Voltaire handle the components of the legend with a freedom uncharacteristic of the treatment of legends and myths in general, they all present Semiramis at the center of a tragedy.

Thus by examining the legend and its variants, it is possible to determine its essence and relevance to human experience for many centuries and also to shed some light on different conceptions of tragedy.

Notes

[1]Raymond Trousson, *Un problème de littérature comparée: les études de thèmes* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1965), pp. 6-7.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 36.

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND

Semiramis is mentioned for the first time in the writings of the Greek historian Herodotus. In Book 1 of his History, she is portrayed as an Assyrian ruler responsible for building dykes on the plain of Babylon; a feat of construction which was remarkable because, prior to it, the plain used to be flooded by the river.[1] In Book 2, Herodotus referred to the gates of the city of Babylon as the Semiramis gate. With these two references, Semiramis sprung into the world of history, literature, art and music. It is very possible that Herodotus knew more about her legend since, when he mentioned Nictoris, whom he described as another famous Babylonian ruler, he said that she was wiser than Semiramis. As he indicated, he planned to write an Assyrian history; the additional information regarding Semiramis was probably reserved for this venture, which was never written.

The most complete and developed account of the legend is provided by the Greek physician and historian Ctesias Cnidus. Ctesias wrote a History of Assyria and, although his writings have been lost, they have been preserved partially in the Historical Library of Diodorus Siculus and in Plutarch's Life of Artaxerxes.[2] Ctesias lived in Persia for seventeen years in the court of King Artaxerxes and his writings are partially based on the information which he gathered while there and on

Greek mythology.[3] His reputation as a historian has been criticized, it is believed that he wished to compete with Herodotus and to prove that the latter was an unreliable source.[4]

Diodorus Siculus was born in Sicily of Greek origin. His History appeared around the year 30 B.C. This great compendium of universal history, current to the time it was written, is most useful due to the fidelity with which he reproduced the writings of his predecessors. In the Second Book of his History, he dedicated twenty-one chapters to the Semiramis story, making numerous references to his borrowing from Ctesias. Since this is the most complete account of her legend it will be presented in detail.[5]

Diodorus arranged his material in three parts: the first part is dedicated to Semiramis' birth and upbringing, up to the time of her marriage to Onnes; the second part is devoted to the siege of Bactra; and the third part covered her great accomplishments as a queen.

Semiramis was the daughter of the famous Syrian goddess Derceto (also known as Astarte). Because Aphrodite was angry at Derceto, she inspired Derceto's love for one of her devotees; Semiramis was born of this union. Subsequently, Derceto became ashamed of her actions and, as a consequence, killed her lover, abandoned her daughter in a deserted area and threw herself into a lake where her body was transformed into that of a fish. This is given as the reason for the Assyrians' worship of fish as gods.

The place where Semiramis was abandoned was the nesting place of many doves. In a most marvelous way the doves cared for and nurtured the

deserted infant for a year, at which time the shepherds noticed that the doves were eating their cheese and, curious about this, they followed the doves which lead them to the infant. Considering her to be extremely beautiful, they took her to the herd's royal keeper, Simmas; since he was childless, he raised the child as his own daughter and named her Semiramis. Diodorus said that the name is a slight alteration of the word which in the Syrian language meant dove. He remarked that, since that time, doves have been honoured as goddesses by the Syrians.

When Semiramis had reached the age of marriage, Onnes, who was the most important member of King Ninus' council and had been appointed governor of Syria, came to examine the King's herds. Upon seeing Semiramis he was captivated by her beauty and he took her to Ninus' court where he married her. They had two sons--Hyapates and Hydaspes--who are mentioned only in this source. According to Diodorus, Onnes was so in love with Semiramis that he would not do anything without consulting her. This benefited him enormously, for she was an extremely intelligent woman.

The second part of Diodorus' account is of extreme importance for it related her rise to power. The siege of Bactra was undertaken by King Ninus after he finished building the city that carried his name, Niniveh. Since he was aware of the strong fortifications of the city and of the courage and number of its soldiers, he decided to assemble a great army.

Even so Ninus encountered enormous difficulties in conquering it, and when the siege became a rather long enterprise Onnes sent for his wife. This gave Semiramis an excellent opportunity to display her natural

abilities. For her journey, she designed a garment that concealed her figure, making it impossible to recognize her as a woman. This attire was so beautiful that it became the typical dress of the Medes and, afterwards, of the Persians.

After her arrival at Bactriana, Semiramis noticed that all the attacks on the city were being carried out on the plains due to their accessibility, while the acropolis was deserted by its defenders because it was in such an inaccessible location. She selected soldiers accustomed to climbing rocky mountains and they made their way into the acropolis. The defenders of the city were so horrified at the sight of the soldiers who had successfully scaled such a height that they fled in terror. Thus Semiramis was responsible for Ninus' conquest of Bactra.

King Ninus became obsessed with Semiramis' beauty and tried to convince her husband to give her up in exchange for his own daughter Susane. Onnes refused and Ninus threatened to put out his eyes if he did not agree to his demands. In fear of Ninus and out of love for his wife, Onnes became mad and hanged himself. And so Semiramis became queen.

Ninus and Semiramis had a son, Ninyas, but upon Ninus' death Semiramis took over his reign. She would reign for forty-two years, conquer all of Asia except India, and live to the age of sixty-two.

The last part of Diodorus' account is dedicated to Semiramis' exploits as a ruler. A large section is devoted to the construction of the city of Babylon. She built other cities as well and lived in luxury, but was most unwilling to marry again for fear of being deprived of her position as ruler. Instead, she chose the most handsome soldiers as her

lovers, and afterwards, had them killed.

Everywhere she went she had her army cut through mountains and cliffs to make roads. On the plains she erected mounds, which were used at times as tombs for her generals and, at other times, as foundations for cities. She went to the oracle of Ammon where she was told that she would disappear from the world of men and would be honoured by some of the people of Asia. This would occur when her son Ninyas conspired against her. She visited Egypt and she conquered Ethiopia and Libya. The last of her campaigns to be described in detail was the one in India, which, however, was not successful; she ws forced to return to Bactra with only a third of her army.

Diodorus then recounted the story of Semiramis' death as told by Ctesias. As prophesied, her son Ninyas conspired against her, but Semiramis, remembering the oracle of Ammon, turned her reign over to him and disappeared. Diodorus says that a myth was created about her death according to which she was transformed into a dove and ascended to the gods escorted by other doves. This was the reason for the divinization of the dove and of Semiramis.

Besides Ctesias' account, Diodorus gave another version of the legend, which, according to him, is based on Athenaeus and on other historians, although nothing is known about the former.

According to these sources, Semiramis was just a comely courtesan, loved by Ninus because of her beauty. When she was married to him she persuaded him to grant her all his royal powers for five days. On the first day, she organized a banquet and persuaded the army officials to

cooperate with her. By the second day, as the people were honouring her as their queen, she had Ninus arrested and put in prison. Since she was a woman of great ambition, she seized the monarchy and remained in power until old age. Her son Ninyas succeeded her, but he had a more peaceful reign because he did not share his mother's ambition and passion to conquer other lands. On the contrary, he dedicated his life to luxury and idleness.

Diodorus' narration of variations of the Semiramis legend recorded most of the principal elements of her mythical story. Other historians merely repeated Diodorus' account or added details that were intertwined into the legend.

In his Naturalis Historia, Plinius Secundus (Pliny the Elder) gave an example of Semiramis' lust when he referred to her having intercourse with a horse.[6] This reference came from Juba II, who wrote lengthy historical and geographical works. Juba could have found this in detail in the Izdubar poem, which describes the same incident.[7] Strabo, the Greek geographer and historian, made several references to Semiramis' mounds and to her campaign to India, which he doubted ever took place.[8]

The Roman historian Justinus in his Historiarum Philippicarum, refers to Semiramis' male disguise as Ninyas in order to remain in power and to the extraordinary resemblance between moter and son.[9] Fearful of leaving the throne to her weak son and not wishing to submit her royal authority to a husband, she impersonated her son. The similarity in their height, voice, and facial structure was so remarkable that she was able to reign for many years in this ingenious way. When she was satisfied

with her extraordinary accomplishments, she revealed her name and artifice, for which she gained even more admiration. Justinus also referred to her incestuous feelings towards her son and her death at his hands.

In Valerius Maximus' Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium, we encounter one of Semiramis' most famous deeds, which reveals the essence of her charcter.[10] While she was combing her hair, she was notified that Babylon was in revolt. She left part of her hair undone, thereby not observing proper decorum, and did not finish combing it until she had repressed the uprising. For this reason, a statue was built in Babylon in which she appears as she went to battle.

Plutarch, in his Amatorius, portrayed Semiramis as Diodorus had in his succinct account of other historians. Plutarch only added that after his arrest Ninus was chained and finally killed.[11]

These additions to Diodorus' accounts, as well as the repetitious references by many Greek and roman writers throughout a long period of time, were responsible for the creation of a fascinating legend around the sensual and ambitious Semiramis, a legend which has captured the Western imagination for centuries.

As with many other legends, the Semiramis legend owes most of its elements to a religious background, and possibly, to an actual historial figure. Historians have tried to find a hitorical precedent, a point of departure that could help explain or shed some light on the origin of this legend. This search has lead them to Sammu-ramat.[12]

Many assyriologists and critics identified the fictional Semiramis

with the Assyrian queen Sammu-ramat, who was Shamshi-Adad V's wife. He reigned from approximately 824 to 810. Sammu-ramat ruled the country as regent for three to five years after the death of her husband and during the minority of their son Adad-nirari III. At a time and in a society where women did not occupy important positions in government, and their role was very minor, this must have been considered as a great honour. This singled her out as an exceptional woman; thereby contributing to her association and identification with Semiramis.[13]

Sammu-ramat's name has been found on a memorial stele of the kings of Assyria found at Assur, an ancient Mesopotamian city.[14] This stele identifies her as a palace woman (queen) of Shamshi-Adad, mother of Adad-nirari and daughter-in-law of Shalmaneser. This literal translation of "palace woman" is usually substituted for "queen" or "palace lady" because the word queen was only applied to goddesses and to the women of the Arabs who were rulers. The chief wife was called "she-of-the-palace," a deferential circumlocution.[15]

Many scholars have postulated that Semiramis and Sammu-ramat were identical, although the evidence is far from conclusive.

C. H. Lehmann-Haupt discussed their identity in several articles published between 1900 and 1918. His thesis evolved from initially believing that their only common aspect was their name, to eventually citing actual references found in a monument in support of his conclusion. In his last article on the subject, "Semiramis and Sammu-ramat," he made reference to an important monument in the collection of the Museum of Constantinople.[16] The inscription, which was transcribed

by E. Unger in 1916,relates a campaign against Palestine and King Mari of Damascus, which took place in the fifth year of Adad-nirari's rule. The inscription says very explicitly that during the fifth year Adad-nirari ascended to the throne. There is a gap between the death of Shamshi-Adad and Adad-nirari's ascent to the throne which can only be explained if his mother, Sammu-ramat, ruled as regent until her son became of age. Since in Diodorus's account of the Semiramis legend there is a period of guardianship of the mother over the son, and since Sammu-ramat's guardianship has been established, Lehmann-Haupt believed that the identity of the two is proven and drew other parallels between the Semiramis of Diodorus' account and Sammu-ramat.

The main opponent of this view is W. Robertson Smith, who did not believe that Semiramis was a historical queen whose legend became enriched with religious myths. To the contrary, he asserted that Semiramis was "a goddess and became a quasi-historical queen only by virtue of that euhemerism which in the east is so much older than Euhemerus."[17]

Even though there is no absolute agreement on the identity of the historical Sammu-ramat and the fictional Semiramis, all the specialists concur in the mythical-religious background of the Semiramis legend, which is basically the narration of Ishtar, the Assyro-Babylonian goddess of fertility.

Ishtar was a goddess of Semitic origin and she was known, celebrated and adored throughout Asia under many different names (Astarte, Semiramis, Anaitis) and forms (fish, dove, lion). She was the divine personification of the planet Venus and the most important deity in the

Babylonian pantheon. She synthesized the forces of life and death because she was adored as a goddess of war and as the great Asiatic goddess of fertility, love and renewal of life.[18]

Her cult is one of the most ancient ones. Ishtar's Sumerian counterpart was Inanna. Like Ishtar, Inanna was queen of heaven, the goddess of light, life and love, and also the goddess of battle and strife. The famous myth "Ishtar is Descent to the Nether World" has been known for almost three-quarters of a century. This poem, written in the Akkadian language and dating from the first millennium B.C., was believed to be of Semitic origin, but with the deciphering of the tablets excavated at Nippur it is evident that this myth goes back more than a millennium earlier to a Sumerian original in which Ishtar is replaced by Inanna.[19]

As a fertility goddess the worship of Semiramis was intimately related to fertility rites. These rites, as described by Frazer, were magic-religious ceremonies with the purpose of securing copious amounts of food and the birth of many children. These rites were conducted during periods of license, which were usually related to the agricultural season, and were dedicated to a god and a goddess of fertility who were responsible for the changing of seasons and the fertility of crops and women.[20]

In Western Asia the Sacaea festival is the best known of these periods of license. A man named Zoganes played to role of King Saturn and he was permitted to indulge in his desires for a period of five days and then he was put to death. This festival was celebrated in Asia Minor where the worship of the Persian goddess Anaitis had established itself.

The cult of this goddess was a variant of the Babylonian Ishtar or Astarte.

The worship of Anaitis was introduced officially by the Persian King Artaxerxes II, at whose court Ctesias lived for seventeen years. Since Anaitis was an Iranian deity, what Artaxerxes did was to confer recognition on an already existing cult. Before she was given official recognition she was worshipped under the various names which the Semitics gave to the different cults of Ishtar.[21] There are reasons to believe that Anaitis is identical to the legendary Semiramis, for Anaitis' sanctuary at Zela in Pontis was erected upon a mound of Semiramis. Frazer believed that the old worship of the Semitic Semiramis continued there even after her name had been changed to the Persian goddess Anaitis.

The sanctuary location at Zela is of great importance for two reasons: one, we have already seen that the seat of the worship of Anaitis corresponds to that of Semiramis; second, Zela was inhabited by sacred slaves and prostitutes. A priest was in command at Zela and he administered it like a religious sanctuary, rather than a city. In the Sacaea festival a female slave or prostitute was chosen to play the part of the divine queen along with the Zoganes, who substituted for the priest-king. The priest could have played the part of the Zoganes, but this would have required him to die at the end of the five day period. Since the Zoganes died, after five days of unrestrained pleasure, just as Semiramis' lovers were put to death, after having had relations with Semiramis, the identity of Anaitis and Semiramis was reinforced. A further parallel exists, because the mounds of Semiramis were said to be

the graves of her unfortunate lovers.[22]

The Gilmanesh epic, the famous Babylonian epic which celebrates the deeds of the hero Gilmanesh, recounts, in Talet VI, how, when Gilmanesh was dressed in royal attire, the goddess Ishtar fell in love with him. The hero rejected her for fear of sharing the fate of all her previous lovers--death. This epic points again, in an even more definite way, to Semiramis' identity with the goddesses Ishtar and Anaitis, all three being part of the same cult.[23]

The Semiramis legend, as narrated by Ctesias contains most of the elements of the worship of Ishtar, Semiramis' mother, Derceto--or Atargatis, as she was known in Northern Syria (Dea Syria to the Romans)--was the local form of fertility goddess worshipped in Hierapolis and she shared with the other fertility goddesses the same sexual symbols and emblems (doves and lions).[24] As a goddess who was half-woman and half-fish, she was associated with the life giving waters and a sacred lake was part of her cult in Northern Syria. For this reason she is also associated with sacred fish. Atargatis' temple was the richest in Northern Syria and her cult included phallic symbols, eunuch-priests and ritual prostitutes, all dedicated to the service of the goddess. Lucian of Samosata's description of the worship of her has been confirmed from numismatic evidence from the time of Alexander.

According to Lucian in his <u>De dea Syria</u> both Semiramis and Atargatis were worshipped at the same temple in Hierapolis.[25] Semiramis' statue was considered to be the oldest in the temple and the one that was carried in procession to the Euphrates at the most important annual feast.

The association of water with her worship, in this Syrian ritual, made possible the introduction of Onnes (Semiramis' first husband in Virués and her suitor in Calderón), who was a Babylonian fish god.

Ctesias made Semiramis Derceto's daughter, instead of a goddess like Derceto; he did this by eliminating the god-son, the fish son of the queen of Hierapolis. This son appears in the account as Semiramis' son Ninyas. In his book, Kinship in Ancient Arabia, W. R. Smith has shown that in the Semitic cults mother and son were worshipped together, the mother being the most important figure and the son secondary.[26] The arrangement dates back to the earliest stages of society when kinship ran in the female line. The mother was an unmarried, but not unchaste goddess, and thus retained her sovereignity. In the Izdubar epic, Ishtar is portrayed in the same manner, as a polyandrous goddess who refuses any formal alliance. The prostitution practiced in her temples was a form of ancient polyandry. As we can see from Ctesias' account, after Ninus' death, Semiramis became a polyandrous queen, who refused to marry as a method of preserving her power and sovereignity. W. R. Smith believes that with time, as in other Semitic sysygies, the divine myth was transformed and the son became the husband of the goddess. This might explain Justin's account of Semiramis' incestuous love for her son.

What Ctesias told about Derceto's illicit love, her shame and the exposure of her child, does not belong to Syrian legend. These stories are clearly based on Greek mythology and are Greek additions to the Derceto story, with the purpose, perhaps, of making it more attractive to Greek audiences.

In the middle part of the story Semiramis' divine character falls very much into the background, since the taking of Bactra, the building of Babylon and the expedition against India are Greek additions, influenced by Alexander's deeds.

Notes

[1]Herodotus, History (London-New York: The Loeb Classical Library, 1930), p. 305.

[2]"Ctesias," Oxford Classical Dictionary (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970 ed.).

[3]W. Robertson Smith, "Ctesias and the Semiramis Legend," English Historical Review, VI (1887), pp. 303-317.

[4]Ibid., p. 306.

[5]Diodorus Siculus, Historial Library (Cambridge-London: The Loeb Classical Library, 1960), pp. 359-419.

[6]Plinius Secundus, Naturalis Historia (Cambridge-London: The Loeb Classical Library, 1967), p. 109.

[7]The Izdubar poem is another name for the Gilmanesh epic poem.

[8]Strabo, The Geography of Strabo (London-New York: The Loeb Classical Library, 1930), pp. 305, 319, 329, 359, 441.

[9]Justinius, Historiarum Philippicarum ex Trogo Pompeio (Paris: Bibliotheque Latine-Française, 1827), pp. 6-11.

[10]Valerius Maximus, Factorum et Dictorum memorabilium (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, 1888), p. 43a.

[11]Plutarchus, Amatorius (Annales de l'Université de Lyon. Troisième Serie. Lettres. Facsimile 21, 1952), pp. 56-57.

[12]See: John Gilmore, "The Origin of the Semiramis Legend," English Historical Review, VI (1887), pp. 729-734; A. H. Sayce, "The Legend of Semiramis," English Historical Review, IX (1888), pp. 104-113.

[13]H. W. Saggs, The Greatness that was Babylon (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1962), p. 103.

[14]Daniel David Luckenbill, Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), I, p. 260.

[15]Leo Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 104.

[16]C. H. Lehmann-Haupt, "Semiramis und Sammu-ramat," Klio Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte, 15 (1917-18), pp. 243-255.

[17]W. Robertson Smith, "Ctesias and the Semiramis Legend," English Historical Review, 6 (1887), p. 304. Euhemerus was a Greek mythographer who established the tradition of seeking an actual historical basis for mythological beings and events.

[18]Lewis Spence, Myths and Legends of Babylonia and Assyria (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1916), p. 125.

[19]Samuel Noah Kramer, Sumerian Mythology. A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C., Revised ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 83.

[20]Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion, 3rd ed. (New York: McMillan, 1966), VI, pp. 364-411.

[21]W. Robertson Smith, pp. 308-309.

[22]Ibid., p. 315.

[23]Alexander Heidel, The Gilmanesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), pp. 49-54.

[24]A. H. Sayce, p. 109.

[25]W. Robertson Smith, pp. 314.

[26]Ibid., pp. 314-315.

CHAPTER II

VIRUES: LA GRAN SEMIRAMIS

Cristóbal de Virués's La gran Semíramis, was written between 1575-1585,[1] but was not published until 1609 in Madrid in a volume containing his poems and plays.[2]

Virués wrote four three-act plays and one five-act play. As Froldi has suggested, Virués's five-act play La cruel Casandra could have been written at any time during Virués's productive years as a writer because it is clearly an experiment in the classical way of writing tragedies that deviates from his practice of writing tragedies "con estilo nuevo."[3] Of the three-act plays, there is strong textual evidence for the belief that La gran Semíramis was the first one written, since in its prologue the author announces:

> Y solamente, porque importa, advierto que esta tragedia, con estilo nuevo que ella introduze, viene en tres jornadas.[4]
>
> (p. 25B-26A)

Virués claims to be the first dramatist in Spain to write three-act dramas, an innovation due to become one of the trademarks of the Spanish comedia.[5] He presents himself as a writer who is very conscious of his art by stressing that indeed it is important and that the fact that he is an innovator should be recognized. Although Francisco Avedaño wrote the Comedia Florisea in three acts, and it was published in 1551, it is

extremely doubtful that Virués knew about it, so his claim seems to be completely justified.[6] Also Lope de Vega in his Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo, published in 1609, credited Virués for this innovation:

> El capitán Virués, insigne ingenio, puso en tres actos la comedia, que antes andaba en cuatro como pies de niño. (vs. 215-218)

So, of Virués three-act plays, La gran Semíramis must be the first one written.

The detailed plot summary that follows follows the play's ambiguities which would be lost in a very succinct exposition. Nino, king of Assyria, has been holding the city of Bactra under siege for ten months, but has not been able to conquer it. Semíramis (dressed as a man) arrives to be reunited with her husband Menón, a general in the king's army. After a brief love exchange between the couple, Semíramis inquires about the state of the siege and upon learning of the failure to conquer Bactra, points to an undefended section of the city and suggests it as the place for an attack. Menón's soldiers succeed and the king thanks Menón for his services. Menón gives the credit to his wife and tells the king how he met her in Ascalon, married her and asked her to join him now since the war was not coming to an end. Nino falls madly in love with her and offers Menón an exchange: he will give him his daughter in marriage and he will take Semíramis as his wife. Semíramis protests the injustice that is being done, but the king insists. Menón refuses the offer, the king sends Menón into exile, and takes Semíramis with him. In despair, Menón commits suicide.

Between the first and the second act, sixteen years have gone by. Semíramis, now queen, requests her husband to allow her to rule for five days, to which Nino complies after a consultation with his counselors. With the help of Zopiro and Zelabo (two soldier-servants), Semíramis imprisons Nino and sends her son, Ninias, a letter, asking him to go into the temple of the vestal virgins dressed as herself. This ruse is made possible by the striking similarity in appearance between mother and Son. Semíramis then, dressed as her son, announces to the council that Nino has been called to the side of his parents Juno and Belo, and that they wish that she should live in the temple with the vestal virgins, and that Ninias should be the new king. Semíramis reigns in disguise and to prevent her secret from being known makes Zopiro, with whom she is in love, her attendant. Nino is given poison and dies.

The third act begins after Semíramis has reigned gloriously for six years. Desiring to be given credit and recognized as an exceptional woman capable of surpassing all other kings, Semíramis reveals her disguise and asks her council to recognize Ninias as the prince he is. At this point it is clear that Semíramis is fighting her incestuous feelings towards her son, but when she is unable to hide them from him, is killed by Ninias, who is horrified by his mother's feelings. In a long dialogue Diarco (a servant) and Zelabo discuss Semíramis' life. Zelabo points out her lasciviousness, her plot to kill NIno, and her low origin as a prostitute's daguther. On the other hand, Diarco stresses her achievements in war and peace, thus giving a very balanced evaluation of her life and charcter. Ninias lies to the council about Semíramis'

death in the same way that she had about Nino's death. According to Ninias, Semíramis was transformed into a dove and left the earth in that form. The comedia ends with the figure of Tragedia speaking and summarizing all the feelings, virtues and vices which are presented in the play, and exhorting the audience the use the example he has presented as a way of learning.

Virués opens La gran Semíramis with a prologue very useful for understanding the play and for observing how the author thought about his craft. The prologue can be divided into two parts. The first part consists of the first twenty-two verses and is dedicated to a comparison between a painter and a writer, and expresses the author's intention:

> Como el sabio pintor en varias formas
> con los colores y pinzeles muestra
> de fuertes i prudentes capitanes,
> de poderosos Príncipes i Reyes,
> las célebres vitorias i altos triunfos
> dignos de eterna i memorable /h/istoria
> para dechado de las almas nobles
> que al punto excelso de virtud aspiran,
> así el poeta con divino ingenio,
> i con una invención cómica alegre,
> ya con un caso trágico admirable
> nos hace ver en el teatro i sena
> las miserias que traen nuestros pechos,
> como el agua del mar los bravos vientos,
> y todo para ejemplo con que el alma
> se despierta el sueño torpe i vano
> en que la tienen los sentidos flacos,
> i mire i siga las virtus divina;
> con este fin, con este justo intento
> /h/oy en su trage trágico se ofrece
> la vida i muerte de la gran Semíramis,
> tirana reina de la grande Asiria.
>
> (p. 25A-B)

The prologue begins with a comparison between painters and poets, a commonplace among Renaissance theoreticians and writers, mainly due to

the influence of Aristotle's Poetics and especially Horace's Ars poetica, whose ut pictura poesis helped to establish the theory of the intimate resemblance between painting and poetry, from this emerges "an extensive body of aesthetics speculation and, in particular, an impressive theory of art which prevailed in the 16th, 17th, and most of the 18th century."[7]

For the learned members of the audience or for learned readers this reference will immediately remind them of Horace, who begins his Epistle to the Pisos (known as the Ars poetica) by comparing a painter and a writer. Contrary to some Renaissance interpreters of Horace, who considered the painter as superior to the poet or vice-versa, Virués seems to equalize both creators.

Like the painter, the writer has different means to express his subject matter. Where the painter will use colors and different brush-strokes to portray the victories of captains and kings, who because of their victories deserve a place in history in order to serve as a guide to noble souls, in the same manner a poet may use his wit in a tragic or comic form to show the spectator or reader the weaknesses that are contained in our spirits. As we can see, not only are painters and poets equal in their worth, they also share a didactic principle which guides their creations. Their intention is to move souls to la virtud divina, as Virués indicates he wants to do in this play. The Semiramis story therefore will be recreated with this intention.

The comparison between painter and writer emphasizes the visual element that govertns both means of communication. For Virués, the visual experience seems to be tied to his notion of theater and of tragedy.

Although Virués's tragedies were not performed in his lifetime, Virués appears to write with the idea of theater as spectacle to be seen, a notion not completely generalized in the Renaissance. Throughout the play there is a repeated use of the verb to see, specially to narrate deaths which are not seen on stage, but which are seen through the "linguistic painting" of the characters who speak. Seeing and being confronted with the deaths of characters of high rank is essential to Virués's notion of tragedy as will be seen.

The last two lines of this first part of the prologue sum up the contents of the play. We are about to see or read the life and death of the great Semíramis, tyrannical queen of great Assyria. After we analyze the play, we shall return to the use of gran in the play's title.

The second part of the prologue consists of the remaining sixteen verses dedicated to literary precepts:

> Y solamente, porque importa, advierto
> que esta tragedia, con estilo nuevo
> que ella introduze, viene en tres jornadas
> que suceden en tiempos diferentes:
> en el sitio de Batra la primera,
> en Nínive famosa la segunda,
> la tercera y final en Babilonia.
> Formando en cada cual una tragedia
> con que podrá toda la de /h/oi tenerse
> por tres tragedias, no sin arte o escritas.
> Ni es menor novedad que la que dixe
> de ser primera en ser de tres jornadas,
> i desto al fin i lo demas se advierta
> con su alto ingenio cada cual, y admita
> lo que más la virtud en sí despierte
> que es el fin justo a que aspirar se deve.
> (pp. 25B-26A)

The estilo nuevo that Virués proclaims for his literary creation refers to his adaptation and transformation of Greek and Latin tragedy.

The Spaniards, like the English, did not adhere to the Neo-aristotelian commentaries and interpretations of Aristotle's Poetics, and felt free to experiment with new forms of tragedy. The basic literary element in all Renaissance treatises was Aristotle's definition of tragedy.[8] Among the principal commentators of the Poetics were the Italians Robortelli, Cintio, Castelvetro, Minturno and Daniello. In the commentaries there was no total agreement as to what was tragedy and who was the perfect tragic hero. Having lived in Italy for so many years as a soldier, there can be no doubt that Virués was aware of this leading literary controversy of his time.

The importance given by Virués to his position as an innovator is stressed by his saying "porque importa" and by separating this statement from the rest of the verse by two commas. It is self-evident that for Virués it was extremely important to be considered as an innovator in the theater world. What prompted Virués to undertake this transformation in the dramatic composition has been attributed by Froldi to his consciousness of "el problema de su representabilidad."[9] There is no doubt that the reduction of the acts from five or four to three added more dynamism, as Froldi has noted, and that this change came at a time when "los espectáculos se iban intensificando."[10] If there were more performances the authors had to be more aware of writing plays for the stage, to be performed, and not just to be read. Still there may have been other factors which influenced this change. As we mentioned previously, La gran Semíramis was the first of the three-acts plays written by Virués and the scope of its subject matter may very well have

imposed a new form on his dramaturgy.

With regard to the unities of time and place Virués breaks with them, and this is part of his "estilo nuevo." The kind of epic scope that Virués had in mind for his first play may very well have dictated this change in form. To write a play about "la vida y muerte de la gran Semíramis" following the unities of time and place would had limited Virués's design tremendously, so in order to accommodate his design Virués created a three-act play with no unities of time and place. Semíramis' life as Virués wanted to portray it falls almost naturally into such form. The first act takes place in Bactra and in it we observe Semíramis' path to power, the second act takes place in Nínive and in it we see how Semíramis obtains absolute power, the third act takes place in Babylonia and deals with Semíramis' glories and death. Between the first and the second act there is a lapse of time of sixteen years and between the second and the third acts, there is a lapse of time of six years. At the end of the play the spectator or reader is left with a sense of expansiveness and burst of energy that probably could not have been achieved following el estilo viejo.

The fact that Virués maintains the unities within each act, that each act takes place in twenty-four hours and in the same city, exemplifies his concept of tragedy since he states in the prologue that each act could be considered as one tragedy, as one unit. As we shall see when we study the three acts, each act represents a tragic unit since each represents the fall of a character of high position which for Virués was essential in a tragedy. Although from his point of view each act is

an independent unit, the three acts are strung together to form an interdependent system of acts.

The prologue ends with a call to the audience or reader to observe in the play what he has stated in the prologue and with a remainder of the drama's didactic intention. The author encourages his hearers to be receptive to the play and to accept the feelings that virtue may arouse in them upon hearing or reading the play. This arousal or response in the public may be related to the Aristotelian theory of catharsis and to Virués's understanding of the concept of tragedy.

It seems that Virués anticipates different levels of responses from the public for he seems to recognize differences among individuals which will lead them to a variety of responses to a work of art. Virtue, the goal that we must pursue according to our author, may be capable of bringing out a variety of reactions from human beings to La gran Semíramis.

The Semíramis portrayed by Virués, gathers all the main elements of the legend: his Semíramis will be ambitius, lustful, incestuous and a glorious and efficient ruler. How this portrayal is achieved will be the main focus of the analysis of this drama.

The first act opens with the reunion of Semíramis and her husband Menón after an absence of more than ten months due to the war that King Nino has been engaged in against the city of Bactra. Not being able to spend a longer period of time without his beloved wife, Menón sends for Semíramis; she complies with his wishes by traveling in disguise as a man to avoid inconvenience on her trip. Their encounter is marked by Menón's loving words to Semiramis and by his joy at seeing her. This is expressed

by Menón's abandonment of warlike posture to greet her, thus risking the honor, fame and glory that he could achieve through war. For Menón, the highest possible glory is the enjoyment of his wife. The expression gozar de vos carries sexual overtones and indicates very subtly a healthy sexual relationship between the couple.[11] Considering the importance given to fame and honor, in the Renaissance, Menón's statement is very significant in expressing his devotion to his wife, as are the last two verses of his first speech in which Menón compares his life without her to "un cuerpo casi muerto / que eternamente gime, pena y llora."

Semíramis' answer is brief:

> Amado esposo, alegre y dulce puerto
> de mis deseos, si llegara ahora
> a ser universal reina del mundo
> al bien de veros fuera bien segundo.
>
> (p. 26A-B)

Her loving reply seems to be in agreement with the feelings expressed by her husband, but as we shall see shortly this brief speech is the center of a controversy and of an interpretation of her character.

Menón's second speech is characterized once more by expressions of his feelings for his wife. In the first of the three eight-line stanzas that form his second speech Menón sees death as a victory if it were not for the hope of seeing her again. The sexual aspect of their relationship is alluded to again by Menón calling his wife mi gozo by the role of his memory in evoking and heightening his desires. It seems obvious that Menón's memory points to the happy times the couple has spent together. There is a significant parallelism in the use of the adjective dulce by both Menón and Semíramis that reflects the inner agreement of their

feelings. Semíramis calls Menón alegre y dulce puerto / de mis deseos, and Menón refers to his desires as mis dulces deseos.

The last eight-line stanza of his speech reinforces again Menón's idea that his highest glory is the enjoyment of his wife. Menón enumerates most of the possible sources of happiness, but concludes by saying that nothing would give more happiness to his soul than gozar de vos, señora, thus once more emphasizing the physical aspect of their relationship.

Semíramis answers Menón in two perfectly balanced eight-line stanzas. The first stanza reveals her agreement with the feelings expressed by Menón, while the second inquires about the state of the war. The first four verses of the second stanza mark the transition from one topic, their feelings, to another, the war.

> Pero dejemos cosas tan sabidas
> como son las conformes voluntades
> que tienen abraçadas nuestras vidas
> para firmes i eternas amistades,
> dezidme las cosas sucedidas
> en la gran rebelión de estas ciudades,
> i el punto de la guerra, i algún hecho
> de vuestro valeroso brazo y pecho.
>
> (p. 26B)

The balance achieved in these two stanzas also points to the main aspects of the legend that are being treated by Virués, Semíramis' personal life and her life as a ruler. We may observe here that both are equally valuable to her at this point.

Menón's answer prompts in her mind an idea for attacking the enemy at a location that is without defenses because the enemy felt that it was impossible to attack at that site. Semíramis' idea is received by Menón

with joy, and he praises her divino espiritu, belleza, divino aviso, rico ingenio, valor and entendimiento profundo, which indicates a deep appreciation on his part for his wife's intelligence. King Nino's victory results from Semíramis' plan.

By close examination of this first scene, I have tried to determine the nature of the relationship and feelings that unite Menón and Semíramis. This is important because several critics have seen irony and duplicity in this scene. John Weiger is the critic who has paid close attention to the scene. For Weiger, Semíramis' first reply to her husband is "replete with irony, given what we know of her character and the subsequent events." Actually, Weiger sees evidence of Semíramis' "implied duplicity" in the whole scene.[12]

There is no doubt that there is irony in the use reina del mundo by Semíramis, when minutes later Menón is going to describe Nino as Rei del mundo, but this irony is not intended by the character, it is intended by the playwriter and the protagonist is completely unaware of it; thus Virués's dramatic irony does not make Semíramis a hypocrite. For the spectator the irony works on two levels: for the spectator who is aware of the legend, this irony places him in a superior position with regard to the charcter because he knows that Semíramis will become reina del mundo; for the alert spectator who is unaware of the legend it also functions as a kind of retrospective irony which will close a circle when Semíramis becomes reina del mundo.

When Semíramis tells Menón: "Pero dejemos cosas tan sabidas / como son las conformes voluntades /" etc., Weiger also sees duplicity. He

comments, ". . . there is nothing veiled in her hurried desire to change the subject and speak instead of military matters." This interpretation seems to be intended to prove Semíramis' "wicked character" as other critics have called it,[13] and avoids the evidence of sincerity in her and in the portrayal that Virués draws of her relationship with Menón. Semíramis, after all, is an intelligent woman and it seems perfectly reasonable in the middle of a war to inquire about the war. The interpretation of this scene is very important for determining Semíramis' characterization and portrayal. If we agree with Weiger, this scene would set in motion the black legend that has surrounded Semíramis in most of Virués's critics. On the other hand, I believe that her portrayal in this scene is essential to Virués's overall characterization and intention, either consciously or unconsciously, for his Semíramis is not just a "morally base" charcter but rather a complex and ambiguous figure. Also sincerity at this point would explain the change (in part) in her response to the king's actions in the last part of this act.

King Nino appears physically on stage for the first time after Bactra has been conquered, inquiring who was behind such a heroic deed. when Menón's men give the credit to Menón, he is prompt to point out to the King that it was Semíramis who invented the stratagem responsible for the victory. Being unaware of her identity and that Semíramis has traveled in disguise to be reunited with her husband, the king's reaction is one of surprise.

> i quien es el que es hombre en el vestido
> i vos le dais el nombre diferente
> (p. 29A)

The king does not understand the dichotomy between nombre and hombre which appears here for the first time in the play and which will reappear in the second act. At this point of the play, the male attire used by Semíramis serves a practical purpose, her safety while traveling; it is this male attire which makes her for all practical reasons a man, which allows her to reach the battleground. Semíramis' male attire will allow her a freedom of action that a female attire would not permit. It should also be remembered that Semíramis undertook this trip at the request of her husband and not on her own initiative. So in using this disguise we cannot find anything morally wrong or negative on her part; her disguise agrees with and originates in her desire to be reunited with her husband safely. As we shall see in the second act, this same disguise will be used because of her wish to rule without being recognized as Semíramis, as if she were her own son. We should also observe that in this play, Virués anticipates one of the favorite characters of the Spanish Golden Age drama, la mujer vestida de hombre.[14]

Menón answers Nino's curiosity with a brief explanation of how and when he met Semíramis and how on her arrival to Bactra she gave the suggestion that made victory possible. Nino manages to stay alone with Semíramis and begins his speech to her with three rhetorical questions which reveal his state of mind. Nino's speech consists of sixty-nine verses: fifty-nine of them are dedicated to praise and celebration of Semíramis and thirteen to an aside in which he questions his own wishes, but nevertheless resolves to take advantage of the situation presented by fortune. Nino's speech creates the conflict which wil trigger the action.

Semíramis' and Nino's scene is interrupted by Menón's arrival with a report to the king as to the state of the affairs in the just captured Bactra. Menón's speech culminates with the narration of Prince Alexandro's suicide, Menón's detailed description of how he found Alexandro is important for determining Virués's idea of tragedy and also because Alexandro's suicide is premonitory of Menón's suicide:

> i de dos grandes salas, entré, i hallo
> en ella una visión /h/orrenda y brava
> un /h/orrendo espectáculo espantoso:
> al Príncipe Alexandro, desarmado,
> vi tinto en sangre desde el pie a la frente
> sin espada ni daga, sino sola
> esta soga cruel, con que ahorcado
> estava de la verjas de una rexa,
> que a aquella cuadra sale de un retrete.
> Al tiempo que yo entré, aún vi las piernas
> i los braços moverse, i sentí un grito
> ronco, triste, espantoso i mal formado.
> Corrí bolando i con la espada al punto
> corté la soga para dalle vida,
> pero por presto que lo hize, tarde
> fue para el desdichado de Alexandro
> que sin alma cayó ante mí, poniendo
> terrible /h/orror i lástima i espanto
> a los que vimos en dolinte caso.
> Esta es la soga que quité al cuitado,
> que la traxe conmigo para exemplo
> de los crueles casos de fortuna.
>
> (pp. 31B-32A)

Central to this speech is the importance of the visual element as the catalyst of Menón's emotions and also of the spectators' emotions, because Menón is put in the same position as the audience. Menón has seen Alexandro's death, the audience is watching the play and seeing Alexandro's death through Menón's eyes, through his description and narrative. In a similar manner Virués emphasizes the horrid aspect of the scene's sight: Alexandro covered with blood, his last scream and his

Nino celebrates Semíramis by comparing her to an angel:

> I esta mui claro de ver
> que esa belleza i aviso
> dan cierto indicio de ser
> un Angel del Paraíso,
> no, como fingís, muger;
>
> (p. 30A)

Semíramis' description does not conform to the traditional Petrarchan description of the beloved woman. The Petrarchan beloved's beauty is a heavenly beauty, like a Platonic idea, and is therefore like the beauty of the angels. The non Petrarchan element here is her being an angel. Both her belleza and aviso are considered by Nino to be so extraordinary that he uses this hyperbolic language to refer to her.

As Weiger has pointed out, Virués is being ironic once more in his use of words and in the place in which they are delivered, the battlefield. But the irony does not result from the fact that: "far from being angelic we know Semiramis to be diabolic" as Weiger says.[15] At this point of the play we do not know that Semiramis may be "diabolic"; for the members of the audience familiar with her story do not know yet how Virués is going to treat her legend. One of the main attractions for the public, after all, is to observe how a particular author recreates a well known story. Virués's irony derives rather from making Nino refer to her in terms of divinity, or "a deity," when he will encounter death through her.

Semíramis' reply emphasizes the wrongness of Nino's desires:

> Creo que quieres hazer
> contra toda lei i fuero
> aquesta triste muger
> de muger de un cavallero
> esclava de tu querer.
>
> (p. 30B)

Nino reassures Semíramis of his intentions which are:

> por mi esposa i mi señora
> te quiero, i hazerte igual
> con esta alma que te adora.
>
> (p. 30B)

Nino intends to offer his daughter Sosana to Menón with all the richness and power that Menón's marriage to her would entail, since she is the king's daughter, in exchange for Semíramis. Love has overpowered Nino in such a way that he even believes he is making a concession to Menón by asking him instead of doing it by force, as he feels he could do as king.

In her answer Semíramis points out to Nino that the greatest victory one can have is to conquer oneself and exhorts him to do so in this instance. Her request is of no avail; Nino is determined and claims that a king's will is law and that as such should be obeyed, but what seems to be the driving force of his actions is another even more powerful king. Love, "ques el poderoso Amor / contra quien ni /h/ai lei ni fuerça" (p. 31A). This argument will reappear in the play when Semíramis, moved by the power of Love, will fall in love with her son, and will meet death at his hands, thus creating a parallel situation.

Although Weiger gives credit to Semíramis for mentioning to Nino the "impropriety of his desires" he still claims that she "did not speak about Sin."[16] Actually at no point in the play do we find the word sin mentioned and with very good reason. The action of the play is not located in a Christian milieu, but rather in a pre-Christian era governed more by natural law than by Christian precepts. This also helps to explain Nino's and Semíramis' inability to fight against the power of love, for they lack the grace needed to control their nature.

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legs' last movement, because these are the elements that will produce dread and pity in the spectators, thus creating a cathartic experience. The importance of the visual element will be noted throughout the play and should be related to the ut pictura poesis theme which we made reference to when we discussed the prologue to the play. In Alexandro's death it must be observed that it is language that "paints" the picture.

Nino's request to exchange Sosana for Semíramis is received by Menón with utter astonishment, and he strongly refuses even at the risk of his life. Nino is enraged by Menón's refusal and threatens him with the most cruel of deaths if he does not go into exile. Semíramis' last speeches in this act serve to point out once more the injustice that is being done by the king and also to express her concern at being separated from her husband:

> Semíramis: Rei, mira que es injusto lo que hazes.
> Nino: Ven tú conmigo.
> Semíramis: ¿Dónde, sin mi esposo?
> Nino: Donde tenga tu ser lo que merece.
> Semíramis: ¡O/h/, injusto apartamiento!
> (p. 33A)

There is no evidence of willingness to go with the king in her words even though he is offering her lo que merece; her words seem to reinforce even more the ties that have united her and her husband.

Menón's last speech begins with very harsh words about Nino and with a call for Nino's death in a way similar to his; this call for justice will be satisfied at the end of the second act when Nino dies as a result of Semíramis' intrigues. Although Menón's death comes from his own hands, the king is morally responsible for it, because Menón could not conceive of his life without Semíramis; in depriving him of her, Nino was

already taking his life. Among the conventions of love poetry, the metaphor of the lover as one's life goes back to Roman poetry. With Menon's death this metaphor becomes alive; without Semíramis Menón is literally dead. Menón's use of the same rope that Alexandro used to end his life is important, because it stresses a parallel between them. Alexandro was Nino's adversary in war; with his death Menón becomes Nino's adversary, not in war but in love, since both Nino and Menón love the same woman. With Menón's death, the role of adversary is actually left to Semíramis. As Nino's adversary, Semíramis will win since Nino will encounter death through her.

The act ends with a dialogue between Zopiro and Zelabo, two soldiers and friends of Menón, in which the evils of war are recounted. This condemnation of war is a recurrent theme throughout the play, and as critics have mentioned it could very well reflect upon and derive from Virués's own personal experience as a soldier.[17] In the dialogue between these two characters there is an emphasis on what they have seen in Bactra on that day:

> Zopiro: Notables casos, admirables hechos,
> /h/orrendos espectáculos se /h/an visto
> /h/oi en esta ciudad Zelabo amigo.
>
> Zelabo: Estoi, Zopiro, atónito i pasmado
> que con aver tantas batallas visto,
> tantos sacos i assaltos de ciudades,
> digo que cuanto /h/e visto junto es menos
> de lo que /h/oi /h/a passado de miseria
> en este miserable i triste pueblo.
> (p. 34B)

Once more Virués is establishing a relationship between seeing and feeling, for it seems to be this act of seeing which brings a response in the

spectators. The act comes to an end with the discovery by Zopiro and Zelabo of Menón's body.

So in this act the two deaths that occur are balanced in their presentation. Alexandro's death is narrated vividly by menón, the visual experience is recreated in language; Menón's death is more dramatically seen on stage, another visual experience, but this time not presented to us in language. As we shall see in the next two acts, Virués works out very carefully this balance between the deaths that appear on stage and the ones that are narrated.

The Semíramis we encounter in the second act is presented in a very different manner; after a period of sixteen years we now see Semíramis living in Niniveh and in the role of Nino's wife, as queen. More profound and drastic will be the transformation that can be observed in her character, and this drastic transformation will be one of the main problems that needs to be addressed.

Most critics have seen in this change no change at all, but rather a continuation and heightening of her wickedness; but it seems that in doing so the critics are responding to a stereotyped vision of her legend and do not pay sufficient attention to Virués's text in itself. As demonstrated in the analysis of the first act, Semíramis and Menón were really in love with each other, and at no point is there evidence of duplicity in her, very much to the contrary of what we are going to observe in the second and third acts, where duplicity becomes almost the essence of her character. There is a change, however, and it can be attributed to the consequences of Nino's behavior at separating her from

her husband and consequently causing his suicide. Lienhard Bergel has been the only critic who has observed this change in her character and has attributed it to:

> . . . the tragedy of a good and gifted woman whose virtuous instincts were distorted by a forced marriage; . . . The impression is created that the desire for power is slowly aroused in her through the opportunities she perceives after she has become queen against her will.[18]

Thus Semíramis' behavior in this act obeys a principle of compensation that is always present between her personal life and her political role. After giving in to her marriage with Nino, Semíramis counterbalances her loss in the personal life with her inordinate desire for absolute power.

The first scene of the second act opens with a dialogue between Semíramis and her husband Nino:

> Rei i señor, pues ya la paz gozamos
> libres de los trabajos de la guerra
> i en tu famosa Nínive /h/abitamos,
> suplícote, por cuanto el cielo encierra,
> que una merced que ya me /h/as prometido
> tenga su efeto en esta amada tierra.
>
> Aora puedes ser, señor, servido
> de mandar que se junte tu consejo
> para que sea mi desseo cumplido;
> ahora /h/ai tiempo, espacio y aparejo;
> no lo dilates más, así los hados
> te dexen ver tu hijo cual tu viejo.
> (p. 35B)

Semíramis' speech seems to indicate great deference for her husband the king, though her last word viejo carries a great emotional burden. Modern editors like Juliá Martínez and Ebersole emphasize even more the word viejo by placing commas before cual and after tu, but that punctuation was not used by Virués. Semíramis is not really wishing her husband

Nino life long enough to allow him to see their son as old as he is now, she is rather emphasizing the fact that Nino is by now an old man. This word viejo will acquire even more meaning when shortly afterwards Semíramis will refer to Nino as torpe i asqueroso in opposition to Zopiro, the man she is in love with now, whom she will describe as dulce i amoroso, thus marking an obvious sexual incompatibility and disgust on her part towards Nino. This fact cannot be taken lightly in view of the strong sexual and emotional tie that had existed between Menón and Semíramis.

The wish that Semíramis desires to be granted, as she will reveal very soon, is to kill Nino; the fact that she has asked for it already and Nino has agreed to it, indicates that Semíramis has been planning her plot for a long time and finally had seen the moment to put it into effect. All of Semíramis' words in this scene are ironic and imply duplicity in her part. When she says:

> Esta muger, que como un Dios te adora,
> dará con esto fin a un pensamiento
> que para tu descanso le atesora,
>
> (p. 35B)

all her words mean the contrary, and the descanso that she wishes him is an eternal one, death.

Nino, who only wants to please Semíramis, agrees to ask the council to allow her to rule as the only sovereign for five days. In his request to the council, Nino praises her discreción, industria i arte as attributes that distinguish her character and that consequently will make her a great ruler. Once more Virués is being ironic in the lines he writes for his character, for Nino is totaly unaware that Semíramis is using all her discreción, industria i arte to plot his death.

Once Semíramis is made queen, she remains alone on the stage and reveals to the audience her true motives and wishes in all openness:

> El descanso i el bien que te procuro,
> Nino infelice, es el que da la muerte,
> i por el alma de Menón, te juro
> que /h/a de ser, si yo puedo, desta suerte;
> i aunque me veo en un abismo escuro
> yo buscaré como a salir acierte,
> placando el alma que suspira i llora
> i siendo yo, como desseo, señora.
> (p. 37B)

Semíramis' evocation of Menón at this point is significant to understand her motives, which are complex. there is no doubt that her ambition is to become the ony ruler, but in her mind there still lingers the memory of Menón thus adding vengeance to her underlying motives to kill Nino. The fact that she swears by his memory is also significant of how important that memory is. Semíramis is not only "paying lip service to Menón's memory" as Weiger has said[19] but it is an integral part of her driving force. Semíramis' suffering can also be seen in that double perspective: her soul needs to be appeased for the imprisonment she feels as Nino's wife in terms of love and power, and for Nino's responsibility for Menón's suicide. This peace of mind can only be achieved through Nino's death.

To accomplish her plan Semíramis counts on the assistance of Zelabo and Zopiro, the men who were Menón's friends, and soldiers. It is at this point that Semíramis begins to display her attraction for Zopiro: "¡Qué gracioso, qué lindo, qué discreto / qué airoso, qué galán, qué dulce i blando!" (p. 38B) and her determination to have him as a lover, thus beginning to reflect the character that the legend has made her

famous for, that of a powerful and erotic woman. These two aspects of her personality will determine much of her behavior, but at this time Semíramis' main objective is to consolidate her power; her erotic needs are postponed until her goals are achieved. Actually Semíramis will always give preference to power; it is ironic that when her erotic needs are placed before her need for absolute power, she will encounter death.

> Tiempo después /h/avrá para gozarme,
> no con un Nino torpe i asqueroso;
> tiempo tendré después para emplearme
> en un Zopiro dulce i amoroso;
> tiempo tendré para desencerrarme
> de un cautiverio infame i afrentoso,
> que /h/a ya diez i seis años que en mí reina
> con título de Reina sin ser Reina.
> (pp. 38B-39A)

As we have mentioned before, the opposition of Zopiro and Nino points to the disgust Semíramis feels towards her husband; it is evident that their sexual relationship has not been at all satisfactory for her. Within this context it can be said that the cautiverio that Semíramis refers to is not limited to the fact that she has been queen only in name and not in terms of power, but also to her personal life. When she referes to her sixteen years with Nino as cautiverio infame i afrentoso she is making reference to several points: Menón's suicide, caused by Nino, her forced marriage, her inadequate sexual life and her lack of real power. Nevertheless, Semíramis' main goal now is to become the sole ruler and once she has obtained this, she will go to any length to preserve it.

It is at this point that Semíramis reveals what I believe is her truest and most profound ambition:

> . . . i luego al alto i generoso
> intento, mostraré como confío,
> con lo cual en el mundo el más famoso
> /h/a ser de mi valor i el nombre mío
> de cuantos ensu /h/eroica i alta /h/istoria
> /h/aga la eternidad viva memoria.
> (p. 39B)

Semíramis' driving force is not limited to blind ambition; her real ambition is to be remembered and perpetuated in history for achieving what no one else in the world has been able to achieve. Semíramis is impeled then, rather than by blind ambition and power per se, by her quest for secular immortality, for fame, which as a pagan is the only kind of immortality she knows. Thus, in making fame Semíramis' driving force, Virués is attributing to her one of the main concerns of the Renaissance, and thus is remaking the Semíramis legend into a legend that responds more to his time's concerns and aspirations.

In order to achieve her goal Semíramis takes advantages of the striking facial resemblance between her son and herself. Semíramis sends her son, Ninias, to live in the temple among the vestal virgins dressed as a woman, which will transform him into Semíramis. This ruse will allow Semíramis to assume her son's identity and to rule in disguise.[20]

Once in disguise as Ninias, Semíramis summons the council and hands them a letter written by her in which she narrates the marvelous arrival on earth of the god Belo and the goddess Juno, Nino's parents, with the intention of taking him from this life. This is the wish of their great god Amón, who also orders Semíramis to go into the temple and to Ninias to govern as the monarch. The council, as always, is ready to do what they are told and agree to crown Ninias the following day.

To protect her disguise Semíramis makes Zopiro her private steward.

> No /h/ai cosa en que repare ya ni dude;
> mañana seré Rei i Reina junto,
> i solo lo sabrá quien me desnude,
> el cual será Zopiro, i si barrunto
> que por él o Zelabo /h/a de saberse,
> morirán por mi mano, que en su punto
> de /h/oi más mi voluntad ha de ponerse.
> (p. 45A)

Making Zopiro her steward serves Semíramis a two-fold intention. Since Semíramis desires him, it makes their encounters safe and at the same time is a protection for her secret. Semíramis will be able to indulge in her sexual desires without risking her position. Once more we can observe her preference for power over love when she is willing to kill Zopiro if she suspects that her disguise may be made known by him.

To complete her plan Nino must be killed. Together with Zelabo and Zopiro Semíramis, dressed as Ninias, goes to the tower where Nino has been hidden, to give him the poison that will take his life. Nino, who does not understand the situation, reproaches the one whom he believes to be his son, for his actions. Led to believe that Ninias has killed his mother already, Nino laments the death of his beloeved wife and begs to be killed in order to be reunited with her. Semíramis orders them to give Nino the poison and as she leaves she says:

> Yo me entro, que a un metal, a un duro canto
> puede mover aquel amor i llanto.
> (p. 45B)

These two verses seem to contradict the disgust that she has expressed towards him, and the one-sided approach that some critics have taken with regard to Semíramis. Among Virués's main critics, Sargent has said:

> This woman's ambition can be realized because, untouched by affection, she is complete mistress of the feminine art of knowing and handling men.[21]

To assert that Semíramis has been "untouched by affection" is to deny the nuances that Virués created in her portrayal and to transform her into some kind of monster. Besides the true love that she has felt for her husband Menón, these two verses reflect a certain degree of affection for Nino. If Semíramis was comletely "untouched by affection" she would not fear the possibility of being moved to pity by Nino's cries and laments. Furthermore, in Semíramis' words there is not an equivalence between herself and "un metal un duro canto"; what she seems to point to is that if even such hard substances can be moved, even more can a human being be shaken by such laments. At a moment when Semíramis seems to be acting with extreme cruelty there is a softening touch to her character that humanizes her.

Zelabo decides not to let the king die deceived and tells him the truth. With Zelabo's revelation Nino discovers who Semíramis is in several senses: he becomes aware of Semíramis' disguise, and that the person he has seen is not his son as he thought but his wife. More important is the revelation in terms of Semíramis' character. Nino who has idolized his wife suffers a great <u>desengaño</u> when he realizes that Semíramis has contrived his death. Nino's last words parallel those of Menón:

> Mas ya el remedio es tarde,
> o/h/ fiera rigurosa, /h/orrible i brava
> tal castigo te guarde
> la mano justiciera; a quien te amava,
> a quien te amava más que a sí o/h/ traidora
> o/h/ pérfida Semíramis.
>
> (p. 46B)

As Menón called for Nino's death in his last words, Nino also asks for Semíramis' death. Semíramis' death will also parallel Nino's death because as Nino loved her "mas que a si" so will Semíramis love her son, her killer. Nino dies cursing the woman he has adored and the act finishes with Zopiro and Zelabo carrying Nino's body to the fire.

Nino's death, like that of Menón, is presented more dramatically by having it on stage; we are also in the presence of another visual experience of the kind that Virués expected would move the spectators by seeing the fall and death of a powerful king.

The third act opens with a long speech by Semíramis, who once again, after a period of six years, reassumes her identity as Semíramis and abandons the disguise that made her appear to be, and govern as, Ninias. Semíramis' aspiration has reached its peak and she feels free now to "reveal" her disguise, a disguise that once known will make her deeds even greater for what she has accomplished being a woman.

> Ya llegó al punto mi desseo ardiente
> de que el mundo por mí en su punto viesse
> una muger /h/eroica iecelente;
> una muger que en guerra i paz rigiesse
> fuertes legiones, pueblos ordenados
> i que en todo a mil Reyes ecediese.
>
> (p. 47A)

As has been said previously, Semíramis is striving for fame and secular immortality and at this point she feels that her heroic deeds have earned her the fame she was looking for. Semíramis' revelation places her in a unique position, for as a woman she has conquered a position that no other human being, male or female, has been able to reach.

McKendrick has seen in this passage a manifestation of Semíramis' supreme "feminism":

> But she is a woman, she is Semíramis; and such is her egotism that she wishes to be recognized as Semíramis the woman. Disguised, she is merely creating glory for her son and she wants immortality for herself. Totally successful as she is, her ambition carries within itself the seeds of its own defeat. She is driven to admit impersonification although it means the end of her career, and appropriately, at the point of decision, the supreme egoism of this superwoman who has not been able to rule qua woman manifests itself as supreme feminism . . .[22]

Although McKendrick's perception of Semíramis seems accurate, it can be argued whether Semíramis' revelation means the end of her career and, as a consequence, her own defeat. Semíramis asks the council, "sino sólo rogaros que se admita / Ninias, mi hijo, a las reales sillas" (p. 47A), which gives the impression that they will share the power or that he will be given the recognition that as a prince he deserves. Furthermore when Ninias begins to suspect his mother's incestuous desires he says:

> Yo, yo tengo la culpa, que permito
> que reine una muger engañadora.
> Pues muera yo si el reino no le quito.
> (p. 48B)

which establishes very clearly the fact that Semíramis remains in power. Semíramis' fatal end will come not as consequence of her own ambition but as a consequence of her incestuous love for her son and Ninias' own ambition to govern. Semíramis places love before power because she is not able to control her passion for her son: this will bring her death.

During the six years that Semíramis impersonates her son and reigns in his place, Semíramis plays a masculine role. McKendrick sees in

Semíramis a charcter that rises "to a crescendo of varonilidad"[23] far from any traditional portrayal of women. Semíramis' ambition and lust are traits which traditionally have been associated with aspects of the masculine character, but Virués seems to show that both females and males can have the same desires and passions. It is for this reason that McKendrick has called Virués a "feminist writer,"[24] for granting both men and women the same drives.

Although Semíramis acts like a man in public, in her private life she remains true to her own identity, since as Zelabo will reveal, in those six years Semíramis had a legion of lovers whom she killed in order to protect her impersonation. So even when she is playing the role of a man, Semíramis maintains an extremely active sexual life as a woman. She allows herself to indulge in her desires, but always protecting her role. There is no doubt that the role is essential to her, since it is the disguise which allows her to fulfill her dreams of glory, but once she has arrived at the zenith, Semíramis wants to regain her identity as a woman in order to maximize her glory. Semíramis uses and controls her masculine role.

Once Semíramis and Ninias are alone the theme of incest appears in the play for the first time. When Ninias tells his mother how proud he feels of being her son (although this is not his real feeling), Semíramis experiences a profound sadness. It is as if the process of revealing herself to the world sets in motion a process of revelation within herself, about her feelings for her son.

> Esso me causa a mí mortal tristeza
> esso me quita a mi todo el contento
> que puede dar tu celestial belleza.
> Mas ¿qué furioso disparate intento?
> ¿Adónde me despeñan mis desseos?
> ¿Dónde buela mi vano pensamiento?
>
> (p. 47B)

Semíramis' first reaction to her son's expression of proudness for being her son, is one of grief and disappointment. But as soon as she stops herself to question and examine her desires, she becomes completely aware of the monstrousness of her feeling. Questioned by Ninias about the words she has uttered to herself she refuses to explain to him:

> Ninias: No entiendo, amada madre tus razones.
> Semíramis: ¡Qué dulce nombre, amada, i cuán azedo
> es el de madre, que con esse pones!
> Tan grande es mi passión que ya no puedo
> dissimulalla más ni resistilla.
> Ya, ya me rindo; ya rendida quedo
> ya no puedo mi pena diferilla,
> mas, ¿cómo la diré? ¿Qué boz, qué aliento
> qué palabras tendré para dezilla?
> Inmenso es mi dolor i mi tormento;
> elada estoi i enmedio estoi de un fuego
> todo por . . .
> Ninias: ¿Dónde vas?
> Semíramis: A mi aposento.
>
> (p. 48A)

There is no doubt that Semíramis is consumed by the passion she feels for her son and that she is unable to hide it any more because she has been completely overpowered by love. When she is about to declare her love Semíramis flees from the object of her desires. This action invalidates Sargent's statement with regard to the incest:

> . . . Semíramis alone represents Phaedra and Oedipus --but it has gained in determined wickedness, for whereas Phaedra shudders at the precipice into which her ill-fated love is pushing her against her better instincts, and Oedipus adjusts his life to avoid the

> disaster for which the Fates destine him, Semíramis approaches the crime with the relish of an already perverted degenerate.[25]

Sargent's judgment does not seem to take into account Virués's text, because Semíramis does question her ill-fated love for her son and controls herself when she is about to verbalize it and confess to him. Bergel has seen in this scene an anticipation of Racine's Phèdre since both seem to be overcome by a feeling of shame that prevents them from declaring their passion at a certain moment.[26]

Once Ninias is alone we learn of his own ambition, his desire to avenge his father's death and his awareness of Semíramis' feelings towards him. Ninias' discovery of her incestuous feelings make him ponder killing her. For Ninias, Semíramis' death means the end of all her evils,

> Daré fin con su muerte a sus marañas,
> acabarán sus vicios i maldades,
> sus diabólicas artes i sus mañas;
> evitaré sus fieras crueldades
> cortaréle en agraz su vil desseo,
> gozaré yo mis reinos i ciudades,
> (p. 48B)

and also the opportunity to seize power for himself. Ninias' speech ends with four verses in which he reconsiders the monstruous deed that it will be to kill his mother.

Semíramis' and Ninias' second encounter is marked by Semíramis' despair and by her passion. Semíramis is torn between her desire to reveal her passion to Ninias and at the same time conceal it from him. She begs her son not to make her say what she feels, since her heart is showing it, which once more points to Semíramis' feeling of shame and

recognition of the wrongness of her passion, which she is unable to control. Ninias chooses to leave her presence instead of killing her, also recognizing the monstruousness of such act.

Once Semíramis is alone, we can see the magnitude of the passion that will being her end:

> No puedo sin ti passar,
> no puedo sin ti bivir,
> por fuerça te /h/e de buscar,
> por fuerça te /h/e de seguir,
> por fuerça te /h/e de alcanzar.
>
> No puedes huir de mí
> que /h/e de correr mucho yo,
> pues quiere que sea así
> el que me hirió
> dexándote sano a ti.

Virués has reserved some of his best love poetry for this speech. He uses anaphora to stress and heighten the expression of her feelings and her inability to fight against them, because what is moving her is stronger than her will. She is compelled to follow Ninias, the god of love has decreed it that way. This compulsion to follow Ninias resembles Phaedra's feelings towards Hippolytus in Seneca's Hippolytus:

> te vel per ignes, per mare insanum sequar
> rupesque et amnes, unda quos torrens rapit,
> quacumque gressus tuleris hac amens agar (v. 700-702)[27]

Weiger believes that Semíramis "has really fallen in love with her own masculine image" and that "the perversity which has been noted by many scholars is not so much incest as narcissism."[28] However, in his book on Virués, he seems to abandon this theory, which may actually reflect one side of Semíramis' passion for her son. The theme of incest appears in the sources used by Virués since it is an integral part of the

Semíramis' legend. Whether Semíramis has fallen in love with her "masculine image" is debatable, since Semíramis is really in love with herself and her image of herself is both masculine and feminine. Semíramis sees in her son an identical projection of herself and is compelled to love him as she loves herself.

Semíramis' last moments and her death, like Alexandro's, is not seen on stage. Her death is narrated by an afflicted Diarco, a palace porter, in a conversation with Zelabo:

> sintiendo bozes acerqué los ojos
> al agujero de la cerradura
> por ver quién era el que en aquella parte
> tan sin respeto se descomponía
> i vi, o/h/ Zelabo, una visión /h/orrible,
> un terrible espectáculo espantoso;
> a Semíramis vi bañada en sangre
> asirsse de las manos de su hijo
> i echarle al cuello los hermosos braços,
> diziéndole con rostro que moviera
> a compasión leones i serpientes
> palabras cuyo son confusamente
> oía yo, aunque jamás alguna
> comprender distintamente pude,
> bien que en sus ojos, bien que en sus afetos
> mostrava claramente que pedia
> al cruel hijo, al inorme i fiero,
> merced, la desdichada, de la vida,
> la cual el áspid sordo, el tigre bravo,
> le quitó luego con su infame espada,
> dándole dos heridas en los pechos
> que cada cual passava a las espaldas.
>
> (p. 52B)

The way in which this scene is presented parallels the scene in which Menón describes Alexandro's suicide, by Diarco's repeated use of the verb ver to recreate what he saw. As in the first act the visual element acts as a catalyst of Diarco's emotions and as the catalyst of the public's emotions, because the audience is watching the play and

seeing Semíramis' death through Diarco's eyes; once more the language is the vehicle that paints the picture.

However, in this scene the public's emotions will be more controlled by the fact that they are not confronted with Semíramis' death on stage. Virués's reason for not presenting Semíramis' death on stage could respond to his desire to create a distance between the spectators and Semíramis. The public will not react with the same intensity to the narration of her death as to the visual confrontation of her tragic death on stage. In Diarco's narration of her last moments there is a great ambiguity in Semíramis' gestures:

> a Semíramis vi bañada en sangre
> asirsse de las manos de su hijo
> i echarle al cuello los braços,
> diziéndole con rostro que moviera
> a compasión leones i serpientes,
>
> (p. 52B)

The gestures described her in the second and third verses could respond to a fit of passionate love or to her reaction after being hurt; by not presenting them on stage Virués creates an aura of ambiguity which will remain unresolved. This ambiguity is consistent with the overall ambiguity that surrounds Virués's characterization of the Babylonian queen.

Diarco also narrates Semíramis' last words after she has been fatally wounded by her son Ninias; Semíramis' long speech is divided in two thematic parts: the first part consists of the diatribe against her son, in which Semíramis ponders the inhuman act committed by Ninias, an act that places him in her view lower than the wild beasts. The second part of her speech is dedicatd to her confrontation with death and her

realization of how little all her accomplishments count for at this moment.

> ¿Es esta mi esperança?
> ¿Son estos mis contentos?
> ¿Es este el triunfo i gloria de mis glorias?
> ¿Dónde esta mi pujanza?
> ¿Qué son de mis intentos?
> ¿Qué de mis grandes hechos i vitorias?
> ¿Son estas sus memorias?
> Mi bien un breve sueño /h/a sido apena;
> mis años i mis días
> mis gozos i alegrías,
> así /h/an passado como larga vena
> de agua corriente i biva
> que el curso abiva a la marina arena.
> (p. 53B)

In Semíramis' words, Virués anticipates one of the favorite themes of the Spanish Baroque poets the desengaño, without the religious connotations this theme will carry for them. Semíramis' desengaño can be considered a secular desengaño because as a pagan the concept of another life after death does not exist for her. It is for the audience that this desengaño could be revisted of a religious meaning and here is probably Virués's intention and didacticism as he states in his prologue. Seeing the immensity of her achievements and of what little avail they are, there is the possibility of moving the audience to recognize the futility and emptiness of this world's glories and turn their thoughts to the glory of a second life.

Diarco, who has been extremely affected and moved by Semíramis' death, is informed by Zelabo of Semíramis' crimes and lust. Probably Zelabo's most important revelation concerns Semíramis' low origin. Here Virués transforms drastically the legend making of Semíramis' mother, the goddess Derceto, a prostitute, and of her father "un hombre vil i baxo."

Weiger believes that Virués has chosen this moment towards the end of the play to reveal Semíramis' origin as a means of discrediting her as a tragic heroine.

Aristotle's commentators have debated for centuries what Aristotle meant in his definition of the tragic hero. Among Renaissance commentators of Aristotle's Poetics there was great disagreement and controversy as to what was more important for a tragic hero: social rank or moral flaws. Weiger quotes Robortello, who wrote the first commentary to the Poetics in 1548:

> Is thus sufficiently clear that common men of low birth cannot sink to calamity from a happiness which they never have possessed.[29]

Weiger believes that Semíramis is not a tragic figure for both her low origin and her wickedness; he concludes:

> When this information is combined with her moral baseness, one conclusion is unavoidable: we are not dealing with Classical tragedy. It remains possible, of course, to suggest an original conception of tragedy, as A. A. Parker has done for Calderón. However, we assuredly ought not to force Virues's drama into a neo-Aristotelian mold, as McKendrick does when she maintains that 'Semiramis is the victim of Fate--her tragedy is that she was not born a man.'[30]

However, most of Virués's critics agree that among the Italian commentators of the Poetics Giraldi Cinto was the one that most influenced Virués's concept of tragedy and of art, and not Robortello. For Cintio the poet function is: "to condemn vice and to praise virtue."[31] Cintio also considers rank the essential characteristic of the tragic hero:

> . . . the actions of tragedy are called illustrious, not because they are virtuous or vicious, but merely

> because they are the actions of people of the highest rank.[32]

As Spingarn has stated, this idea of tragedy that views rank as the distinguished mark of tragedy was very common in the Renaissance and was un-Aristotelian, for Aristotle's does not make rank the essence of the tragic hero.[33]

It seems evident that Virués considers the fall of a character of high rank at a time when he or she seem to be at the Zenith of their glory, as the essence of tragedy for each act of La gran Semíramis ends with the death of such a character. It must be remembered that in the prologue Virués speaks of each act as a complete tragedy, so it is the fall of a character of high rank that determines the tragic hero. Such an end could produce a cathartic experience on the audience by making them recognize how ephemeral fame and worldly success are. It is as if the character's awareness at the moment of death becomes the audience's own awareness by which Virués's didactic aim is fulfilled.

Considering the above mentioned, Weiger statement with regard to Semíramis' low origin does not seem accurate for it should be considered in the context of Cintio's ideas and not Robortello's. It is true that Semíramis is not a classical tragic Aristotelian figure, but Virués makes it clear in the prologue that he is trying to combine classical and contemporary theory to create a new style. Virués is the first one to disassociate himself from a neo-Aristotelian position.

It is necessary to provide another explanation for Virués's change of the legend concerning Semíramis' parents, and the answer may be in the influence of blood as a determinative of one's character. Once more

Seneca is relevant. After Hippolytus is falsely accused, Theseus says: ". . . redit ad auctores genus / stirpemque primam degener sanguis refert" (v. 907-908).[34] Phaedra's nurse also recognizes the curse behind Phaedra's passion: "prodigia totiens orbis insueta audiet / natura tutiens legibus cedet suis / quotiens amabit Cressa?" (v. 175-176).[35] Semíramis' inordinate lust could be explained to an extent as a consequence of being a prostitute's daughter. By providing an explanation for her lust Virués makes her actions more understandable. Actually, Virués's change of the legend could make Semíramis' lust understandable by providing an explanation for her behavior.

Zelabo's revelation is followed by Diarco's examination of Semíramis' actions as queen. Diarco's and Zelabo's interchange results in a point-counterpoint of Semíramis' life which is of vital importance for considering the kind of portrayal that Virués is creating about the famous Babylonian queen. To Zelabo's revelation of Semíramis' low origins and the many lovers whom she had killed in order to keep her disguise a secret, Diarco answers with a review of Semíramis' reign. He praises her courage in war and her great campaign against India, which in Diodorus' account was unsuccessful, but which Virués claims as one of her greatest victories in war. So Virués changes once more the legend to Semíramis' advantage granting her the greatest conquest of antiquity, India.

Zelabo agrees with Diarco's praises and states that Semíramis' only defeat was in conquering "los viles apetitos ciegos." Diarco goes on to consider her achievements as queen in time of peace, among which the building of Babylon was one of the most prominent, together with Valerius

Maximus' famous anecdote in which Semíramis interrupted her toilet in order to calm a revolt in Babylon and went to it with half of her hair braided and the other half unbraided. Diarco's recitation ends with a consideration of the emptiness of life's glories.

What emerges from this dialogue between Zelabo and Diarco is a perfectly balanced appraisal of Semíramis' life, who in the final analysis is not portrayed as a wicked woman but rather as a glorious leader in war and peace who was unable to conquer the weaknesses in her character. It should be emphasized that within this context Semíramis' low origin can only be seen as an explanation for her lustful condition.

Considering the vital importance of this scene, it is indeed remarkable that Virués's critics have not paid any attention to it, with the exception of Bergel who pointed out that "a balance is struck between the heroine's virtues and vices."[36]

To explain Semíramis' death to the council, Ninias uses a parallel technique to that used by Semíramis to explain Nino's death. According to Ninias' account to the council, Semíramis turned into a dove and disappeared in the sky, while to Zelabo and Diarco he orders to "dar esse lacivo cuerpo al fuego" (p. 57B). This fact creates a situation parallel to that of Nino, whose body was also burnt, and although we cannot speak of poetic justice here the parallel could correspond to the fact that both of them died victims of their loved ones. Nino was so much in love with Semíramis that he was blinded and unable to realize her ambition and desire for avenging Menón's death; Semírmis is so overpowered by her love for Ninias that she prefers death to not being with him.

Tragedia is the figure that closes the play:

> De valor, de bondad, de cortesía,
> de engaño, de maldad i de malicia,
> de discreción, de amor, de valentía
> de passión, de rencor i de cudicia,
> de vicio, de crueldad, de tiranía,
> de govierno, de paz i de milicia
> ilustre exemplo doi al alma ilustre
> con que su lustre como deve ilustre.
> (p. 57B)

Although Weiger has pointed out that in Tragedia's speech we find: "an enlightening compendium of the play's motifs" he explains line six in the following manner:

> . . . this sixth line, while referring to good qualities, is not so much in opposition to the preceeding evils as it is a moralizing piece of advice on how the Vices are to be dominated: harmony governed by discipline.[37]

Weiger's first statement seems in perfect agreement with the virtues and vices which Virués portrays in La gran Semíramis, but to explain the sixth line as part of Virués's moralizing seems to be a forced interpretation that deprives Semíramis of some of her positive attributes. After all, Semíramis does excel in govierno, paz i milicia. There is no doubt of Virués's moralizing intention as a whole since it is clearly stated in the prologue and repeated in the last two lines of the epilogue, but the first six lines of this eight-line stanza do represent a synopsis of the play's motifs, courage, kindness, courtesy, deceit, evil, malice, prudence, love, passion, cruelty, tyranny, government, peace and the art of man.

Notes

[1]Several critics have attempted to establish the chronology of Virués's dramas. Moratín gave a span of three years from 1579-1581, Merimée suggests 1580-1586, Sargent 1579-1590, Crawford 158-1585 and Ramón Ruiz 1575-1585.

[2]Obras trágicas y líricas del Capitán Cristóval de Virués (Madrid: Alonso Martín, 1609).

[3]Rinaldo Froldi, Lope de Vega y la formación de la comedia. En torno a la tradición dramática valenciana y al primer teatro de Lope, 2a. edición revisada y ampliada (Salamanca: Anaya, 1973), p. 112, no. 59.

[4]All quotes from La gran Semíramis are identified by page number and column and are taken from: Poetas dramáticos valencianos, ed. Eduardo Juliá Martínez (Madrid: Real Academia Española, Biblioteca Selecta de Clásicos Españoles, 1929), I. It must be observed that Virués's spelling conforms mainly with Fernando Herrera's reforms which appeared in his edition of Garcilaso de la Vega. Some of these changes were: consonants are omitted which had no longer vocal position in words, initial h was suppressed unless it replaced Latin f, and Virués goes further than Herrera in eliminating h not derived from Latin f. For a detailed description of Herrera's reforms consult, A. Coster, Fernando de Herrera, Paris, 1908.

[5]By comedia I refer to the Spanish national drama created by the pre-lopista playwriters, as well as Lope de Vega and other dramatists. Essential to the comedia was the use of three acts, the mixture of comedy and tragedy, the gracioso figure, the lack of observance of the unities of time and place, and the use of sub-plots and variety of meters.

[6]J. P. Wickersham Crawford, Spanish Drama before Lope de Vega. Revised edition. Reprinted with corrections and Bibliographical Supplement (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967), p. 183.

[7]Rensselaer W. Lee, Ut Pictura Poesis (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1967).

[8]Aristotle defines tragedy as: "an imitation of an action that is serius and complete and has sufficient size, in language that is made sweet, and with each of the kinds of sweet language separately in the various parts of tragedy, presented by those who act and not by narrative, exciting pity and fear, bringing out the catharsis of such emotions." Allan H. Gilbert, Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), pp. 75-76.

[9]Froldi, p. 113.

[10]Ibid., p. 116.

[11]Joan Corominas, Diccionario Crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1980), III, p. 186. "Conocido es el empleo transitivo en el Siglo de Oro en el sentido de yacer carnalmente con (una mujer)' (ejs. característicos en Denis, Le Lexique de J. R. de Alarcón, s.v.)."

[12]John G. Weiger, Cristóbal de Virués (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), pp. 71-81.

[13]Crawford has called Semíramis: "this monster of vice"; with reference to her incestuous feelings Sargent says: "Semíramis approaches the crime with the relish of an already perverted degenerate"; comparing Dido and Semíramis Weiger comments: "whereas Dido displays virtue, Semíramis embodies vice."

[14]Several critics have written about this theme from different perspectives. Among them are: Carmen Bravo-Villasante, La mujer vestida de hombre en el teatro español (Siglos XVI-XVII) (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1955); B. B. Ashcom, "Concerning 'la mujer vestida de hombre' in the Comedia," Hispanic Review, 26 (1960), pp. 43-62; Melveena McKendrick, Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age. A Study of the Mujer Varonil (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

[15]Weiger, Cristóbal de Virués, p. 77.

[16]In his book The Valencian Dramatist of Spain's Golden Age, published in 1976, Weiger recognizes that the concept of sin is absent from La gran Semíramis: "The question of sin does not apply to Great Semíramis, of course, since Christian awareness is entirely absent. Menón, for example, displayed no cognizance of the Christian attitude toward suicide," p. 39. This concept is rightly on agreement with the concepts expressed on the play. However, in 1978, in his book on Virués, Weiger claims that "Semiramis did not speak of sin." His brief commentaries in his 1976 book seem more accurate and understanding of Semíramis than those of 1978.

[17]Cecilia Vennard Sargent, A Study of the Dramatic Works of Cristóbal de Virués (New York: Instituto de las Españas, 1930), p. 53. "Thus Virués contends against such evils as have come under his observation and have cast their shadow on his own life."

[18]Lienhard Bergel, "Semiramis in the Italian and Spanish Baroque," Forum Italicum VII/2, June (1973), pp. 227-249.

[19]Weiger, Cristóbal de Virués, p. 78.

[20]Sargent has observed that several critics have noted the anachronism of speaking about vestal virgins "in an eastern empire where sacred prostitution was much more in keeping with religious ideas than sacred celibacy," pp. 73-74. Nevertheless, this is a small detail and what is more astonishing according to Sargent is, "that he showed a grasp of other details whose accuracy is now attested by modern research workers in the field of eastern religious thought," p. 75.

[21]Sargent, p. 65.

[22]McKendrick, p. 67.

[23]Ibid., p. 69.

[24]Ibid., p. 70.

[25]Sargent, p. 129.

[26]Bergel, p. 233.

[27]Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Tragoediae, V. I. With an English translation by Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 374-375. "Thee even through fire, through the mad sea will I pursue, yes, over crags and rivers, swollen by torrent streams; where'er thou shalt direct thy steps, there I will madly rush."

[28]Weiger, The Valencina Dramatist of Spain's Golden Age, p. 38.

[29]Weiger, Cristóbal de Virués, p. 74.

[30]Ibid., p. 75.

[31]J. E. Spingarn, A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), p. 49.

[32]Ibid., p. 62.

[33]Ibid., pp. 62-64.

[34]Seneca, Hippolytus, pp. 392-393. "The breed reverts to its progenitors and debased blood reproduces the primal stock."

[35]Seneca, Hippolytus, pp. 332-333. "Shall the world hear of strange prodigies, shall nature's laws give away, whenever a Cretan woman loves?"

[36]Bergel, p. 234.

[37]Weiger, p. 125.

CHAPTER III

CALDERON: LA HIJA DEL AIRE

In the last fifteen years, there has been a renewed interest in Calderón's play La hija del aire, mainly due to the attention brought to it by one of the main critics of Calderón, Alexander A. Parker. In his well-known article "Towards a Definition of Calderonian Tragedy," a basic article in Calderón criticism, Parker comments as follows: "Es ésta una obra que, en mi opinión, tiene muchos títulos para ser considerada como la obra maestra suprema de Calderón."[1] Among the critics who acknowledge their debt to Parker for bringing this play out of oblivion is Gwynne Edwards, who explains that his studies and his critical edition of La hija del aire are an attempt to support Parker's view.[2]

Although the play was praised by the Romantics, especially in Germany, in Spain a favorable reception was delayed mainly by the impact of Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo's negative criticism of Calderón.[3] In 1881, he published his book Calderón y su teatro which established the standard criticism of Calderón for decades to come. Menéndez y Pelayo rejected Calderón's art because of what he considered to be a lack of unity in his plays, mainly due to the use of sub-plots, the repetition of situations and characters, the lack of verisimilitude in the characters, and their affectation and false way of expressing themselves, as well as the anachronisms and lack of accuracy in historical matters.[4] All

these criticisms would make Shakespeare a bad playwright too. As Wardropper has observed, Menéndez y Pelayo agreed with most of Luzán's negative criticism of Calderón which indicates that Menéndez y Pelayo was a neo-classical critic "malgré lui."[5] His neo-classical frame of criticism explains his rejection of Calderón's Baroque techniques. Of La hija del aire Menéndez y Pelayo says:

> Hay ciertos dramas de Calderón que no me atrevo a calificar de históricos, porque no tienen de tales más que el nombre, los cuales más bien pudieran entrar en el grupo de comedias heroicas. Entre éstos se cuenta La hija del aire, primera y segunda parte. La hija del aire es la gran Semíramis de Babilonia. Calderón ha procedido en esta obra arbitraria y caprichosamente, y ha hecho un drama ideal y fantástico. Bajo este concepto, y no como drama histórico, debe ser considerado. El carácter de la protagonista tiene rasgos de primer orden; su nacimiento sobrenatural, aquella especie de misterio que la envuelve desde sus primeros días, el amor que por ella concibe el Rey Nino, la ceguera de Menón, todo esto es de grande y poderoso efecto dramático. De todas suertes, el drama, más bien que tal, puede ser calificado de leyenda o de novela dialogada. Es de las obras más desigualmente escritas de Calderón, con más hinchazón y con más palabrería. El poeta no ha sabido contener su desbordada fantasía, ni llevarla por el cauce del buen gusto. De los datos allí esparcidos podía haber salido una buena tragedia; pero están hacindados sin orden ni concierto. Hay allí material para tres o cuatro obras dramáticas.[6]

The Baroque begins to be reevaluated in Spain with the study of Góngora by the Generación del 27. In his book of 1933 Mangas y capirotes, José Bergamín describes La Hija del aire as "Esta portentosa figuración melodramática de Calderón, acaso la obra culminante de todo el teatro católico del siglo XVII."[7] Rafael Alberti selected two verses spoken by Chato, the gracioso, as the title for some of his poems: "Yo era un tonto y lo que he visto / me ha hecho dos tontos . . ."[8]

In the early thirties there began in England the most important and radical re-evaluation of Calderón's theater with the studies of Alexander A. Parker and Edward M. Wilson. These critics developed what is considered today as the British school of Calderonians and gave us a new way of reading Calderón and a new vision of his craft. Unfortunately, critics seem to have concentrated their studies on a handful of plays and a masterpiece such as La hija del aire was not studied. Valbuena Prat, however, considered this play as "una de las más bellas creaciones de Calderón"[9] in 1941, and in 1956 in his Historia del teatro español dedicated ten pages to the study of it, concluding that: "Como suma de lo trágico y lo poético, es tal vez La hija del aire la obra capital de Calderón, y una cima de la escena universal."[10] It was only after the previously mentioned article by Alexander A. Parker that the critics began to read and study La hija del aire. In 1981, the tercentenary anniversary of Calderón's death was celebrated. At almost all the conferences and symposiums there were one or two articles dedicated to La hija del aire, but it still awaits a good translation to make it known to non-Spanish readers.

La hija del aire was staged for the first time in 1653 at the Royal Palace in Madrid. The first part was performed on November 13 and the second part on November 16, in the presence of Philip IV and his wife, Mariana of Austria.[11] The play was printed in 1664 in Calderón's Tercera parte and until recently it was believed that the Tercera parte was the first edition of all the plays contained in it.[12] Now it is a well-known fact that the second part of La hija del aire, attributed to

Antonio Enríquez Gómez, appeared in 1650 in a collection of plays by different authors known as Comedias nuevas de diferentes autores, parte XLII (Zaragoza), usually referred to as Diferentes XLII.[13] Most critics agree that the date of composition must be around 1648-1650, although Edwards believes that the date of Diferentes XLII was mistaken and the play was written just prior to its performance in 1653.[14]

The Semíramis portrayed by Calderón differs a great deal from the one recreated by Virués. Calderón is freer than Virués in the handling of the sources and selects only three of Semíramis' predominant characteristics to construct her character.[15] While Virués portrays her as a beautiful, intelligent, ambitious, lustful and incestuous woman and also as a glorius ruler and conqueror, thus maintaining all the characteristics that appear in the classical sources, Calderón chooses beauty, intelligence and ambition as the essence of her personality, thus eliminating almost completely the erotic elements in her.[16] The antagonism between the goddesses Venus and Diana, Venus' prophecy at Semíramis' birth, and her growth in seclusion as a consequence of that prophecy, all represent new additions which, as will be made evident, determine for the most part Semíramis' life.[17]

When the play begins, martial music announces King Nino's triumphant arrival in Ascalón. To mark the end of the war the music changes from martial to a soft music of the kind associated with love. On the left side of the stage there is a cavern and as the door to it is struck from the inside a woman's voice is heard,

> Tiresias, abre esta puerta,
> o a manos de mi furor,

muerte me dará el verdugo
de mi desesperación. (v. 13-16)

These are the first words uttered by Semíramis in the play, and it is not just a mere coincidence that her first utterance is a command to her keeper Tiresias. Although her longing for freedom is so strong, she does not beg to be set free but rather orders and threatens, actions which already point to her strong will. Semíramis calls on Tiresias a second time and repeats her threat to commit suicide:

Tiresias, si hoy no dispensas
las leyes desta prisión,
donde sepultada vivo
la muerte me daré hoy. (v. 35-38)

The imprisonment which Semíramis has suffered all her life is for her a living death. The image of "sepultada vivo," with its symbolical associations of darkness to express blindness, will recur again in the second part of the play.

Tiresias responds to Semíramis' call by allowing her to come out of her prison; Semíramis appears on stage dressed with animal skins which indicates her condition of "fiera racional" as she will call herself.

Semíramis' conversation with Tiresias is of extreme importance in understanding her character and the symbolical role of the music in relation to her.

. . . Dos acentos,
que a un tiempo al aire veloz
pronuncia, dando a mi oído
coros de equivocación,
por no haberlos escuchado
jamás, que jamás llegó
a mi noticia el ruidoso
aparato de su voz,
la cárcel romper intentan
donde aprisionada estoy

desde que nací; ¿por qué
confusamente los dos
me elevan y me arrebatan?
Este que dulce sonó,
con dulces halagos, hijos
de su misma suspensión;
éste que horrible, con fieros
impulsos, tras quien me voy,
sin saber dónde; que iguales
me arrancan el corazón
blandura y fiereza, agrado
y ira, lisonja y horror;
cuándo un estruendo a esta parte
cuándo a esta una admiración;
ésta adormece el sentido,
ésta despierta el valor,
repitiéndome los ecos
del bronce y de la canción. (v. 43-70)

Semíramis' excitement and urge to be free have been provoked by the music she has heard for the first time in her life. The two kinds of music, soft and martial, produce in her antithetical reactions: the soft music calms her senses, while the martial music awakens her courage. These two opposite reactions that pull Semíramis in different directions create confusion within her and reflect the double nature of her character which is feminine and masculine at the same time. Semíramis feels compelled to follow both kinds of music without showing any preference for one or the other, which means that her personality is equally divided between the feminine and the masculine. Semíramis refers to the effect of the music as "coros de equivocación" because she realizes that she cannot follow the two impulses simultaneously. On another level, the soft music can be associated with Venus, and the martial music with Diana, the two goddesses who oversee Semíramis' life and as will be seen determine her life to a great degree.

Tiresias is not surprised by Semíramis' confusion and feelings, be-

cause he has always feared the awakening of Semíramis' will by such sounds.

> Hablarte quise, porque
> esas novedades dos
> temí siempre que engendrasen
> en su altiva condición
> nuevos deseos de ver
> a quien las ocasionó,
> y así quiero prevenirte
> de lo que es, para que no
> te desespere tu vida
> y el influjo superior
> que a voluntad de los dioses
> te tiene en esta prisión. (v. 73-90)

The "novedades dos" which Tiresias refers to are obviously the two kinds of music which symbolize love and war with its associations of ambition, power, and the control that can be obtained through both. The fact that Tiresias fears the effect of such kinds of music on her, points to his knowledge of the prophecy and the circumstances surrounding Semíramis' birth.[18] Tiresias explains to her the reason for the music, King Nino's triumphal arrival in Ascalón, and begs her to return to her cave, which he describes in a typical Baroque manner as "la estancia que te dio / por cuna y sepulcro el Cielo" (v. 109-110).

Since Semíramis refuses to obey him, Tiresias asks her to remember the reasons for her imprisonment, and she says:

> . . . Venus te anunció,
> atenta al provecho mío
> que había de ser horror
> del mundo, y que por mí habría,
> en cuanto ilumina el sol,
> tragedias, muertes, insultos
> ira, llanto y confusión
> . . . . . .
> Que a un Rey
> glorioso le haría mi amor
> tirano, y que al fin vendría
> a darle la muerte yo. (v. 132-142)

This represents Semíramis' first account of Venus' prophecy and explains Semíramis' confinement, although not completely. This partial knowledge of the reason for her imprisonment helps to explain Tiresias' fears and his words to her when he begs her to return to the cave:

> Sosiégate y vuelve, vuelve
> . . . . . .
> que me está dando temor
> pensar que el sol te ve, y que
> sabe enamorarse el sol. (v. 107-112)

An important element of Venus' prophecy concerns a glorious king who will become a tyrant because of love of Semíramis and who eventually will die at her hands. The music which has awakened Semíramis' ambition celebrates the triumphal arrival of a glorious king, and Tiresias fears the possibility of an encounter between Semíramis and the king, which will fulfill the predictions. The association of the king with the sun has already been suggested at the very beginning of the play by the musicians who refer repeatedly to the king's glorious victory as "A tanta admiración / suspenso queda en su carrera el sol" (v. 33-34, 71-72).[19]

To Tiresias' questioning of her motives for insisting on being freed when she already knows her future, Semíramis' answer reflects the image she has of herself which, as subsequent events will prove, does not correspond to what she really is:

> ¿Qué me importa que mi ambición
> digan que ha de despeñarme
> del lugar más superior
> si para venceerla a ella
> tengo entendimiento yo? (v. 148-155)
> . . . . . .
> Y así, yo no he de volver
> a esa lóbrega mansión;
> que quiero morir del rayo,
> y de sólo el trueno no. (v. 163-166)

Semíramis believes she has the necessary "entendimiento" to overcome the fate that her ambition is supposed to produce, but as we will see, this might be one of Semíramis' greatest errors, if not the greatest, because she does not possess the required education to control her destiny. Believing firmly in her capacity to change the curse of her prophecy, Semíramis expresses her determination to be free and to experience life in its fullness.

Semíramis' situation is radically opposed to that of Segismundo in La vida es sueño. Although both of them suffered imprisonment because of fateful prophecies and both lack experience, Segismundo receives from Clotaldo the benefit of an education and he is also given a second opportunity after his first experience in freedom. As Lipmann has also pointed out, Segismundo's horoscope is not completely fatal to him and he ignores it, while Semíramis has to bear the full knowledge of her disastrous future.[20] Clotaldo is an adviser and teacher to Segismundo, while Tiresias is just a jailer to Semíramis, a role that is continued by Menón.

Tiresias is determined to keep Semíramis in her cave and orders the guards who watch over the cave to bring her into submission again. Although Semíramis is desperate to be free, she is aware of her inability to overcome her guards, and decides to return to her cave, a decision based on her inordinate pride.

> Mira Tiresias, a cuánto
> se extiende mi presunción;
> pues porque nadie me fuerce,
> voluntariamente voy
> a sepultarme yo misma
> en esta oscura estación

de mi vida, de mi muerte
tumba dijera mejor. (v. 187-194)

Semíramis prefers her cave-sepulchre to the humiliating situation of being forced. It is this inordinate pride which will cause her eventual death at the end of the second part when out of pride she decides to engage in an unnecessary battle. The pattern is repeated: Semíramis beings with expressing her pride by agreeing to return to her living death, and dies a literal death as a victim of that same pride.

Typical of the comedia is the use of sub-plots, which are intimately related to the main plot and on many occasions these sub-plots serve as ironic mirrors of the main plot, or as complements to it.[21] The scenes which follow introduce the minor characters who appear in the first part in the main and sub-plots.

Three of these characters are the graciosos, the married couple of Sirene and Chato, and Floro, the soldier who comes to lodge at their house, creating a mock triangular relationship that mirrors ironically the triangular relationships that will be formed by the main characters. Of these three characters Chato is the most important because of his closeness to Semíramis.

When Chato and Sirene first appear, they are quarreling and engage in a comical critical interchange in which each makes fun of the other, thus setting the tone of their relationship and establishing one of their functions in the play, that of amusing the public, and through it creating a distance between the audience and the actors. For example: when Lisías praises Irene's beauty saying ". . . y vos, señora / de tanto

humano sol divina aurora, / a todos dad la mano" (v. 221-223), Chato comments:

> Sino a Sirene, mi mojer, que es llano
> que si llegan en sus labios, a ponella,
> de asco en un mes no comeréis con ella. (v. 224-226)

Chato is not only making fun of his wife by pointing to her disgusting hand, but his words also serve as parody of Lisías' elevated style. Sirene fights back by threatening her husband with a caning as soon as they are alone. The parody is reinforced when Chato uses the word aurora to refer to his wife; speaking to Menón he says: "Llegad acá, verá mi amigo ahora / con que cara amanezco cada aurora" (v. 349-350).

Once they are in their house, Floro appears, since he has been assigned to lodge with them. As much as Chato is displeased with his arrival, Sirene is delighted with it, for as she says: "En viendo un soldado yo / se me quitan los enojos / tras él me lleva los ojos" (v. 467-469). Sirene's courtesy towards Floro prompts him to ask Sirene for an embrace, which she is more than willing to give. Chato surprises them and once he is alone he embarks in a soliloquy, which is really a dialogue between his honor and himself, in which he debates what course of action he should take since his honor is at stake. However, Chato's speech is not the traditional Calderonian soliloquy of tormented husband, but rather a parody of questions of honor.

> Ya estamos solos honor.
> ¿Qué hemos de hacer? ¿Qué sé yo?
> Si el mundo bajo me hizo
> de barro tan quebradizo,
> y de bronce y de mármol no,
> ¿qué hay que esperar, si me ven
> quebrar al primero tri?
> ¿Eso dices, honor? Sí;

juro a Dios que dices bien.
¿Qué pie o brazo me ha quebrado
su abrazo? ¿De qué me asusto? (v. 494-504)

Chato's speech is also important because it parallels in form Semíramis' soliloquy at the beginning of the second act, emphasizing the relationship between the graciosos sub-plot and the main one.

Since Chato grew up on the mountain where Venus' temple is, he is selected to lead Menón and Lisías to it, thus he has an important role in Semíramis' discovery. Once more Chato is unhappy with his orders since he believes the mountain is enchanted, as Tiresias has claimed, in order to discourage anyone from coming too close to Semíramis' hiding place. Courage is not one of Chato's virtues.

When Tiresias commits suicide rather than free Semíramis, it is Chato who judges his actions by saying: "La última necedad hizo" (v. 727), since nothing is resolved or prevented by his death. Chato's remarks are usually based on his observation of reality; it is for that reason that they are so spontaneous. They are not the product of grave reflection, but an expression of common sense.

In the second act, Chato and Sirene are living with Menón and Semíramis, acting as her companions and servants. The graciosos are not only acting comically for the audience, but also for Semíramis who finds them very amusing, and they are with her precisely for that reason. It is a case of theater within the theater.

In this act the graciosos play a very important role in building Semíramis' illusions of living fully. At the end of a soliloquy Semíramis asks herself: "Cielos, ¿no tengo de ver / sino imaginar no más

/ cómo es el vivir?" (v. 1257-1259), she overhears the quarreling of the graciosos and, not recognizing their voices, she believes a god has answered her.

Chato: Sí harás.
Semíramis: ¿Quién me ha respondido?
Sirene: Dios
que en eso el mundo a los dos
oirá.
Chato: Sí oirá, que ya sé . . .
Semíramis: Si hablas conmigo, di, ¿qué?
Chato: Que todo el mundo con vos
no se podrá averiguar
porque sois una atrevida,
pero costaráos la vida. (v. 1259-1268)

For Semíramis these words are a confirmation of Tiresias' words, but in Chato's words there is a new element since her foretold death is associated here with her brío. What Semíramis understands to be a message from the gods, is in reality a quarrel about the graciosos' triangle; a highly ironic situation, especially if one remembers that Semíramis considers herself of divine descent.

The element of parody of their masters is further emphasized in the structure of the second act, since a quarrel between the three graciosos precedes Nino's encounter with Semíramis, which will create a triangle between Menón, Nino and Semíramis.

In the third act Chato follows Semíramis to the court and he is the one who summarizes Semíramis' change of fortune:

¿Quién no diría que mi ama
siempre trujo aquel adorno?
Pues yo me acuerdo de cuando
eran pellejos de un lobo.
Pero ¡cómo esas pellejas
vemos hoy cubiertas de oro!

As Nino's and Menón's friendship deteriorates, Sirene appears in the court looking for her husband. Her relationship with Floro has ended, but Chato is determined to punish his wife: "Y yo enojado / más de una hora pienso estar' / que esto es saber castigar" (v. 2982-2984). Chato's punishment is once more a parody of the traditional murders committed by suspicious husbands to save their honor. Structurally, the scene takes place after Nino has expelled Menón from Niniveh and Menón has expressed his intentions of seeing Semíramis once more, and before Nino encounters Menón in Semíramis' quarters. The result is Menón's banishment again, but this time Nino orders his soldiers to put out Menón's eyes. In parallel scenes both triangles are resolved, one tragically and the other with mockery.

So the graciosos in the first part of the play serve many functions: they provide laughter for the audience, thus creating a distance between the events in the play and its characters, and the audience, and they also create a release of dramatic tension; the graciosos' love triangle serves as mirror of the triangle of their masters, and especially, Chato has the function of reducing and bringing down to earth Semíramis' image of herself.

One of the main sub-plots of the first part is dedicated to the existing relationship between Menón and his king. The relationship of friendship and vassalage between King Nino and Menón is developed in the first act before Menón rescues Semíramis. When Nino arrives in Ascalón after his victory, he shows his gratitude to Menón for his military services by giving Ascalón to him. However, there is more than gratitude;

Menón and Nino have a deep affection for each other which is expressed in their parting words when Nino says to Menón:

> Dame, Menón tus brazos,
> y cree que aquestos lazos
> nudo serán tan fuerte
> que solo le desate . . .
> Menón: ¿Quién?
> Nino: La muerte. (v. 303-306)

There is no doubt of Nino's sincerity and the high esteem he feels for Menón, but, in retrospect, his words will have an ironic connotation, for as soon as Nino sees Semíramis, the ties that united the two men will begin to deteriorate, to the point that Nino will expell Menón from Niniveh and will order his soldiers to put out his eyes. Involved in that relationship is Nino's sister Irene, who is in love with Menón; he seems to respond to her. Semíramis' appearance will create a triangle between Menón, Semíramis and Irene.

Another important sub-plot begins to develop in the first act and will be of central importance in the second part of the play; it is that of Lidoro, King of Lidia. Having been defeated by Nino, Lidoro flees, and in the mountains he finds a lost woman who turns out to be Irene. He helps her and, risking his life, returns her safely to his enemy's camp; becoming aware of her beauty, he falls in love with her. Lidoro follows Irene to the court and there presents himself as Arsidas, begging to be allowed to serve the king. Lidoro's love for Irene creates another love triangle, Lidoro, Irene and Menón; but Lidoro's unselfish love will serve as a contrast to Nino's and Menon's selfish love for Semíramis. Through Irene's intercession the King grants Arsidas-Lidoro a position in the court. This position will enable him to win the King's trust and will

also make him Menón's antagonist.

After all the characters have been introduced and the threads of the sub-plots have been established, the last scene of the first act is dedicated to Menón's discovery of Semíramis. Having heard from Lisías about the mystery that surrounds the mountains, Tiresias' warnings of the horrors it contains and the villagers' stories about the laments that are heard from there, Menón decides to unravel the mystery, and using Chato as a guide they proceed towards the temple. As they come close to it, they hear the laments of a woman, but Tiresias comes forth and impedes their approach to the temple. Menón, who is mesmerized by the woman's voice, demands an explanation from Tiresias, but Tiresias, the priest, is determined to be faithful to Venus' commands, and rather than explain or open the door he chooses to commit suicide. Although his suicide does not prevent Semíramis' freedom and can be seen as an evasion of his duties, for Tiresias it is the only solution to preserve his responsibility as Semíramis' keeper. What they all fail to see in Tiresias' death is the beginning of the prophecy's unfolding: this is the first death for which she is partially responsible. The main characters in the play are all susceptible to a blindness that unables them to grasp the full meaning and the danger of their actions.

Tiresias' suicide also points to the hopelessness of Semíramis' future. Instead of his traditional role as the blind seer and prophet in Greek tragedy who appears only to deliver a message from the gods, and whom no one believes, Calderón's Tiresias only tells the truth to Semíramis and rather than freeing her chooses death, knowing that her freedom will mean death and suffering.[22]

Menón orders whoever is in the temple, ". . . Horrible monstruo / que aquí encerrado has vivido / sal a ver el sol" (v. 775-777). This command to "ver el sol," refers to Semíramis' captivity of a lifetime but also the light of the sun stands for the knowledge of the world which has been unknown to her. The sun is also a symbol of the king; in that light Menón's invitation to "ver el sol" foretells her eventual meeting with King Nino.

When Semíramis comes out, Menón calls her "monstruo divino" as he is struck by her beauty. The word monstruo comes from the Latin word monstrum which originally belonged to religious language and meant "divine omen, indicating misfortune, an evil omen, portent."[23] The word came to be used as a synonym of prodigy or something amazing to look at. Leo Spitzer has documented the use of the word monstruo in Calderón with the meaning of híbrido.[24] Although Spitzer's conclusion fits Calderón's Semíramis perfectly well, it is very possible that Calderón was playing with various levels of meaning in the use of that word. Semíramis can be seen as a divine misfortune because of her descent from pagan gods and the dreadful prophecy that encircles her life.

Semíramis first reaction to Menón is one of admiration and since he is the second man she has seen in her life, there is also a feeling of bashfulness and shyness in her. At Menón's request Semíramis tells who she is and why she has been a captive all her life; this narration is essential to understanding Semíramis' character and behavior and to an extent it represents the central conflict in the play, because Semíramis' life is a desperate attempt to overcome her dreadful destiny. The ter-

rible irony is that the more removed she thinks she is from her fate, the closer she is to it; just like Oedipus.

Semíramis' long narration begins with the story of her parents; her mother was Arceta, a nymph dedicated to the goddess Diana, her father was a devotee of Venus who, rejected by Arceta, offered many sacrifices to Venus to obtain Arceta's favour. Venus could not make Arceta love him, but she allowed the young man to find the nymph when she was alone and taking advantage of the situation he raped her. Of her conception Semíramis says:

> Desta especie de bastardo
> amor, de amor mal nacido,
> fui concepto. ¿Cuál será
> mi fin, si este es mi principio? (v. 831-834)

From Semíramis' conception her life has been the result of contradictory situation and feelings. Semíramis is a product of love but this love is "bastardo"; she is the product of a violation which brings death to both her mother and father. This pattern will repeat itself when Semíramis impersonates her son, violating her own identity. Her downfall comes from that violation of her identity. This also marks the beginning of Diana's anger towards Venus and her eventual vengeance in which Semíramis will be the victim.

Semíramis' birth is not only marked by a violation but also by death. Her mother avenges herself by killing her violator and Arceta will also die at childbirth:

> pues víbora humana yo,
> rompí aquel seno nativo,
> costándole al cielo ya
> mi vida dos homicidios. (v. 875-878)

The reference to the viper that kills its mother at birth was a conventional reference at the time, and Semíramis uses it here to express her horror at her origin, since there is no doubt that she feels responsible, at least in part, for both deaths.

The night of Semíramis' birth there was an eclipse and Tiresias came out to make astrological predictions from it. It was he who found Semíramis amid a battle between the birds and the wild beasts, the birds trying to defend her and the beasts trying to tear her apart. Puzzled by such chaos in nature, Tiresias went to Venus' oracle where Venus informed him that Diana had sent the wild beasts to destroy Semíramis but she has sent the birds, as her sacred animals, to defend the child whom she protects. However, Venus warns Tiresias of her fears for Diana's revenge on Semíramis to avenge the violation of Diana's nymph which took place with Venus' assistance, and tells Tiresias that he should prevent all the tragic events and deaths that will cause Semíramis' beauty, which is the characteristic that she has given her. All the disasters will culminate in her own death. Tiresias has done everything as the goddess ordered and as she says:

> Todo Tiresias lo hizo,
> y así, en aquesta prisión
> tantos años me ha tenido
> sin que sepa más que aquello
> sólo que enseñarme quiso; (v. 954-958)

What Tiresias taught Semíramis is never specified, but from her future words she will seem to be aware of the concept of free will. However, although she talks about it one is never convinced that she understands what the concept means. What is more certain is that she lacks the

necessary knowledge and experience to fight against the prophecy.

> Pues que tu, gallardo joven,
> hoy la cárcel has rompido
> que fue mi centro, te ruego
> que allá me lleves contigo
> donde yo, pues advertida
> voy ya de los hados míos
> sabré vencerlos; pues sé,
> aunque sé poco, que impío
> el Cielo no avasallo
> la elección de nuestro juicio. (v. 965-974)

Semíramis calls her jail "mi centro" and if her imprisonment stands for darkness, ignorance and lack of experience it means that up to now at the center of her life there has been only ignorance.

Semíramis begs Menón to give her freedom but shows very clearly her willingness to commit suicide if he does not free her. Once more Semíramis speaks of her "brío" as she did with Tiresias when she demanded to be free, thus showing Menón two sides of her personality, that of a pleading woman and that of a courageous and desperate woman. A similar pattern in her behavior can be observed when in the second part she asks Friso to help her in her plan to impersonate her son. Although her plan is a desperate one and requires tremendous courage to execute it she pleads with Friso calling herself "mujer soy aflijida" (II, v. 2164). Menón, who is extremely impressed with her beauty, believes that she is capable of fighting her destiny; considering Semíramis' ignorance Menón's words are ironic since he says: "ya tú doctamente has dicho / que puede el juicio enmendarlos" (v. 996-997). In Semíramis' parting words can already be observed her ill prepared judgment:

> Adiós
> tenebroso centro mío,
> que voy a ser racional,
> ya que hasta aquí bruto he sido. (v. 1003-1005)

Semíramis is identifying freedom with rationality as if all she needed to be a rational human being is to be free.

Lisías warns Menón of the danger he is exposing himself to in the last words of the act: "que, gusano humano, no / labres tu muerte tú mismo" (v. 1013-1014). Edwards explains the fascination that the silk-worm exerted in the Gold Age because it makes its own sepulchre in which it dies since it cannot come out alive from the cocoon that it fabricates.[25] The image for Baroque writers, who were drawn to the theme of death and man's own complicity in his destruction, was perfect and in this case foretells Menón's end.

Semíramis' dream of freedom is curtailed by Menón at the beginning of the second act; from her cave Menón has taken Semíramis to his country house in the mountains at the outskirts of Niniveh. Fearing her fate, Menón has decided to keep her there, in the company of only the graciosos Sirene and Chato, while he goes to the court as a dutiful vassal to ask permission from the king to marry her. From Menón's words it is understood that between the acts he has made sexual advances to Semíramis, but she has refused any sexual attachment that does not provide for her honor first.

> Dijísteme que tu vida
> hija de un delito era
> de amor, y así que no era
> posible tener amor
> a quien primero tu honor,
> que su gusto, no quisiera. (v. 1059-1064)

The position taken by Semíramis is important because she is sincere in her concern for her chastity, Semíramis is not using her virginity to obtain a promise of marriage from Menón. Rather this reflects how her

mother's rape has affected her and how in her determination to save her honor and not to allow herself to be violated she is more like the goddess Diana than the goddess Venus. This will be one of the greatest ironies that surrounds Semíramis: her inability to recognize in her character Diana's attributes instead of those of Venus.

Before parting from the court, Menón states his wish to keep Semíramis only for himself.

> Pues si ocultarte pudiera,
> tanto mi amor te ocultara,
> que ni el sol viera tu cara
> ni el aire de ti supiera; (v. 1085-1088)

Semíramis seems to be willing to accept the life Menón has envisaged for her which reproduces her captivity in the cave:

> Tan sagrado es el precepto
> tuyo, que humilde y postrada,
> vivir del sol ignorada,
> y aún de mí misma prometo. (v. 1205-1208)

Once again the sun stands for the king and its court, from which Semíramis is being kept by Menón and also for the life experience she yearns for and will not be able to find in Menón's country house. But Semíramis' submission to Menón is questioned by her as soon as he leaves:

> Ya
> grande pensamiento mío,
> que estamos solos los dos,
> hablemos claro yo y vos,
> pues solo de vos confío:
> mi albedrío, ¿es albedrío
> libre o esclavo? ¿Qué acción,
> o qué dominio, elección
> tiene sobre mi fortuna,
> que sólo me saca de una
> para darme otra prisión?
> Confieso que agradecida

a Menón mi voluntad
está; pero ¿qué piedad
debe a su valor mi vida
de un monte a otro reducida?
   Aunque si bien lo sospecho,
la causa es, que de mi pecho
tan grande es el corazón,
que teme, no sin razón,
que el mundo le viene estrecho,
   y huye de mí. En fin, ¿jamás
más que un bruto no he de ser?
Cielos, ¿no tengo de ver,
sino imaginar no más,
cómo es el vivir? (v. 1235-1259)

Semíramis' soliloquy is a dialogue between herself and her "grande pensamiento." The adjective grande is very significant because up to now Semíramis has expressed her wish to live fully, but here for the first time we begin to realize that her expectations and dreams are of a very great magnitude. The life that Semíramis has imagined in her years in captivity is not the one Menón is offering her, which is just another form of imprisonment; Menón is actually prolonging Tiresias' role as her keeper. It is also relevant that Semíramis does not realize the nature of Menón's fears. Semíramis believes that Menón fears her brío and her ambition when these are traits of her personality that Menón has not been exposed to, with the exception of Semíramis' verbal expression of brío when she begs Menón to set her free; besides that moment Menón has only seen in Semíramis submission to his wishes. What Menón has certainy seen is Semíramis' extreme beauty, to the point that he has asked her to marry him. It seems evident that Semíramis, in her determination to fight against the prophecy, has subconsciously forgotten that it is her beauty which will cause disasters. As Peter Dunn has very well observed:

> Like Oedipus Tyrannus, this is a play about forgotten or rejected knowledge, and like the Greek play, it is full of mirrors, strategically placed.[26]

At the same time that Semíramis affirms her will to overcome her destiny she moves towards it without realizing that the prophecy is being fulfilled. Oedipus' tragic pattern is repeated in Semíramis.

It is at this point, at the end of her soliloquy, when Semíramis asks herself "¿no tengo de ver, / sino imaginar no más, / cómo es el vivir?" (v. 1257-1259), that she hears voices and not recognizing the graciosos, she believes the gods have answered her question.

Although Menón is determined to hide Semíramis from the king, he answers the king's questions about Ascalón, informing him that he has found a treasure. Nino is intrigued by this woman whom Menón considers a treasure, and when Menón is about to begin her description Irene interrupts. Irene, who comes to her brother to intercede for Arsidas-Lidoro and obtain a position for him in the court, is present then when Menón describes Semíramis' beauty.

Menón describes Semíramis' inordinate beauty using language as if he were a painter. Nino's ears become the canvas, Menón's tongue his brushes, and his words his colors; Menón's painting is an attempt to compete with nature, or to recreate nature through art. In Calderón, the traditional Petrarchan description of the loved one becomes a study in contrast and tension, characteristic of Baroque art.

> Estaba de toscas pieles
> vestida, para que hicieran
> lo inculto y florido a un tiempo
> armonía más perfecta;
> bien como un bello jardín
> en una rústica selva,

más bello está cuando está
de la oposición más cerca. (v. 1527-1534)

In Semíramis' rustic appearance as she leaves the cave, Menón has seen the contrast between her natural beauty and her primitive state. However, this antithetical reality is resolved in a synthesis that surpasses the antithetical elements, creating a harmony among them. Menón compares the contrasts in her with a beautiful garden within a rustic forest, whose beauty is enhanced by having its opposite so near by.[27] This principle of opposition is at the heart of Calderón art and explains the many contrasts seen in his plays, such as the use of the graciosos who always are an ironic contrast to their masters. Menón "paints" Semíramis' face and neck in a highly hyperbolic style, creating a twofold effect; in Nino it awakens his desires to meet this prodigy, but as a good king he decides to control his desires knowing that Menón loves her; in Irene it creates jealousy.

¿Qué retórico orador,
qué enamorado poeta
os dio para esa pintura
tantas rosas y azucenas,
tanto oro, tanto marfil,
tanta nieve, tantas perlas? (v. 1677-1682)

Actually, Irene's words reflect her jealousy but they also reflect a critical view of Menón's elevated style, criticism which usually comes from the graciosos.

Once Menón has painted Semíramis' picture, Nino encounters her during his hunt. Nino loses control of his horse and as the horse is headed towards a precipice, Semíramis takes Chato's stick and entangling it between the horse's legs saves Nino's life by provoking his fall from the

horse and preventing him from falling down a precipice.

When Semíramis sees Nino's horse running ungovernably, she is in the company of the graciosos Chato and Sirene. As they observe the unfortunate situation Semíramis comments:

> Nadie le alcanza; ¿qué mucho
> si se deja atrás el viento?
> Como pudiera el valor,
> que está brotando en mi pecho,
> dar vida al gallardo joven
> que se despeña. Mas esto
> no quiere penarse; suelta
> este bastón. (v. 1803-1810)

For the first time Semíramis' brío is seen in action, and this brío manifests itself as an essential characteristic of her personality since her response to the situation is completely spontaneous. The courage that Nino's uncontrolled horse provokes in her is as spontaneous as is her reaction to take action. Semíramis does not think the possible consequences of her act, she acts impulsively. Semíramis' action and Nino's fall from the horse are seen through Chato's narration and prompts this statement from Sirene: "¡Ay tal marimacha!" (v. 1820). Sirene's comment, although brief and reductive, points to the perception that others have of Semíramis' character, but of which she is unaware at this point; Semíramis does not yet realize at this point that her brío is a characteristic associated with masculinity.

As it has been pointed out by several critics, in Golden Age drama and specially in Calderón, the fall from a horse was a recurrent symbol. The horse as a sexual symbol stands for passion and the fall represents the loss of control; as a whole it is taken for a bad omen.[28] Edwards sees in King Nino's fall "his ultimate downfall" symbolized.[29] However,

as Peter Dunn has observed, its function as an omen depends on "decisions and actions not yet taken." As he says, what is more significant is that Semíramis "forgetting that the jealous eye of Diana is upon her, fails to recognize the vengeful goddess in the hunt."[30] The scene also represents an ironic twist for Nino, since the hunter will be hunted by Semíramis' beauty.

Nino, like Menón, reacts to Semíramis' beauty calling her: "prodigio bello / de amor divino milagro" (v. 1830-1831).[31] Semíramis is also moved by Nino's presence:

> oh generoso mancebo,
> cuyo semblante, no sé
> por qué secreto misterio,
> a amor a veneración
> me está provocando a un tiempo (v. 1844-1848)

but her sense of loyalty and gratitude to Menón is deeper at this point than her attraction to Nino, and she runs away from him.

When Nino's men find him, Nino is in despair and sends them all to lookfor "una deidad humana" (v. 1889). Menón suspects that Nino has been saved by Semíramis and is determined to find her before anyone else to hide her from the king.

Arsidas, who is trying to gain the King's favour, sees Semíramis at the same time Menón does; each one insists on taking her to the king's presence and their argument ends in a confrontation which Nino and Irene come upon. Menón identifies Semíramis as the woman he had described before to Nino and explains that, following his advice of never presenting a beautiful woman to a powerful man, he wanted to keep her from him. Nino inquires about the nature of his relationship with Semíramis and she answers.

Semíramis' response to Nino originates in her desire to maintain her honor. Semíramis explains that Menón has obtained from her only a promise of marriage and that under no other circumstances he could expect to possess her. Once more from Semíramis' words her determination not to suffer her mother's fate can be observed. Semíramis' pride is also at issue here, for she does not want anybody to believe that she has been Menón's lover, even if he says this to keep her from the king.

Nino makes believe that he wants to honor Semíramis for saving his life, and Menón for obtaining military victories for him by saying that he wants to invite all the powerful princes from Asia to their wedding; in reality, he is only using this as an excuse to delay the wedding and bring Semíramis to the court. Although Menón refuses Nino's offer, Semíramis accepts.

> ¿Por qué, si el Rey quiere honrarnos,
> Menón, con mercedes tantas,
> no a mi presunción le distes
> la vanidad de lograrlas? (v. 2173-2176)

Nino orders his sister Irene to take Semíramis to the court, to dress her in royal attire, and to ride in her car with Semíramis through Niniveh so that everyone may admire and honor her beauty. In an aside Semíramis says:

> Altiva arrogancia
> ambicioso pensamiento
> de mi espíritu, descansa
> la imaginación; pues
> realmente a ver alcanzas
> lo que imaginastes; pues
> aun todo aquesto no basta;
> que para llenar mi idea
> mayores triunfos me faltan. (v. 2198-2206)

Semíramis' arrogance and ambition are obvious in her words as is the fact that her imagination has a central role in the elaboration of her plans. Captive in a cave during all her previous life, Semíramis uses her imagination to create another image of herself and another reality that could erase the ominous one of the prophecy. Following her imagination, and not perceiving reality, she fails to recognize that every step she takes brings her nearer to the fulfilment of the prophecy.[32] As Semíramis departs, Chato's words emphasize her vanity and arrogance:

> ¡Ha visto y qué tiesa va!
> Apenas volvió la cara,
> ¡Ay tontilla, que no en vano
> hija del viento te llamas! (v. 2207-2210)

and points to the symbolical meaning of the play's title, as has been observed by Edwards. In a literal sense Semíramis is called <u>la hija del aire</u> because she was fed and protected by Venus' doves, but also in Golden Age literature the words <u>viento</u> and <u>aire</u> were used to signify arrogance and pride.[33]

When Nino and Menón are alone, Nino's real intentions become known. If the relationship of friendship and vassalage between Nino and Menón has been extremely close up to now, Semíramis' beauty is causing a transformation in Nino: from a victorious but kind and generous king Nino is becoming a tyrannic king who wants to impose his will and wishes in Menón; the prophecy continues its course. Nino demands that Menón pretend that he is not interested in Semíramis anymore, without indicating that he has ordered it. Nino's possessiveness has reached a point in which he threatens to put out Menón's eyes if he dares to look at her again.

At the beginning of the third act the voices of the citizens of

Niniveh are heard as they acclaim Semíramis. Semíramis' change of fortune is reflected in the news clothes and jewels that she now wears. Asked by Nino her opinion about the greatness of Niniveh, Semíramis shows once more how her imagination works.

> Imaginaba yo que eran
> los muros más suntuosos,
> los edificios más grandes,
> los palacios más heroicos,
> los templos más eminentes
> y todo, en fin, más famoso. (v. 2399-2404)

Irene is surprised by Semíramis' reactions and asks her how, having been brought up in seclusion, she can be so proud. Semíramis' answer is the key to the reality she has created:

> . . . que como
> pude allí discurrir mucho,
> no me contenté con poco. (v. 2412-2414)

Being haunted by a disastrous prophecy and condemned to live in seclusion, Semíramis has used her imagination to create another image of herself that could compensate for her miserable reality. Through her imagination Semíramis developed extraordinary illusions of grandeur and convinced herself that she was able to overcome her prophecy. The world that she created in her imagination is so magnificent that nothing in her new reality at the court measures up to it. The adulation Semíramis receives from the people of Niniveh confirms her sense of worth:

> ¿Cómo en tan célebre día
> Menón falta de mis ojos?
> Mas, ¿para qué le echo de menos,
> si tantos aplausos logro
> sin él? Como estos no falten,
> lo demás importa poco. (v. 2421-2426)

For Semíramis this day is célebre because she feels she is receiving the recognition and admiration she deserves. Her words confirm that she does not love Menón and that since she can obtain fame without Menón she does not need him any more. How true the feeling expressed in the last two verses is will be seen in the second part when Semíramis loses the applause of her people and fears that she might lose her mind without it.

Since Irene loves Menón, she asks Semíramis if she is very much in love with him. Semíramis acknowledges her great gratitude to Menón, but shows her inordinate pride when she expresses her displeasure at marrying someone who is the vassal of another man. Irene orders Semíramis to show a dislike for Menón, hoping that he will reply with the same dislike for her. Irene hides where she can listen to their conversation, and Nino, who has given similar orders to Menón, also hides to be able to hear their conversation. The symmetry between Nino's and Irene's orders and their respective positions in the garden serve to emphasize their attempt to deceive others as well as themselves. Both Nino and Irene are ordering Menón and Semíramis to lie about their feelings, but without realizing it they are deceiving themselves by expecting that their ruse will work. The levels of deception have many facets in this play: Semíramis is not the only one who tries to deceive herself about her future.

Before seeing each other, Menón and Semíramis have asides in which each one shows regret for their predicament; the parallel form of the asides emphasizes the parallelism of their situation. Although they both try to disguise what Irene and Nino ordered, their true feelings begin to show:

Menón: Yo tampoco,
mas si vieras lo que paso . . .
Semíramis: Si supierais lo que escondo . . .
Menón: Vierais . . .
Semíramis: supierais . . .
Menón: que yo . . .
Semíramis: que yo . . .
Menón: siento . . .
Semíramis: sufro . . . (v. 2690-2694)

Their conversation is arranged as an interwoven dialogue in which each character continues the thread of their discourse; Calderón uses this arrangement to express the internal turmoil of the characters. Once more the exact parallel structure reinforces the characters' dilemma.

Nino and Irene discover each other and the king confesses his love for Semíramis. Semíramis' reaction, which is given in an aside: "¿Qué es esto cielos? ¡De mí / enamorado el Rey! ¡Qué oigo!" (v. 2721-2722), shows her complete surprise as she discovers the feelings Nino has for her. Semíramis' astonishment points to the fact that she has no awareness at all of the feelings she creates in other people, especially men. What is most surprising of all in her is that being extremely ambitious she does not use her beuty as a means to achieve her dreams and aspirations. Semíramis does not know that her beauty is such a powerful weapon. The reason for this could very well lie in the fact that according to the prophecy it is her beauty which will bring disasters and death. Subconsciously Semíramis seems to have erased from her mind the dangers her beauty might cause and even more the knowledge of her being so beautiful. This corresponds to the pattern which has been observed up to now, Semíramis represses knowledge of the prophecy and replaces it with an imaginary view of the world and of the possibility of her overcoming the

prophecy. Semíramis' lack of awareness can also stem from her isolation from the social, a factor that is crucial in her life.

Considering Menón a traitor, Nino's first impulse is to order the removal of his weapons, which is a form of dishonor, and to order him to be imprisoned for life, but after further consideration he decides to leave the final decision to Semíramis. Instead of sending him to prison, Nino decides to banish Menón from the court and kingdom and reduces Menón's life to a life "sin honor, / sin amparo y sin favor" (v. 2818-2819) and then tells Semíramis to decide if she wants to be his wife in such conditions. Menón reminds Semíramis of the life he had given her, but his pleas are to no avail. Semíramis argues her case in five ten-line stanzas, each one developing one reason for not following Menón in his new condition. First she recognizes her gratitude but she believes that it is cruelty to try to be rewarded for having helped a person who was in need. In the second stanza she argues that if Menón has enjoyed the benefits of good fortune up to now and her life is just beginning, he should not destroy her good fortune, but rather let her have it. In the third stanza she argues that if both of them are unfortunate they could make each other even more unfortunate; in the fourth stanza she argues that she has paid for the life he had given her by just taking that life, since he did it for himself and not for her; she also wonders if it would not be a mistake to follow a worthy person and leave a greatful one like the king, for her having saved his life. Finally, in the last stanza, Semíramis argues that in his present misfortune it is best for Menón not to have a beautiful wife since a poor man would be mocked for having a beautiful wife.

Menón is banished from Niniveh and when he is alone on stage he expresses his precarious situation in a soliloquy in the form of a sonnet. Menón's sonnet begins with a rhetorical question "¿Vivo o muero?" (v. 2903) which indicates the state of confusion and disbelief in which he is. The first two quatrains of the sonnet elucidate the question which is resolved in the typical Baroque oxymoron of vivo y muero simultaneously.

Guided by his grief, Menón decides to speak with Semíramis once more before leaving Niniveh. "Pisando las negras sombras / imágenes de mi muerte" (v. 3009-3010), marks the passing of time; it is nighttime, and the words also create an image of death, foreshadowing Menón's death. The darkness of the night also points to Menón's subsequent blindness. Nino also decides to go and see Semíramis, expecting to obtain her favour; the contrast between Nino's and Menón's situations is stressed by the parallel movements of the two men towards Semíramis' apartment, Menón going through the gardens and Nino through the palace, and their opposing comments. Menón's words show his dispair, and Nino's his hope and happiness:

> Nino: ¡Oh patria de mis placeres!
> Menón: ¡Qué triste piso tu umbral!
> Nino: Tu friso toco, ¡qué alegre! (v. 3041-3044)

Once more the symmetry of the situation points to Nino's and Menón's "blindness," both fail to see the fatal path they have undertaken. Also Menón's present misfortune mirrors Nino's future one.

Menón hears someone approaching and tries to hide. Nino can see a shadow and goes towards it, while Semíramis hears voices and comes out of her apartment with a light that reveals Menón. Ironically, this light

which reveals Menón will cause him the loss of his eyes.

Nino attempts to kill Menón but through Semíramis' intervention his life is spared. Since Semíramis' intercession saves his life, she feels that her debt to Menón has been paid. He has given her a life, but now she does so for him. Semíramis' last words to Menón show once more the hope she has for her destiny: "pues en paz estamos, vete / y déjame que yo logre / de mi destino la suerte" (v. 3114-3116). Semíramis firmly believes in the image of the great fortune she has envisaged for herself and fails to see how Nino has become a tyrant because of the passion he feels for her. Nino keeps his word and sets Menón free, but in an aside to one of his soldiers orders him to put out Menón's eyes. Menón's last words before departing show the type of insight associated with blindness:

> Mucho temo, aunque
> libertad y vida lleve,
> Semíramis, que en mi vida
> yo no he de volver a verte. (v. 3149-3152)

He goes from one kind of darkness (in the garden into another).

When Nino and Semíramis are alone, Nino tries to embrace her, believing that her decision to stay in the palace was prompted by her love for him, but Semíramis reacts with her characteristic arrogance. She recognizes her gratitude to Nino for the honors he has granted her, but makes clear that her decision to stay was not the result of love but rather: "de mi fortuna / logrados los accidentes / que favorables conmigo / se mostraron" (v. 3163-3166); Semíramis is convinced now that her good fortune has arrived. Since Nino persists in embracing her and in his desire to possess her physically, Semíramis reaffirms once more her determination to resist a rape: "No lo intentes; / que primero que

de mí / triunfe amor, me daré muerte" (v. 3180-3182), in order not to suffer as her mother did. Determined to save her honor, Semíramis takes Nino's dagger and points it at herself, but at this very moment Nino has a vision of himself as a corpse.

> ¡Mi mismo cadáver, cielos,
> miro en el aire aparente!
> Pálido horror, ¿qué me sigues?
> Sombra infausta, ¿qué me quieres? (v. 3201-3204)

Nino's image of his own death prompts him to respect Semíramis' beauty, believing that she is protected by the gods. This vision, which is a product of Nino's imagination, mirrors Semíramis' visions before her death and points to the tyranny that both characters have exerted. Nevertheless, his passion has taken possession of him and since he realizes that "Mas si tampoco es posible / que sin ella viva y reine" (v. 3227-3228), he decides to marry her. Semíramis' belief in Venus' protection, "Hija soy de Venus, y ella / mis fortunas favorece" (v. 3241-3242) is highly ironic for several reasons. Semíramis seems to forget that her mother's rape was made possible by Venus' assistance so her belief in Venus' protection of her honor is ironic. Also the gift that Semíramis possesses from Venus is her beauty and it is her beauty which makes Nino attempt to rape her. Furthermore, to defend herself Semíramis displays a courage and <u>brío</u> more like the goddess Diana, but fails to realize that she is more like Diana than like Venus. The very fact that she attaches so much importance to her chastity associates her more with Diana, making her like one of her nymphs.

Semíramis' belief in Venus' help goes beyond preventing her rape by Nino. She is certain that Venus is aiding her in her "fortunas." As I

have said previously, while in the cave Semíramis constructed an image of herself and her fortune that came to substitute for the prophecy; the king's marriage proposal seems to support her dream of grandeur, and in her mind reality and imagination fuse at this point. This is more evident in the last scene of the first part.

After he is blinded by Nino's soldiers, Menón's fall from fortune is illustrated in two verses: "El que envidia daba ayer / mayor lástima os de hoy" (v. 3276-3277). At his request the soldiers leave him at the palace's door where he hears voices acclaiming Semíramis "la gran Semíramis bella / Reina del Oriente, ¡viva!" (v. 3284-3285). Chato explains to him that Nino is making Semíramis his wife and queen, and Chato takes Menón to where she is going to be crowned.[34] Menón begins a salute to Semíramis wishing her "que triunfes, vivas y reines . . . " (v. 3386), but at this point he is overcome by a new voice that forces him to wish her the opposite of what he said previously: "que / no vivas, reines ni triunfes" (v. 3392-3393) and to prophesy:

> Soberbiamente ambiciosa,
> al que ahora te constituye
> reina, tú misma des muerte,
> y en olvido le sepultes,
> siendo aqueste infausto día
> universal pesadumbre
> de los vivientes; y en muestra
> de que presagios le anuncien
> de cielos, astros y signos
> la gran monarquía desahucie . . . (v. 3394-3403)

As Menón finishes his words the sky breaks out in thunder and lightning and many portents are seen in nature. Semíramis blames the portents on the competition between Diana and Venus, believing that Venus

has made possible her success and Diana wants to destroy it. Nino swears not to be influenced by omens and reassures Semíramis about their marriage. It seems as if the whole universe is involved in their destiny.

Menón's power as seer has come to him after the loss of his eyes, a convention in classical literature. The blind man is the one who can see and predict what others cannot. He becomes a Tiresias figure. If Menón has gained in inner vision, Semíramis in this last scene seems to be even more firmly placed in the world she has imagined for herself, she sees herself as Nino's wife and as queen, and so reality and imagination have become one and the same for her. She fails to see how Nino has become a tyrant with Menón, who becomes the second victim of the prophecy, and that this was provoked by the effect her beauty has had on him. She knows from Tiresias that it is precisely her beauty which will trigger the prophecy, but she represses this knowledge in her consciousness and replaces it with her dreams of glory which crystalize in this scene. Semíramis is "blind" to her fate.

The first part of La hija del aire closes with Chato's words:

> Entre todo este alboroto
> vuesas mercedes escuchen:
> ya ven que esta loca queda
> hecha Reina a sus ilustres
> hechos, a sus vanidades
> y su muerte no se dude;
> que con la segunda parte
> os convida, Corte ilustre,
> quien más serviros desea,
> si aquestas faltas se cumplen. (v. 3440-3449)

Chato calls Semíramis "loca" for her defiance of all the omens and for the haughtiness he has seen in her. By the end of the first part Semíramis has embarked on the prophecy's way without realizing it. Tiresias is

dead, Menón is blind and will throw himself in the river, as we will learn in the second part, and her beauty has caused Nino's tyranny: the prophecy is following its course. As Chato announces, the second part will bring the peak and decline of Semíramis' dreams; she will accomplish her "ilustres hechos," but she will die.

The second part of La hija del aire centers around Semíramis' loss of power to her son Ninias and her return to power through her impersonation of her son, an impersonation that is made possible by their extreme physical resemblance.

The staging of the opening scene is important as a contrast with the opening scene of the first part because it marks Semíramis' change of fortune. If in the opening scenes of the first part Semíramis is a captive in a cave as a "fiera racional," in the second part she is in all glory at her apartment in the court of Babylon being served by her ladies. The stage directions call for musicians and soldiers and three ladies of the court who serve Semíramis: Astrea, who carries a mirror, Libia, who carries a platter with a sword on it and Flora, who carries another platter with a hat on it. Semíramis is dressed in mourning, her hair is down and all the women are serving her. The sword points to Semíramis courage and brío, while the mirror stands for her feminine side, so that the dichotomy that was established in her character in the first scene of the first part through the music reappears again. The music also creates a parallel with the first part:

> que áquellos que llorosamente graves,
> y lisonjeramente estos suaves,
> que me hablen es justo;
> áquellos al valor, y éstos al gusto. (II, v. 21-24)

This time, however, Semíramis can distinguish the two types of music and knows that each one corresponds to a different side of her personality; the music does not have the confusing effect it did in the first part. So if the duality in Semíramis' character remains in her, it seems to be integrated and balanced now.

Semíramis' opening words place the spectator or reader in the middle of the action. Lidoro, King of Lydia (who is Arsidas), has his army at the outskirts of Babylon ready to attack the city. Semíramis explains that she reigns now since Nino's death and how she has built this glorious city to compete with and surpass Niniveh. As a display of courage Semíramis continues with her coiffure and listens to music, so as not to show any concern for the imminent attack. The musicians' words reinforce Semíramis words and attitude:

> La gran Semíramis bella,
> que es, por valiente y hermosa,
> el prodigio de los tiempos
> y el monstruo de las historias,
> en tanto que el rey de Lidia
> sitio pone a Babilonia,
> a sus trompetas y cajas
> quiere que voices respondan;
> y confusas las unas y las otras,
> éstas suaves, cuando aquéllas roncas,
> varias cláusulas hacen
> la cítara de amor, clarín de Marte. (II, v. 27-38)

It is Semíramis' brío and beauty that makes her such an outstanding woman. This combination of the feminine and the masculine in her elevates her to being "el prodigio de los tiempos" (II, v. 29). Semíramis' unparallel life is reinforced constantly in the first and second part by the constant use of the words "prodigio" and "monstruo." The last verse of the musicians' speech, "la cítara de amor, clarín de Marte" (II,

v. 38), balances perfectly well in its two hemistichs the duality in her character.

Semíramis' leisure is interrupted by the arrival of her generals, the brothers Friso and Licas, who come to communicate to her that an ambassador from Lidoro, King of Lidia, requests an audience. Semíramis grants the audience to Lidoro's ambassador, who turns out to be Lidoro himself.

Lidoro's long speech to Semíramis serves as a brief summary of some of the events which occurred in the first part, and as an exposition of events which have occurred between the two parts which explains the in media res situation in which the second part begins. Since there was an interval of a few days between the performance of the first and the second parts, Lidoro's reference to the events in the first part serves to remind the audience of certain key events. For the spectator who has not seen the first part, it serves as an introduction to the play. Among the relevant incidents that have occurred between the two acts are: Lidoro's marriage to Irene; the son they bore, Irán; Irene's death, Menón's suicide and Nino's death. When Lidoro refers to Nino's death, he repeats the public opinion which makes Semíramis an accomplice in his death. Lidoro also accuses her of keeping her son away from his throne and kingdom and here for the first time their physical resemblance is alluded to:

> - que el cielo
> le dio lo mejor de ti,
> pues te parece en extremo,
> sin nada de lo que es alma,
> en todo de lo que es cuerpo;
> pues, según dicen, la docta

naturaleza un bosquejo
hizo tuyo, en rostro, en voz,
talle y acciones-, y siendo
hijo tuyo y tu retrato,
le crías con tal respeto,
que de Nínive en la fuerza,
sin el decoro y respeto
debido a quien es, le tienes,
donde la corona y cetro
tiranamente le usurpas
la majestad y el gobierno. (II, v. 252-268)

It is because of Nino's death that Lidoro comes to Semíramis to claim his right to the throne as Nino's brother-in-law, believing that neither Semíramis or her son who has her blood should reign.

Semíramis' response to Lidoro is important to understanding the power and the glory she has achieved, distinguishing herself in times of war and peace. This is actually the only place where her deeds are enumerated, since Calderón is not centering the play around them. Nevertheless, this section is essential to fully grasp the great dimension of her fall from fortune at the end of the play. Whether or not Semíramis killed Nino or was responsible for his death remains in doubt till the end of the play, since in her answer to Lidoro she argues the lack of need of that murder.

pues
si vivía tan sujeto,
tan amante y tan rendido
Nino a mi amor, ¿a qué efecto
había de reinar matando
si me reinaba viviendo? (II, v. 395-400)

The most important element of her speech is her comment about her son and herself for what it reflects of the dichotomy in her character.

Y aunque tú en lo mejor
me parece has dicho, es cierto
que en lo peor me parece,

pues sería más perfecto
si hubiera de mí imitado
lo animoso que lo bello.
Es Ninias, según me dicen,
temeroso por extremo,
cobarde y afeminado;
porque no sólo hizo un yerro
naturaleza en los dos,
si es que lo es el parecernos,
sino dos yerros: el uno
trocarse con su concepto,
y el otro habernos trocado
tan totalmente el afecto,
que, yo mujer y él varón,
yo con valor y él con miedo,
yo animosa y él cobarde,
yo con brío, él sin esfuerzo,
vienen a estar en los dos
violentados ambos sexos. (II, v. 413-434)

There is no doubt that Semíramis is at odds with Lidoro's judgment of her beauty as her best attribute, but as Lipmann has indicated her words express that

> . . . she is radically at odds with herself. She deprecates her beauty and, by implication, her sex, suggesting that nature erred in making her a woman. She now identifies brío and valor as masculine qualities, and apprehends the duality of her nature as a mismatch of body and soul. After this speech, her self-conscious display of vanity at the end of the scene is hardly credible, but Semíramis is unaware of the discrepancy between her feelings and her actions.[35]

Lipmann's perceptive comments about the duality in Semíramis between the feminine and the masculine in her character are consistent with what Semíramis was in the first part of the play. Although it is also true that Semíramis identifies now her brío and valor as masculine qualities, which she was not able to do in the first part of the play, Lipmann's argument that Semíramis "deprecates her beauty, and by implication, her sex" may be too strong and emphatic for what Semíramis is now. If there

is a discrepancy between her feelings, which are expressed in her speech to Lidoro and her actions, another way of expressing her feelings, the answer may be in Ninias' personality. It is possible that Semíramis' strong words respond more to the lack of valor and brío displayed by her son Ninias, than by her own feelings of being a "mismatch of body and soul." Semíramis' statement that Ninias "en lo peor me parece" (II, v. 415), responds more to the lack of brío in a man, than to a devaluation of her beauty. As she says, nature would have acted more in agreement with sex roles if he had been given courage instead of beauty.

There is another element that seems to deny that Semíramis "deprecates her beauty," her love for her general Licas. Although Calderón has eliminated from the Semíramis legend almost every trace of her lust, there are several clear indications of her passion for Licas. Before going to battle with Lidoro she says to Licas: "Licas, ostenta hoy tu esfuerzos / mira que anda por hacerte / dichoso un atrevimiento" (II, v. 522-524). When Licas comes to speak to Semíramis as the people begin to acclaim Ninias as their king, in an aside she says: "Bien ese afecto me debe. / Pero yo miento. ¿Qué digo?" (II, v. 745-746). In the third act when she is already impersonating her son she says in an aside: ("¡Oh injusta, oh vana, oh tirana / pasión! Todavía estás / en lo secreto del alma; / pero yo te venceré / con silencio") (II, v. 2964-2968). Finally, when she hears from Licas that he loves Libia, in another aside she says: "¡Quién vio más nuevo rigor! / ¿Qué es esto que escucho, cielos? / No avives, cierzo de celos, / cenizas de un muerto amor" (II, v. 2955-2958). Semíramis' love for her general heightens her femininity and her vulnerability to this love.

Actually, in the first scene of the second part, Semíramis seems to have integrated both her feminine and masculine characteristics. As we have seen, in the first part of the play Semíramis does not seem to be aware at all of her beauty and the effect it has on others, but in this scene in which Semíramis is seen taking care of her hair, surrounded by musicians and ladies who serve her, there is a sensuality and a pleasure derived from those activities unknown to the Semíramis of the first part. However, this sense of integration in her life does not last long.

Since Semíramis would not give the throne to Lidoro as he wanted they go to battle. Semíramis stops her coiffure and goes to battle with her comb in her hair:

> Laurel de aquesta victoria
> ha de ser; porque no quiero
> que corone mi cabeza
> hoy más acerado yelmo
> que este dentado penacho
> que es femenil instrumento. (II, v. 471-476)

Lipmann believes that "these demonstratins of her womanhood are intended to unnerve her foe," but it seems more likely a celebration of her womanhood.[36] The comb becomes an ironic symbol serving as a helmet while it maintains its feminine qualities. After Lidoro's defeat Semíramis returns to her chambers, to her music, her ladies and her coiffure, passing from the masculine to the feminine with complete ease; but first she punishes Lidoro with extreme severity. Treating him like a dog, she asks Chato to take care of him as he does of her other dogs, and to tie him by the palace's door. Semíramis' cruelty seems an unconscious echo of her own beast-like life in the cave.

Wanting to prove Ninias' incapacity to rule, Semíramis has sent for

him before going to battle with Lidoro. As she is entertained by her musicians she hears voices acclaiming Ninias as their king: "¡Viva Ninias, nuestro Rey! / ¡Viva el sucesor de Nino!" (II, v. 733-734). They also express their desire not to be governed by a woman: "No una mujer nos gobierne, / porque aunque el cielo la hizo / varonil, no es de la sangre / de nuestros Reyes antiguos" (II, v. 781-784). Lisias, Ninias' tutor, comes forth and explains to Semíramis that this has been the reaction of the people of Babylon upon seeing their king. Semíramis' outrage at her people is entirely justified,

> pues cuando acabo de darte
> la victoria que has tenido,
> ¿de que soy mujer te acuerdas,
> y te olvidas de mi brío? (II, v. 795-798)

because of their ingratitude. Wanting to punish the "desgradecido monstruo" (II, v. 791), Semíramis decides to abandon the government and retire to the most secluded part of the palace, where she will only be seen by Flora, one of her ladies. However, as she acts so impulsively, no sooner has she said it than she thinks she is going to lose her mind:

> ¿Yo sin mandar? De ira rabio.
> ¿Yo sin reinar? Pierdo el juicio
> Etna soy, llamas aborto,
> volcán soy, rayos respiro. (II, v. 877-880)

Semíramis' reference to the people's applause in the first part ". . . Como estos no falten, / lo demás poco importa" (I, v. 2425-2426) acquires full meaning now. The center of her life is her reign and the recognition of her people.

From this point on until the end of the second act, Semíramis will not be seen on stage. The action is dominated by Ninias who begins to

act like a weak and inexperienced king; by the general Licas, who is loyal to Ninias, and his brother Friso, who remains loyal to Semíramis, and by the emotional entanglements of these characters.

Of Ninias' first actions as king, the most important for the development and denouement of the play is his treatment of Lidoro, king of Lidia. Confronted when he enters the palace with Lidoro's pitiful state, tied up like a dog, Ninias promises to help him. Once he is king he sends for Lidoro and expresses to Lisias, Ninias' counselor, his intention of freeing Lidoro since he has promised it. Lisias wisely advises Ninias not to give absolute freedom to Lidoro without having him promise the same loyalty to him as he had promised to his father Nino. Once in Ninias' presence, Lidoro agrees to remain in the palace until Ninias orders his complete freedom, although he is not pleased with his conditional liberty. When Semíramis impersonates her son and imprisons Lidoro again events begin to unfold towards her destruction.

Semíramis' prolonged absence from the stage has been explained by Daniel Rogers as a problem of casting; he believes that both Ninias' and Semíramis' parts were intended to be played by the same actress.[37] The practice of doubling parts had been common since Cueva's time and although actresses were not allowed to appear on stage in men's costumes, the law was not strictly observed. Also in 1653, the year of the first performance of La hija del aire, a decree permitted women to dress as men as long as the plot called for it.[38]

Semíramis reappears on stage towards the end of the second act to speak with Friso and plan Ninias' abduction. Friso comes to meet with

Semíramis in response to a letter he received from her through her companion Flora, in it Semíramis writes:

> "Una mujer aflijida,
> que poco a su estrella debe,
> de vos a fiar se atreve
> fama, ser, honor y vida. (II, v. 1687-1690)

Semíramis finds meaning in life through her role as a ruler of a great nation; without it, as she says to Friso, she finds that: "Porque mi honor, ser y vida, / ni es ser, ni vida ni honor" (II, v. 2028-2929). Without her reign Semíramis is reduced to nothingness.

In order to regain power, Semíramis conceives a most daring plan: to abduct Ninias and, by taking advantage of their physical resemblance, to impersonate him by dressing like him. Semíramis is fully aware of the great audacity of her plan; before explaining it to Friso she tells him:

> pero antes que la industria te declare,
> dile a tu admiración que no se pare
> que volando en ajenas alas venga,
> cuando las suyas desplumadas tenga,
> porque es preciso hablar en esta parte
> juntos el hablar yo y el admirarte. (II, v. 2096-2101)

Semíramis knows that her scheme will cause great admiration for its boldness, and her call to Friso to let his admiration run wild as he hears it is also a call to the audience to do the same. Semíramis realizes that she may endanger her life or that her plan may not work out, but all that is secondary to the greatness of her imagination which is capable of conceiving such a plan:

> Ven, no temas, que cuando no consiga
> el intento, me basta que se diga
> que lo emprendí. El concepto de mi idea
> escándalo de todo el mundo sea. (II, v. 2200-2203)

Lipmann believes that Semíramis' impersonation is an attempt on her part:

> . . . to transcend a physical identity which she feels has constrained her spirit, and to assume a shape in which the world will accept her as a ruler and restore the sense of self denied her.[39]

His statement is grounded in some of Semíramis' comments in her long speech to Friso: "Yo, pues, no quepo en mí misma, y con nueva cisma / solicito explayarme de mí misma" (II, v. 2086-2087), "del femenil adorno haciendo ultraje, / me he ensayado el traje / varonil, porque en nada me halle la novedad embarazada" (II, v. 2112-2115), "en su lugar quedando / yo desmentido el sexo, gobernando" (II, v. 2144-2145). Semíramis' impersonation is a desperate attempt on her part when she feels that it is her only recourse to regain power. There is no doubt that in this process as Lipmann so well says she attempts to assume an identity by which she will be accepted as a ruler again, but this impersonation remains a means to power. As a woman, Semíramis has not been "constrained," she has been able to reach the applause she so much wanted, and if she pretends to be a man is only to regain the applause which is essential to her life. It could be said that Semíramis' being depends on other people's perceptions of it, since she needs the constant feedback of their adulation and applause. Although regaining her kingdom is extremely important to her, it seems to be more important to be able to conceive such a daring idea and to try to execute it, which if unsuccessful will still give her an enormous fame. She will be perceived as an exceptional being.

Meanwhile Ninias has fallen asleep in his apartment, half naked

while going over some papers. Friso and Semíramis come to his room and, taking advantage of the fact that he is alone, they decide to proceed with Semíramis' plan. As Friso takes Ninias away, his writing table falls down, Ninias wakes up and calls for help, but Friso succeeds in taking him away. Semíramis hears the voices of Lisias and Licas who want to come in to see what is happening; Semíramis has to act quickly. As she undresses and stays in just a bodice she says:

> Adiós, femenil modestia
> que desta vez has de verte
> desnuda de tus adornos,
> aunque en los ajenos quedes. (II, v. 2332-2335)

This change of sex in front of the audience must have caused admiration and enjoyment. In Semíramis' words there is a display of femininity and modesty towards her body, and a pleasure in her use of feminine attire, which seems to contradict the opinions of those who emphasize her disappointment in being a woman.

Semíramis' impersonation is a success and she thanks Venus once more for it:

> Mil gracias te doy, oh bella
> deidad, protetora mía,
> al ver cuánto en este día
> has mejorado mi estrella.
> Una y mil veces por ella
> . . . . . .
> que pues por ti merezco
> ver que aplauso tan altivo
> segunda vez le recibo,
> segunda vez le agradezco. (II, v. 2483-2492)

The expression of gratitude and appreciation for the goddess whom she believes to be her protector is once again very ironic since Venus has actually failed to protect her. Semíramis also fails to realize that the

applause she is receiving is not directed at her, but to Ninias whom she is impersonating; as Lipmann has said: "she fails to recognize illusion and reality."[40] But whether Semíramis realizes this or not is not very important for her at this point, she wants to be recognized, admired and applauded and any price that she has to pay for it is accepted by her. Actually there is a sense of pleasure on her part from deceiving all those who wanted her to abdicate in favor of Ninias. Semíramis is playing a game and she is enjoying it; it is a deadly game but her ambitions are satisfied.

When Semíramis begins to reverse the action taken by Ninias, everybody is surprised, but Semíramis herself delights in an ironic game with all her advisors, as when she says: "que ya no soy el que fuí; / que el reinar da nueva alma" (II, v. 2575-2576). Before Lidoro appears in her presence Lisias advises her to act sternly with him, and she follows his instruction so sternly, sending Lidoro to prison again, that it prompts Licas to say: "¡Cielos! ¿Quién en Ninias habla?"[41]

Irán, Lidoro's son, is planning an immediate attack on Babylon to free his father, but Lidoro manages to escape from prison and orders his army not to attack unless Ninias' army does so. Semíramis confronts Irán, but Irán explains that since his father is free there is no reason to attack. Moved by her characteristic pride to capture Lidoro a second time, Semíramis engages in an unnecessary battle in which she will encounter death. She is hurt in the battle and as she dies her moment of anagnorisis arrives:

> En fin, Diana, has podido
> más que la deidad de Venus,

pues sólo me diste vida
hasta cumplir los severos
hados que me amenazaron
con prodigios, con portentos,
a ser tirana y cruel
homicida y de soberbio
espíritu, hasta morir
despeñada de alto puesto. (II, v. 3207-3216)

After believing in Venus' protection and assistance all her life, Semíramis finally becomes aware of the forces which have molded her life. It has been Diana all along who has allowed her triumphs in order to fulfill the prophecy. If during the second part of the play the audience's sympathy for Semíramis has diminished as she turned into a cruel woman, as Lipmann has said, her death restores it.[42] We can now see Semíramis as the victim of the rivalry and vengeance of a goddess who does not care to sacrifice her in order to obtain her revenge.

Semíramis' guilt also helps to reestablish a sympathetic link with the audience, which sees her tormented by the degree of responsibility which she bears for Nino's and Menón's deaths and for Ninias' imprisonment.

¿Qué quieres, Menón, de mí,
de sangre el rostro cubierto?
¿Qué quieres, Nino, el semblante
tan pálido y macilento?
¿Qué quieres, Ninias, que vienes
a afligirme triste y preso? (II, v. 3235-3240)

Yo no te saqué los ojos.
Yo no te di aquel veneno.
Y si el reino te quité,
ya te restituyo el reino.
Dejadme, no me aflijáis.
Vengados estais, pues muero,
pedazos del corazón
arrancándome del pecho
Hija del aire yo,
hoy en él me desvanezco. (II, v. 3243-3252)

Although many critics want to find a statement in this play about Calderón's concept of free will, and like to make moral judgments about Semíramis' vanishing in the aire, Calderón's outlook in this play has been interpreted very wisely by Valbuena Briones:

> Lo interesante es que la acción no ha sido vista principalmente con un ejemplo moral, aunque moralidades pudieran deducirse de ella, sino una tragedia poética en la que el protagonista femenino cumple el destino trágico impuesto por los otros.[43]

In the final analysis, Semíramis' downfall can be seen as the failure of her imagination. Semíramis' imagination has served her to imagine greater and greater goals which she saw herself achieving, and to repress the knowledge she possessed about her prophecy. Always imagining what is going to be, her imagination fails to imagine what is unconceivable for it, her own downfall.[44]

Notes

[1]Parker's article appeared for the first time in the Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, XXXIX (1962), pp. 222-237. It was translated by Manuel Durán and reprinted in the book by Manuel Durán and Roberto González Echevarría, Calderón y la crítica: historia y antología. Vol. I & II (Madrid: Gredos, 1976).

[2]Pedro Calderón de la Barca, La hija del aire, ed. Gwynne Edwards (London: Tamesis, 1970). All quotations are taken from this edition and are identified in the text by verse number.

[3]The German Romantics reawakened interest in Calderón's dramaturgy after the condemnation of Calderón as a corruptor of the theater and a writer of absurd plays lacking in verisimilitude, by eighteenth century neo-classical writers. The Schlegel brothers, Friedrich and August Wilhelm, translated five of Calderón's plays, which appeared between 1803 and 1809. In his Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, August W. Schlegel referred to Calderón in high terms: "All the writers of that day wrote in a kindred spirit, they formed a true school of art. Many of them have peculiar excellences, but Calderón in boldness, fulness, and profundity, soars beyond them all; in him the Romantic drama of the Spaniards attained the summit of perfection. . . ." (Über dramatische Kunst und Literatur, transl. J. Black (London, 1982), p. 497). These Lectures were given in 1809 in Vienna, printed between 1809-1811, and translated into French in 1814 by Mme Necker de Saussure, Mme de Staël's cousin. Goethe praised La hija del aire, which became well-known in Germany, in a letter to Karl Ludwig von Knebel, dated June 13, 1821, in which he said: "I considered that it is the greatest of Calderón's work, I would say one of the later ones. . . . I will not forget to give Calderón due praise for it if we should meet in the after-life." Letters from Goethe. Trans. W. von Herzfeld and C. Metuil Sym (Edinburgh: Univ. Press, 1957), p. 434.

[4]Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, Calderón y su teatro (Madrid, 1881).

[5]Bruce W. Wardropper, "Menéndez y Pelayo on Calderón," Criticism, VII, n. 4 (1964), p. 366.

[6]Menéndez y Pelayo, p. 296.

[7]José Bergamín, Mangas y capirotes (Madrid: Plutarco, 1933), p. 186.

[8]The poems appeared in La Gaceta Literaria on the tercentenary of Góngora's death.

[9]Angel Valbuna Prat, Calderón, su personalidad, su arte dramático, su estilo y sus obras (Barcelona, 1941), pp. 128-30.

[10]Angel Valbuena Prat, Historia del teatro español (Barcelona, 1956), pp. 394-404.

[11]N. D. Shergold and J. E. Varey, "Some Early Calderón Dates," Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, 38 (1961), 178, 286.

[12]A parte is a collection of twelve plays preceded by the accustomed preliminaries such as licences, dedications, approbations and errata list. In Calderón's lifetime twelve partes appeared; three editions of each the Primera and Segunda partes, and two editions of Tercera, Quarta and Quinta partes. Not all of the twelve partes appeared with prior knowledge of the author and all of them contain corrupt texts; nevertheless, in most cases this is the closest we are able to get to Calderón's originals. The well-known editions of Vera Tassis, Calderón's friend, which were printed after Calderón's death, derived in a small number of cases from authentic manuscripts, but in other cases what we have are Vera Tassis' editorial changes, a practice of "improving" the text which was usual in the seventeenth century. For detailed textual studies see: Edward M. Wilson and Don W. Cruickshank, The Textual Criticism of Calderón's Comedias (Westmead, Farnborough, Hants, England: Gregg International Publishers Limited, in association with Tamesis Book Limited, 1973), I.

[13]All the critics who have worked with this play believe that Calderón was the author of both parts. There is one exception and that is Constante H. Rose, who believes that the author of the second part is Enríquez Gómez and that the first part was written later as a prologue to the events in the original. See: Constante H. Rose, "Who Wrote the Segunda parte of La hija del aire?," Reveue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire, 543-4 (1976), 797-822.

[14]See the introduction to Edwards' critical edition of La hija del aire (Tamesis: London, 1970), p. xxiii. In his review of Edwards' critical edition Alan K. G. Paterson argues for a much earlier date of composition (1625-1630) due to the composition itself of the play which he calls "this cumbersome piece of theatre." Alan K. G. Paterson, Review of Gwynne Edwards' edition, Modern Language Review, LX (1973), 203-206.

[15]Sargent objects to Calderón's use of the term "history" saying that he only uses the mere outline of the story and embellishes it to suit his fancy. Sargent, pp. 77-78.

[16]As possible explanations for this change Edwards mentions the "prevailing principle of literary decorum" as described by Parker in "History and Poetry: The Coriolanus Theme in Calderón," Hispanic Studies in Honour of I. González Llubera (Oxford, 1952), pp. 211-24. He also mentions the fact that by the time of the play's performance Calderón was already a priest.

[17]Although in Diodorus' account the rape of Diana's devotee through Venus' intervention and Venus' protection of Semíramis at birthappear, the goddesses antagonism does not have any further influence on Semíramis'

life. In that respect it can be said that their antagonism is a Calderonian addition.

[18]For a study of prophecies in Calderón see Alexander A. Parker's article "Prediction and its dramatic function in El mayor monstruo los celos in Studies in Spanish Literature of the Golden Age. Presented to Edward M. Wilson, ed. R. O. Jones (London: Tamesis, 1973), pp. 173-192.

[19]In his critical introduction to the play, Edwards sees in the image of the sun the "greatness and majesty of the king" and also sees the sun in terms of the traditional symbolism of a source of life, light and as a "symbol of man's enlightment, dispelling the dark ignorance in which he gropes." To this light he opposes the darkness that Semíramis' cave and her unlit condition represent. For him the cave "represents man's spiritual prison, the chains of Original Sin and imperfection with which he is born and which he has to bear throughout his life, strive as he might to reach the light of understanding" (Edwards, p. lvii-lviii). Although it is true that Calderón uses these images with these meanings in other plays, in La hija del aire we are in a pagan world in which more than ever actions seem to be governed by the whim of the gods. Semíramis is not the product of the imperfection originated with the Original Sin, but rather an instrument for Diana's vengeance on Venus.

[20]Stephen H. Lipmann, "The duality and delusion of Calderón's Semíramis," Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, 49 (1982), pp. 42-57.

[21]Because of Menéndez y Pelayo's criticism of the sub-plots for decades they were considered unnecessary or very loosely related to the main plot. This view has changed completely and the sub-plots are considered now as an integral and defining element of the comedia.

[22]In Oedipus the King, Antigone and The Bacchae, Tiresias appears in his role of blind seer. Since Calderón's La hija del aire can be considered, like Oedipus, a play about "forgotten knowledge," the reversal in Tiresias' role is even more striking.

[23]Lewis and Short, A Latin Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 1163. See also: Joan Corominas, Diccionario Crítico Etimológico de la Lengua Castellana (Madrid: Gredos, 1974), p. 457.

[24]Leo Spitzer, Lexikalisches aus dem Katalanische und den Übrigen Iberoromanischen Sprachen (Ginebra, 1921), p. 97.

[25]Edwards, p. 278.

[26]Peter Dunn, rev. of Pedro Calderón de la Barca La hija del aire, ed. Gwynne Edwards, Hispanic Review 41 (1973), pp. 567-570.

[27]In a very recent article of Everett W. Hesse, "Los dos retratos de Semíramis" in Estudios sobre el Siglo de Oro, en homenaje a Raymond R. McCurdy, eds. Angel González, Tamara Holzapfel and Alfred Rodríguez

(Madrid: Cátedra, 1983), pp. 151-157, Hesse argues that Menón's description of Semíramis' hair with its sharp contrasts is related to the chaos in her personality and he sees a correspondence between her physical portrit and her psychological portrait as it transpires throughout the play. Although Semíramis is indeed a woman of many contrasts, Hesse seems extremely harsh in his judgment and evaluation seeing only in her "un conjunto de narcisismo, sadomasoquismo, resentimiento y venganza." This is a reduction and simplification of a much larger and complex problem.

[28]This topic is discussed by A. Valbuena Briones in his article "El simbolismo en el teatro de Calderón-La caída del caballo-." Romanische Forchungen 74 (1962), pp. 60-76; by A. A. Parker in "Metáfora y símbolo en la interpretación de Calderón," Actas del Primer Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas (Oxford, 1964), pp. 141-160. In his review of Edwards' book The Prison and the Labyrinth. Studies in Calderonian Tragedy, Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, 59 (Oct. 1982), pp. 340-343. Parker argues that falling from a horse is not a Calderonian symbol for erotic passion, but rather an omen taken from Roman historians and he asserts that Calderón's tragedies "are full of ominous portents." He discusses it in more detail in his previously mentioned article "Prediction."

[29]Edwards, p. xli.

[30]Dunn, p. 569.

[31]This is an essential difference between Virués' and Calderón's portrayals. The men in Virués' play are impressed by Semíramis' intelligence and courage; in Calderón it is her beauty that makes her so attractive to them.

[32]Semíramis' imagination has been the object of two articles: Daniel Rogers, "La imaginación de Semíramis" in Hacia Calderón. Segundo Coloquio Anglogermano. Hamburgo, 1970, ed. Hans Flasche (Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), pp. 171-179; and Stephen H. Lipmann, "The duality and delusion of Calderón's Semíramis," Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, 59 (1981), pp. 42-57. Rogers discusses Semíramis' imagination from a moral point of view as an Aristotelian-Thomistic Faculty incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, and from a mythological point of view considering the influence of Venus on her. Rogers fails to see what Semíramis fails to see too, and that is that she is more like Diana than Venus, and that her ambition and imagination are ways of substituting for and repressing the prophecy. Also the imagination is not a prerogative of women; men are also capable of imagining what may lead them to failure and tragedy; Calderón's Tetrarca is a perfect example. If there is Madame Bovary there is also a Julien Sorel. Lipmann disagrees with Rogers because the latter sees "her ambition stimulated by her imagination" while Lipmann sees "her ambition stimulating her to imagine trumphs while she is imprisoned and after she is freed." Lipmann believes that Semíramis' brío is responsible in part for Semíramis' ambition, and he analyses her delusion as a result of her masculine brío and her imagination.

[33]Edwards, p. 273.

[34]For a discussion of Menón as a tragic figure see: Susana Hernández Araico, "Menón y el determinismo trágico en La hija del aire" in Approaches to the Theater of Calderón, ed. Michael D. McGaha (Washington: Univ. press of America, 1982), pp. 105-117.

[35]Lipmann, pp. 50-51.

[36]Lipmann, p. 51.

[37]Daniel Rogers, "¡Cielos! ¿Quién en Ninias habla?" The Mother-Son Impersonation in La Hija del aire," Bulletin of the Comediantes, vol. 20, No. 1 Spring (1968), pp. 1-4.

[38]N. D. Shergold, A History of the Spanish Stage (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 161, 224, 506.

[39]Lipmann, p. 52.

[40]Lipmann, p. 52.

[41]The line used by Daniel Rogers for the title of his article on Semíramis' impersonation.

[42]Lipmann, p. 53.

[43]Angel Valbuena Briones, Perspectiva crítica de los dramas de Calderón (Madrid-México: Rialph, 1965), p. 236.

[44]In that respect Semíramis is like Macbeth, both fail to imagine their downfall.

CHAPTER IV

VOLTAIRE: *SEMIRAMIS*

Voltaire is mainly known to the non-specialist as the author of *Candide*, as the *philosophe* and the epitome of the French Enlightment. However, the theater constituted one of his major preoccupations and literary activities. His literary career began in the theater with the production of *Oedipe* in 1718, and ended there with his last play *Irène* in 1778, the year of Voltaire's death. During his active years as a writer Voltaire wrote fifty-seven plays, of which twenty-seven were considered tragedies, and several volumes of dramatic criticism.

By the time Voltaire begain to write his *Sémiramis* in 1746, he had already composed *Oedipe* in 1718, which was very successful; *Artémire* in 1720, of which some fragments remain; and *Mariamne* in 1725 in which he reworks his unsuccessful *Artémire*. *Brutus*, *La Mort de César* and *Eriphyle* written between 1726 and 1731 show the influence of Voltaire's sojourn in England from 1726 to 1729. He decided not to produce *La Mort de César* at that time, and *Brutus* amd *Eriphyle* did not succeed; however, as we shall see, *Eriphyle* was used by Voltaire for the composition of *Sémiramis*. In 1732 Voltaire had a tremendous success with *Zaïre*, and what seems to have insured his success was his presentation of a love story, which was what the public was accustomed to and liked. *Alzire*, written in 1733 and staged in 1736, and *Mérope* in 1743, were also great successes.[1]

Voltaire was not the first French dramatist who handled the Semiramis legend. In France, the Semiramis legend had inspired several playwrights to write dramas about the legendary Babylonian queen.

In 1646 or 1647 Gabriel Gilbert's Sémiramis was produced by the Troupe Royale. Although Gilbert's play is unknown today, it is interesting to see how he portrays Sémiramis, since his treatment is one of the most sympathetic to her.

Gilbert presents Sémiramis as having "great tenderness and intense devotion" to her husband Menon.[2] Ninus is the despot, who in his desire to possess Sémiramis will go to any lengths. Ninus offers Menon his daughter Sosarme in marriage and tells him that if he does not accept he will threaten Sémiramis' life. To Sémiramis Ninus says that Menon is marrying Sosarme of his free will and as a consequence she is a free woman. Faithful to Sémiramis, Menon takes his life in front of the altar before the marriage ceremony. In order to avenge her beloved husband, Sémiramis pretends to accept Ninus' love and asks him to grant her rule over Assyria for five days, which, once she has obtained it, she will use to present herself to the Council as Menon's widow and to ask for justice. The Council finds Ninus guilty, but anticipating the Council's decision Ninus commits suicide. Sosarme also stabs herself, and the play ends with the people begging Sémiramis to rule them. Gilbert does not make any mention of Sémiramis' incestuous love for her son, but it is this aspect of the legend which will be central to the plot of Desfontaines.

Desfontaines' play La Véritable Sémiramis was published in 1647, but it was not staged. Desfontaines' title seems like an answer to Gilbert's

play since their heroines have very different fates. From the outset of this play Sémiramis is queen. Ninus married her after her father, the King of Syria, died and Ninus conquered his kingdom. In reward for the victories she has obtained for him, Sémiramis asks him to allow her to rule for a period of three days; motivated by ambition, vengeance and love, her first order is Ninus' death. She offers her hand and kingdom to Melistrate, whom she loves, but angered by his refusal, she orders his arrest. Melistrate is recognized as the son of Sémiramis and Ninus who was kidnapped when he was born. Sémiramis ends by taking her life.[3]

The incest in Desfontaines, Crébillon and Voltaire is always averted by a reconnaissance, which brings about the dénouement of the play. The treatment is radically opposed to that of Virués in which Sémiramis is in love with the man she knows to be her son.

Mme. Gomez (Madeleine-Angélique Poisson), author of many contes, wrote a Sémiramis which was played at the Comédie Française in 1716. In Mme. Gomez's tragedy Sémiramis is the daughter of the King of Arabia, and Menon an Assyrian prince who orders her kidnapping in order to avenge his son's death. Menon brings up Sémiramis, whom he calls Nitocris, as his own daughter. As she grows to be a beautiful woman, Menon falls in love with her, but so do Ninus, King of Assyria, and an unknown man named Arius. Since Menon cannot make Sémiramis love him, he conspires against Ninus but upon being discovered he takes poison and before his death discovers Sémiramis' true identity. Arius is then recognized as her brother and her father gives her in marriage to Ninus. The double reconnaissance brings bout the dénouement.[4]

Prosper Jolyot Crébillon (père) wrote a Sémiramis which was staged at the Comédie Française on April 10, 1717; the piece was received unfavorably and did not see a revival.[5] By this time Crébillon had written La Mort des enfants de Brutus, in 1703, which was refused by the actors of the Comédie Française; Crébillon destroyed the manuscript years later, so there are no copies of his first attempt at playwriting. His second play Idoménée was accepted by the comédiens in September of 1705, and saw thirteen performances between 1705 and 1706. Although limited, this success encouraged him to write Atrée et thyeste, a tragedy which continued to be acted at the Comédie Française until 1866. After the success obtained with Atrée et Thyeste, Crébillon had two successes: Electre in 1708, which was played more than one hundred and twenty-five times between 1708 and 1762, and Rhadamiste et Zénobie, which is considered his masterpiece. This tragedy was performed twenty-three times during its first run in 1711. After this success, however, Crébillon's next three tragedies were very badly received: Xerxès was performed only once in 1714, Sémiramis was acted only seven times, and Pyrrhus written in 1726 was performed once. Between 1726 and 1748 Crébillon worked on a tragedy based on the Catiline conspiracy of ancient Rome, Catilina, which was performed at the Comédie Française in 1748. The play was well received, but he was criticized for his unhistorical portrayal of Cicero. This inspired Crébillon to write his last tragedy Le Triumvirat, which was performed in December 1754 but was withdrawn by the comédiens after ten performances.

Hence, Crébillon's success as a dramatist came in the first decade

of the eighteenth century. His contemporaries were La Chapelle, Campistron, La Grange, Abeille, Thomas Corneille, Belin and Mlle. Bernard; but he differed from them by introducing the element of horror which became his undisputable trademark, and by adding more complications to the main plot.

Although Crébillon's Sémiramis is a forgotten play today, it is important for its relationship to Voltaire's Sémiramis. In his Sémiramis Crébillon portrays Sémiramis as a glorious but tyrannical ruler who is responsible for her husband's murder, without feeling any remorse for it. Sémiramis' brother conspires to overthrow her because of her crimes, but his plans fail. Agénor, a distinguished warrior, comes to the court, he is in love with Bélus' daughter Ténésis, but her father rejects him because Agénor does not have a distinguished ancestry. Sémiramis is in love with Agénor and since his pride has been hurt by Bélus, he accepts the queen. Bélus plans to kill Agénor because his alliance with Sémiramis will make it impossible to overthrow her. The man in charge of killing is Mermécide, and when he goes to kill him, Agénor recognizes him as his lost father. The truth is revealed: after Ninus' murder, Bélus fearing for Ninias' life abducted him and gave him to Mermécide. Ninias-Agénor grew up with Mermécide, but ten years ago they had lost contact with each other. Sémiramis refuses to admit that he is her son and is so jealous of his love for Ténésis that she orders her death. When the soldiers know that Ninias is alive, they pledge their loyalty to him, Mermécide saves Ténésis, and Sémiramis kills herself when she realizes that she has lost everything. She dies regretting her son's love for Ténésis. Cré-

billon's play has an extremely complicated plot and the dénouement is achieved after three consecutive recognitions.

Not only is Crébillon's dramaturgy relevant but even more so is his role as a censor, because out of his censorship of Voltaire's works there grew a controversy between the two men, which was what prompted Voltaire to write a Sémiramis play in 1746. Crébillon was elected to the Académie Française in 1731; in 1733 he was appointed to the post of royal censor, and in 1736 to police censor.[6]

At first Voltaire's relationship with Crébillon was cordial. Since Crébillon was active as a dramatist during the first decade of the century, Voltaire saw in him a predecessor more than a contemporary writer. In 1730 both writers worked together to refute La Motte's proposal to substitute verse for prose in the composition of tragedies. When Voltaire wanted to publish the Temple du goût in 1733, a controversial work, Voltaire was able to obtain Crébillon as censor, who approved it with very minor changes on several verses. Although Voltaire did not complain about Crébillon's action, he never requested him as censor again. Since Voltaire saw Crébillon as a predecessor the controversy between them could not have resulted from Voltaire's envy of Crébillon, who was called the Sophocles of his age, but rather from Crébillon's censorship of Voltaire's play Mahomet.

Voltaire began to work on Mahomet in 1739, and by January 1740 the comédiens had tentatively accepted it for production. However, the piece "constituted a forceful polemic against all who exploit religion for personal and political gain" and its target were the French Jansenists,

and Crébillon refused its approbation.[7] Voltaire was able to circumvent Crébillon with the help of Cardinal de Fleury, who approved it, and allowed Marville, Crébillon's superior, to ignore his opposition. Voltaire wanted to open his play before Lent, but Marville's approval was withdrawn for what is believed to be the government's fear of offending the Turkish ambassador to France. Although Voltaire succeeded in presenting Mahomet in the provinces at Lille in April 1741, it did not see the Parisian stage until August 9, 1742. The play united Voltaire's enemies and Jansenist sympathizers who led a campaign to have it withdrawn from the stage. A few days later Voltaire himself withdrew Mahomet from the Comédie Française. However, Voltaire was not willing to resign himself to this humiliation and decided that the best way to prove that his play was not an attack on Christianity was to have the Pope accept the dedication of the play. In 1745, Voltaire wrote to Benedict XIV who replied showing his admiration for Mahomet and giving Voltaire his blessing.

In 1751, while Voltaire was at the court of King Frederick of Prussia at Potsdam, a revival of Mahomet was organized by Voltaire's friend Argental and Mme Denis, Voltaire's niece and lover. Once more Crébillon censored the play, although he had given assurances of its approval to Mme Denis the day before. However, Voltaire's friends were able to obtain another censor; the play was presented, well received and had twelve performances.

Their contemporaries explained Crébillon's refusal to approve Mahomet from two different points of view, saying that he acted out of ill-feelings towards Voltaire, or by saying that he was justified and he was

only fulfilling his duties as a censor. However, there is evidence that Crébillon was willing to compromise with his religious and moral views when it would please his superiors. In 1751, a translation of Nicolas Rowe's play The Fair Penitent translated by Mauprié as Caliste, ou la belle pénitente, was presented to Crébillon. The censor expressed extremely strong feelings against it for its religious views, which were a mix of pagan, Christian and Protestant elements, and because it dealt with dangerous political, moral and philosophical ideas from England. Crébillon thought that it would be dangerous to allow these ideas to permeate the French stage, which only proves that he was very unaware of the century he was living in. Despite his strong opposition to La belle pénitente, Crébillon was willing to approve it if the police chief ordered it. This incident which occurred just six months before Crébillon's second refusal of Mahomet, at a time when Mahomet had been approved by the Pope and important political leaders, confirms Crébillon's animosity for Voltaire.

Besides his censorship of Mahomet, Crébillon also censored Voltaire's Mort de César in 1743. This play was performed privately in 1733 and 1735, and was published in Amsterdam in 1736. Voltaire felt that the production of this play after his grand success with Mérope would restore his tarnished image after his withdrawal of Mahomet from the Comédie Française. Crébillon not only disapproved the production unless extensive changes were made on the text, but, to add insult to injury, he offfered to do the changes himself. Crébillon made the changes and the play was poorly received at the Comédie Française; Voltaire always resented

Crébillon's use of his post to suppress ideas which the censor considered dangerous.

Although some critics insist that it was Crébillon's increased popularity at the court and hearing him called the Sophocles of France which prompted Voltaire to compete directly with him by writing Sémiramis, the fact that Voltaire began to work on the project by 1946 proved that the hostilities were derived from Crébillon's role as a censor and not from the favour of the court which came about the middle of 1748. In a letter to his friend Nicolas Thieriot dated August 10, 1746, Voltaire shows his involvement with his new play:

> Je vous renvoye vos livres italiens, je ne lis plus que la réligion des anciens mages, mon cher amy. Je suis à Babylone entre Sémiramis et Ninias. Il n'y a pas moyen de vous envoyer ce que je peux avoir de l'histoire de Louis 14. Semiramis dit qu'elle demande la préférence, que ses jardins valoient bien ceux de Versailles, et qu'elle croit égaler tous les rois modernes, excepté peut-être ceux qui gagnent trois batailles en un an, et qui donnent la paix dans la capitale de leur ennemy.
>
> Mon amy une tragédie engloutit son homme. Il n'y aura pas de raison avec moy tant que je seray sur les bords de l'Euphrate avec l'ombre de Ninus, des incestes et des parricides. Je mets sur la scène un grand prêtre qui est un honnête homme, jugez si ma besogne est aisée![8]

Voltaire's selection of Sémiramis for his attack on Crébillon was a wise one for two reasons: Crébillon's Sémiramis had been a complete failure, and there existed a tradition among French playwriters of improving or reworking a subect matter already treated by another writer. After all, Crébillon himself wrote a Sémiramis after three other French dramatists had dealt with it, and his Sémiramis followed Mme Gomez's Sémiramis by a very short lapse of time. As can be seen Voltaire

protected himself very carefuly against any possible attack for his undertaking of Sémiramis.

Harold Ridgway has described the period of the composition of Sémiramis in the following terms: "Sémiramis fit son apparition vers la fin de la période la moins voltairienne, pour ainsi dire de la vie de Voltaire."[9] He pleased the court so much with the poem commemorating the French victory over the English at the battle of Fontenoy that "il était très en faveur à Versailles, où il jouait le rôle de poète courtisan et de domestique du Roi."[10] This is the epoch of his official poems and commissioned works: La Princesse de Navarre, written to celebrate the marriage of the Dauphin, and the Temple de la gloire, composed to celebrate the triumphs of Louis XV. In 1746, when he was commissioned to write a tragedy to celebrate the return to court life of the Dauphin, Voltaire decided to write his own Sémiramis. The sudden death of the Dauphine in July prevented Voltaire's plans for presenting his new play at the court and he had to present it at the Comédie Française.[11]

Fearing Crébillon's censorship, Voltaire wrote Berryer de Ravenoville, the new lieutenant of police whose approval was needed, a letter very clever for the mastery with which Voltaire handled the situation:

> Permettez qu'en partant je remette la tragédie de Sémiramis entre vos mains, et que je vous demande votre protection pour elle; on la représentera pendant mon absence. Je commence par la soumettre à votre décision, non seulement comme à celle du magistrat de la police, mais comme aux lumièrs d'un juge très éclairé. M. Crébillon commis par vous à l'examen des ouvrages de théâtre a fait autrefois une tragédie de Sémiramis, et peut-être ai-je le malheur qu'il soit mécontent que j'aye travaillé sur le même sujet. Je luy en ay pourtaint demandé la permission, et je vous demande à vous monsieur votre

> protection, m'en remettant à vos bontez et à votre prudence.[12]

The letter had the intended effect and Berryer limited Crébillon's censorship to the suppression of a few verses. However, fearing the opposition organized by his enemies and realizing that the new elements which he was introducing in this play, such as the appearance of Ninus' ghost, the use of elaborate stage decorations to lend verisimilitude, and the use of sound effects and gestures to heighten dramatic tension, could be ridiculed by a hostile audience, Voltaire did not give the play to the comédiens until February 1748, and continued to revise it until June.

Since the play had been commissioned by the court, Louis XV had offered to subsidize the expensive redecoration of the Comédie Française for its production, and he had also offered the services of his "peintres des menus plaisirs" the brothers Dominique François and Antoine Sébastien Slodtz, to help with the decorations. Their work had only been seen on the private stages of the court and this first appearance at the Comédie Française was a special event. This only made Voltaire even more fearful, because it would be humiliating for the King to have cooperated so much in a production that failed.

Voltaire participated personally in the rehearsals in the summer of 1748 and was present the day the play was acted for the first time on August 29, 1748. As was customary some of the audience was sitting on the stage. The continuation of such a practice in Paris troubled Voltaire and he questioned it in his Dissertation sur le tragédie ancienne et moderne, which preceded the text of Sémiramis. For that performance the actors distributed too many tickets and the actors could not move properly

on stage. The actor who played the guard at the entrance to Ninus' tomb had to say: "Messieurs, place à l'ombre, s'il vous plaît, place à l'ombre"; this witty statement from the guard proves how crowded the stage was since the actor who played the ghost of Ninus could not come out of the mausoleum. The choice of words is particularly witty and humorous because a ghost does not need any room to move and it heightened the sense of overcrowdness on stage. For its second performance Voltaire was able to restore the six verses that Crébillon had censored and by the third performance Voltaire succeeded in having fewer people on stage.

A parody of Sémiramis, written by Bidault de Montigny, was approved by Crébillon at the same time, although parodies had been prohibited in Paris since 1743. However, through his friends at the court Voltaire succeeded in preventing its performance at the court in Fontainebleau or at the Comédie Italienne. According to LeClerc there is no evidence that the parody was ever performed in Paris, although it was printed in Amsterdam in 1749 as an anonymous work entitled Sémiramis, tragédie en cinq actes.

Voltaire's competition with Crébillon continued for thirty-six years and in that time Voltaire reworked Rome sauvée, Oreste, Le Triumvirat, Les Pelopides ou Atrée et Thyeste; Crébillon continued to use his power as censor to interfere with Voltaire's works. However, the philosophe's mistake was to continue his battle against Crébillon after his death in 1762, which only created animosity towards himself.

In 1732, Voltaire's Eriphyle was performed at the Théâtre Français; it saw twelve performances with a moderate success, but Voltaire was not

satisfied with the play and continued to work on it. Although he modified the text through the years in various ways, Voltaire was not happy with it and never allowed its publication in his lifetime. He reserved Eriphyle to be used as a source for verses in other plays.[13]

Eriphyle belongs to Voltaire's English period, when he was experimenting with the techniques he saw on the English stage; the appearance of a ghost in this play is an obvious influence of Shakespeare's Hamlet.

The plot of Eriphyle resembles very closely that of Sémiramis, and the critics have seen Voltaire's Sémiramis as an elaboration of Eriphyle. Eriphyle, queen of Argos, plots the death of her husband Amphiaraüs, with the assistance of Hermogide. Twenty years after the crime, Eriphyle is distressed by remorse and by strange apparitions. An oracle advices her to marry again, which is what her subjects wish since they want an heir to the throne. Hermogide is her suitor, but in her remorse, she refuses to marry him and expresses her preference fot the distinguished warrior, Alcméon. At the same time she announces that her son by Amphiaraüs is alive and should be searched for and crowned as their king. When her marriage ceremony to Aclméon is about to take place, the ghost of Amphiaraüs appears by the king's tomb and identifies Alcméon as their son. Aclméon learns about his mother's complicity in Amphiaraüs' death but he forgives her. Using his father's sword he goes to the tomb to punish Hermogide, but blinded by the gods, he kills his mother instead. Alcméon tries to kill himself but this is averted by his fainting. Hermogide is condemned to death but before parting he says to Aclméon:

> . . . je triomphe, je vois
> Que vous êtes tous deux plus à plaindre que moi
> Je n'ai plus qu'à mourir.[14]

In Sémiramis, Assur, a character like Hermogide, will say very similar words to Ninias, who will also have to live with the knowledge that he has killed his mother.

A major difference between Eriphyle and Sémiramis is found in the role and function of the high priest, who in Sémiramis is an important character, while in Eriphyle he appears only at the end of the play to deliver the message that arises from the action:

> La Verité terrible, avec des yeux vengeurs,
> Vient sur l'aile du Temps et lit au fond des coeurs:
> Son flambeau redoutable éclaire en fin l'abîme
> Où dans l'impunité s'était chaché le crime.[15]

Eriphye also required an elaborate stage decoration, although not as spectacular as the one for Sémiramis. R. Niklaus believes that Eriphyle failed to win its audience completely for its lack of some love interest or the deep analysis of passion or emotion that the audience was accustomed to; the characters lack the emotions that could move the audience.[16]

With Sémiramis on the other hand, Voltaire had a complete success; the play had fifteen performances in its first run, was given before the court at Fontainebleau, had a successful renewal in 1749 and remained in the program of the Comédie Française until 1834. As far as is known the last presentation was at Porte-Saint-Martin in 1837.

Voltaire's artistic intentions in undertaking Sémiramis are expressed in his Dissertation sur la tragédie ancienne et moderne, which he dedicated to Cardinal Quirini.[17] As the title states, this is a

comparison between ancient Greek tragedy and the tragedies written in France, Italy and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with a special mention of his own time. Voltaire also discusses his concept of the meaning and function of tragedy.

The Dissertation is divided in three parts: the first part deals with the relationship of Greek tragedy and French and Itaian opera. Voltaire believed that opera was the medium that could come closest to the recreation of ancient Greek tragedy. Opera ws able to imitate Greek tragedy through its recitative and the use of a chorus intimately related in their choral odes to the main subject; but opera failed on many occasions on account of the ariettas which were interpolated and which created a break in the main action.

The second part is dedicated to a comparison of French and Greek tragedy. Voltaire affirms that the French tragic authors have surpassed the Greeks in every respect except in their continuous use of galanterie. For him love intrigues belong more in comedy than in tragedy, unless it is a pssion "furieuse et terrible"; such a passion could truly move the audience to tears, which was Voltaire's true criterion for success.

Voltaire conceived a play as a whole experience which included the text, the actors and the stage where it was to be presented. For him French stages were completely backward and that made it almost impossible to create an "action grande et pathétique." To have members of the audience on stage to the point that actors could not move properly was an aberration, especially when such a practice was obsolete on most stages at the time. He discusses at length the ideal theater: it should be

vast, it should allow an actor to be seen by the audience but not by other actors if necessary, it should allow for pomp and the majestic, and all the spectators should be able to see and hear regardless of where they are seated.

The third part is devoted to a discussion of Sémiramis, a play which Voltaire considered a difficult enterprise. Given the current stage of French theaters, Voltaire was not convinced how well the elaborate sets and decorations which were needed to create a real spectacle and produce verisimilitude would fit on stage. He also was afraid about his preference for action over long love discussions, which were favorites of the audience, and the use of a ghost as Shakespeare had done in Hamlet. Voltaire thought of Hamlet as:

> . . . une pièce grossière et barbare, qui ne serait pas supportée par la plus vile populace de la France et de l'Italie. . . . Mais parmi ces irrégularités grossières, qui rendent encore aujourd'hui le théâtre anglais si absurde et si barbare, on trouve dans Hamlet, par une bizarrerie encore plus grande, des traits sublimes, dignes des plus grands génies. . . . Il fait avouer que, parmi les beautés qui étincellent au milieu de ces terribles extravagances, l'ombre du père d'Hamlet est un des coups de théâtre le plus frappans.[18]

Voltaire admired Shakespeare for the prevalence of action and his elaborate staging which allowed for the kind of spectacle which he wanted for the French stage; however, his appreciation was limited by his neoclassical frame of mind which brought him to criticize Shakespeare's disregard for the unities, the use of low characters, and the frequent vulgarity of the language. Voltaire was extremely impressed by the use of the ghost, which he defends when it is incorporated into the play from

the beginning. He thought that prodigies should only be used when they serve a double function in a play: to contribute to the development of the intrigue and to create "terreur." In Sémiramis he follows both principles.

Voltaire ends his Dissertation stating what the function of tragedy should be:

> La véritable tragédie est l'école de la vertu; et la seule différence qui soit entre le théâtre épuré et les livres de morale, c'est que l'instruction se trouve dans la tragédie toute en action, c'est qu'elle y est intéressante, qu'elle se montre relevée des charmes d'un art qui ne fut inventé autrefois, que pour instruire la terre et pour bénir le ciel, et qui, par cette raison, fut appelé le langage dis dieux.[19]

Voltaire's idea of tragedy reflects the century he lived in: tragedy is seen as a didactic tool, as a way of "illustrating" and exposing moral ideas and values; tragedy had to move its audience, so the emphasis was on compassion and if possible its result was tears. Voltaire's concept of tragedy resembles that of Virués in one aspect: both perceived tragedy as a didactic tool. However, they differed in what they wanted to communicate or teach their audience: Virués wished to each his audience Christian values, while Voltaire was not interested in a particular religion but rather desired to inspire in his audience sensibility and reason.

When one begins to examine the portryal of Semiramis in eighteenth century France, a striking difference emerges from the portrayals of Virués and Calderón: from the outset the French plays Sémiramis has been a distinguished ruler for fifteen years, while in Virués and Calderón

great importance is given to how she became queen and that process. In Crébillon, Ninus' murder becomes the reason for which Sémiramis' brother Belus wants primarily to overthrow her; while in Voltaire Ninus' murder is the cause of her death; Sémiramis' death is Ninus' and the gods' vengeance.

In accordance with the grand scale spectacle that Voltaire wanted to produce, the stage representes a large peristyle. At the bottom is Sémiramis' palace. Gardens with hanging terraces are raised above the palace; to the right is the temple of the magi and to the left is a mausoleum, embellished with obelisks, which is Ninus' tomb.

The play opens with a conversation between Arzace, a distinguished young warrior who is really Sémiramis' son, and his friend Mitrane. Arzace has just arrived in Babylon at Sémiramis' request, and in his first words he praises the glory of Sémiramis' empire and even more he praises Sémiramis since she has been the architect of such splendour. In presenting Arzace's appreciation and respect for Sémiramis from the outset of the play Voltaire differs from Crébillon. Agénor perceives Sémiramis as "une reine cruelle" who deserves his hate. His intense dislike of Sémiramis makes his sudden change of opinion about her when he finds out that she is his mother improbable and not consistent with the development of the plot.

Responding to Arzace's picture of "cette Reine heureuse" (v. 13), Mitrane, as one who dwells in Babylon, counterbalances it with the real picture of Sémiramis' present situation:

La renommée, Arzace, est souvent bien trompeuse
Et peut-être avec moi bientôt vous gémirez,
Quand vous verrez de près ce que vous admirez.[20] (v. 14-16)

Voltaire is already presenting Sémiramis as worthy of our pity and compassion, the two elements which he wants to arouse in his audience. Mitrane's description of Sémiramis is important in establishing the kind of atmosphere and mood that Voltaire intends to create:

Sémiramis à ses douleurs livrée,
Sème ici les chagrins dont elle est dévorée:
L'horreur qui l'épouvante, est dans tous les esprits.
Tantôt remplissant l'air de ses lugubres cris,
Tantôt morne, abattue, égarée, interdite,
De quelque dieu vengeur évitant la poursuite,
Elle tombe à genoux vers ces lieux retirés,
A la nuit, au silence,à la mort consacrés,
Séjour où nul mortel n'osa jamais descendre,
Où de Ninus, mon maître, on conserve la cendre.
Elle approche à pas lent, l'air sombre, intimidé,
Et sa frappant le sein de ses pleurs inondé.
A travers les horreurs d'un silence farouche,
Les noms de fils, d'époux échappent de sa bouche.
Elle invoque les Dieux; mais les Dieux irrités
Ont corrompu le cours de ses prospérités. (v. 17-32)

By the continuous use of words and phrases like chagrins, douleurs, lugubre, l'horreur qui l'épouvante, in Mitrane's speech, Voltaire begins to develop a sense of doom and mystery around Sémiramis. From Mitrane's words the image of a queen who is heureuse does not emerge, but rather one who is completely malheureuse. The reason for her despair is unknown at this point, but the impression that the gods are against her is strongly conveyed. The strong persence of the gods in this play is one of Voltaire's ways of evoking the mood of ancient Greek tragedy.

The first scene already shows interesting variations in the treatment of the Semiramis' legend. As was mentioned before, in the French plays Semiramis appears from the outset as a glorious ruler and the crime

she committed or participated in is in the distant past but remains unpunished. Ninias' role and his relationship to his mother present another modification. In both Crébillon and Voltaire's plays, Ninias is removed from the palace as a small child in order to protect his life; at the time the play begins he is believed to be dead or lost. Ninias returns to the palace, like Agénor in Crébillon and like Arzace in Voltaire, as a distinguished and famous warrior, unaware of his true identity. This lack of knowledge on his part and the others creates conflict and a series of complications including the possibility of incest which is avoided by a series of recognitions. In Crébillon's play Sémiramis commits suicide when she realizes that she has lost everything politically as well as the love of her son since she cannot accept his filial love. Voltaire cannot make Arzace kill his mother intentionally and the gods receive the blame for blinding him when he strikes against her. Virués follows the classical sources more closely and in La gran Semíramis Ninias grows up among the vestal virgins. When his mother declares her passion for him, Ninias kills her, moved by ambition and repulsion. Calderón eliminates the incest from his play and Ninias grows up away from the court because he is weak and effeminate. He does not kill his mother; she dies in a battle in which she enganges out of her inordinate pride.

In the first scene of the first act, Arazace's and Mitrane's conversation serves to introduce the main characters. Mitrane informs Arzace that the queen's grief dates from the time he saved Azéma, a princess of the family of Belus. Arzace's words about Azéma reveal his

feelings for her:

> Azéma n'a point part à ce trouble odieux;
> Un seul de ses regards adoucirait les Dieux.
> Azéma d'un malheur ne peut être la cause. (v. 47-49)

Arzace is in love with the princess. In introducing a love intrigue, Voltaire was yielding to the prevailing taste of the audience who liked to see a love conflict on stage. Although in his Dissertation sur la tragédie ancienne et moderne, Voltaire spoke against the constant reliance on a love intrigue in tragedy, the success of his play was more important to him than his theories about tragedy. The love between Azéma and Arzace is one of the elements that Voltaire borrows from Crébillon's Sémiramis. Both couples, Azéma-Ninias and Ténésis-Ninias, are engaged at a very early age; inboth plays Ninias disappears as adult and both Azéma and Ténésis fall in love with the young warriors, Arzace and Agénor, which creates a conflict in them between their loves and their commitment to a lost king. As Crébillon did, Voltaire makes of Azéma Sémiramis' confidant.

As Mitrane explains, when Sémiramis is not sunk in grief, she governs gloriusly, but when her despair takes possession of her soul the reins of government fall on Assur "le fier Assur, ce satrape insolent" (v. 59), who is a prince of the house of Belus as Azéma is.

Arzace confesses his misfortunes too; he feels alone and disoriented since his father Phradates died. We learn that he was very close to Ninus and Ninus entrusted to him the care of his son Ninias, until one day, Ninus and his son Ninias died. Phradates exiled himself and Arzace grew up with him conquering for himself a great name in battle and all being

"l'ouvrage de vos mains" (v. 84), words used by Mitrane to describe Arzace's accomplishments. Although Arzace has come to Babylon at Sémiramis' request, he also brings some relics that his father in his dying hour instructed him to bring to the high priest; Arzace hopes that the high priest will introduce him to Sémiramis. Mitrane's description of the priest reveals Voltaire' ideology and explains why in his already mentioned letter to Nicolas Thierot he refers to the high priest as "un honnête homme":

> . . . Obscur et solitaire
> Renfermé dans les soins de son saint ministère,
> Sans vaine ambition, sans crainte, sans détour,
> On le voit dans le temple et jamais à la cour.
> Il n'a point affecté l'orgueil du rang suprême,
> Ni placé sa thiare auprès du diadême.
> Moins il veut être grand, plus il est réveré. (v. 101-107)

The high priest is a model of what Voltaire thought a priest should be, dedicated to his ministry and not interfering in matters of state.[21]

By the end of the first scene the main characters have been sketched. Before meeting the high priest, Oroes, Arzace is alone on stage. His brief soliloquy emphasizes once more the importance of the gods and the trust he places in them:

> Eh! quelle est donc sur moi la volonté des Dieux!
> Que me réservent-ils? (v. 112-113)
> . . . . . .
> Aux Dieux des Caldéens quel service ai-je à rendre? (v. 117)

Arzace's soliloquy is interrupted by a voice from Ninus' tomb: "On entend des gémissemens sortir du fond du tombeau ou l'on suppose qu'ils sont entendus." By introducing Ninus' voice from the beginning of the play, Voltaire is preparing his audience, as he suggested in his Dissertation, for the eventual appearance of Ninus' ghost. His voice

also contributes to accentuate the supernatural element of the play and to create the same fright in the audience as it does in the characters.

When Arzace meets Oroes he presents the relics to him. Oroes finds in the coffer a letter with Ninus' seal which he wrote before the deadly poison killed him. Oroes informs Arzace that finally Ninus' death and the gods will be avenged: "les manes de Ninus et les Dieux outragés / Ont élevé leurs voix et ne sont point vengés" (v. 155-156). Oroes scarcely appears in the play, but he has an important role as Arzace's guide and as the one who knows his true identity. He forbids Arzace from going into Ninus' tomb, since an oracle has invoked the anger of the gods on whoever enters that sacred place. The use of oracles, as the strong presence of the gods, is another way in which Voltaire imitates Greek tragedy. Oroes' refusal to tell Arzace anything else, "J'ai dit cet que j'ia dû" (v. 183), begins the high priest's silence. This silence has an importrant function in the lay, since it is Oroes' silence which makes the tragedy possible, as in other tragedies like Phèdre. When the silence is broken the tragic conclusion arrives.

Their conversation leaves Arzace in a state of confusion and agitation:

> De tout ce qu'il m'a dit que mon âme est émue!
> Quel crimes! Ninus, quoi! mon maître est mort empoisonné!
> Et je ne vois que trop qu'Assur est soupçonné. (v. 197-200)

From that point Assur becomes his antagonist and in more than one respect: Assur wants to marry Azéma not out of love but out of ambition. Since both belong to the house of Belus, their marriage will ensure the throne for them, Assur's greatest ambition.

S'est-il flatté de plaire et connaît-il l'amour?
Des Rois Assyriens comme lui descendue
Et plus près de ce trône où je suis attendue,
Il pense, en m'immolant à ses secrets desseins,
Appuyer de mes droits ses droits trop incertains. (v. 386-390)

Assur's scheme resembles that of Acomat, the Prime Minister, in Racine's Bajazet:

Voudrais-tu qu'à mon âge
Je fisse de l'amour le vil apprentissage?
Qu'un coeur qu'on endurci la fatigue et les ans
Suivît d'un vain plaisir les conseils imprudents?
C'est par d'autres attraits qu'elle plaît a ma vue;
J'aime en elle le sang dont elle est descendue.[22]

The similarity seems to point to the political nature of Voltaire's play and echoes the same notions about power and society.

Sémiramis appears for the first time in the fifth scene of the first act. She is accompanied by Otane, a favorite and a confidante. Her first words confirm her distressed state of mind as it was described by Mitrane in the first scene:

O voiles de la mort, quand viendrez-vous couvrir
Mes yeux remplis des pleurs et lasses de s'ouvrir!
(Elle marche éperdue sur la scène, croyant voir
l'ombre de Ninus).
Abaîmes, fermez-vous! Fantôme horrible, arrête!
Frappe ou cesse à la fin de menacer ma tête!
arzace est-il venu? (v. 255-259)

From Sémiramis we find out the reason for Arzace's presence in Babylon:

Cette voix formidable, infernale ou céleste,
Qui, dans l'ombre des nuits, pousse un cri si funeste
M'avertit que le jour qu'Arzace doit venir,
Mes douloureux tourmens seront prêts à finir. (v. 261-264)

The message given by Ninus' ghost is part of the tradition of the ambiguous oracles which, as it will be seen, have an important function

in this play. Although Sémiramis believes the message of the voice, she is mistaken as to what the results will be. She expects a happy conclusion to her troubles but although she will encounter some peace knowing that her son is alive and forgives her, she will die at his hands by mistake.

Otane tries to lift her spirits by remainding her of her glorious rule of fifteen years and assures her that if a vengeance is needed Assur should pay since it was he who administered the poison. But Sémiramis sees it from a different perspective:

> Nos destins, nos devoirs étaient trop différens.
> Plus les noeuds sont sacrés, plus les crimes sont grands.
> J'étais épouse, Otane, et je suis sans excuse.
> Devant les Dieux vengeurs mon désespoir m'accuse. (v. 291-294)

Sémiramis feels and knows that she has failed her sacred duty as a wife to her husband, but she expected to atone by her suffering for the loss of her son, and by the glory and respect she has obtained as a ruler. However, all has been in vain. The ghost of her husband and his voice torment her: "D'un grand évènement je me vois avertie / Et peut-être il est temps que le crime s'expie" (v. 305-306). Voltaire prepares a sense of doom and inevitability, a feeling that vengeance is approaching and that it is the wish of the gods. Voltaire succeeds very effectively in this respect, while it is worth mentioning that Crébillon fails completely to create a sense of doom and a feeling of avenging gods. The first act comes to an end with the arrival of an Egyptian priest from the oracle of Jove, for whom she has sent to consult in the hope of finding peace for "ce coeur éperdu!" (v. 364).

The use of the supernatural has already been seen in Calderón's La

hija del aire; there are two instances in which two different characters have visions. When Nino tries to rape Semíramis, he is confronted with a vision of himself as a corpse; before her death, Semíramis is tormented by a vision of Menón, Nino and her son, Ninias. Although these visions are very different from the ghost in Voltaire's Sémiramis, they both represent and emphasize the character's guilt and foreshadow their death. Nino's vision foreshadows his death, which will be plotted by Semíramis, the woman he is trying to abuse at that moment. His action represents a misuse of his power as king. Semíramis' vision before her death signals her guilt for abandoning Menón, for scheming her husband's death and for depraving her son of his right to rule; the last two being an abuse of her power as ruler.

Voltaire shows his preference for action over amorous discourse at the beginning of the second act, when the young lovers Arzace and Azéma meet. Their dialogue is not an exploration of their feelings but rather a commentary on Assur as Arzace's rival. Azéma begins their dialogue by recognizing what the empire owes to Arzace and what she owes him since he saved her life. She remembers the incident and tells him that he has won her heart. Azéma proves her love to Arzace by telling him of her engagement to Ninias as a child. Howver, if he were to live she would scorn the empire for Arzace's love. But their love is threatened by Assur who wants to marry Azéma, to obtain the throne through their alliance. But when Azéma expresses her fears, "Mais notre amour nous perd" (v. 373), the reader does not feel that their love is in such great danger. Voltaire succeeds much better in presenting Sémiramis' plight than the

lovers' vicissitudes. Having placed his trust in Sémiramis, Arzace expects her help and his words about Sémiramis reinforce all the positive qualities of the queen and also introduce the call of blood which brings Arzace close to Sémiramis:

> Elle m'a fait sentir, à ce premier accueil,
> Autant d'humanité qu'Assur avait d'orgueil, (v. 413-414)
> . . . . . .
> Que j'en étais touché! Qu'elle était à mes yeux
> La mortelle, après vous, la plus semblable aux Dieux!
> (v. 421-422)

By equating her humanity with his pride, Voltaire emphasizes the redeeming qualities of the queen, since Assur's pride and arrogance are carefully pinpointed throughout the play.

Voltaire dedicates most of the second act to the development of the intrigues that create an active and complicated plot. Assur is seen trying to intimidate Arzace and to separate him from Azéma; he also tries to convince Azéma of the convenience of their alliance. Since Sémiramis is now a shadow of her past glories, their marriage would ensure the throne for them. Azéma is firm in her love for Arzace and stays obedient to Sémiramis. Assur conspires with his friend Cedar to overthrow Sémiramis. They have sown discord and rebellion among the citizens of Babylon, who now clamor for a successor to the throne and look up to Assur as the logical choice. Assur confesses to the murder of Ninus and, as he believes, to the murder of Ninias, and tells how he did it in the hope that Sémiramis will share the throne with him. His hopes are in vain and she has been admired and equalled by no one.

Sémiramis does not appear again until the end of the second act when she confronts Assur directly. Her speech is surprising to Assur and the

reader, for she appears again in control of herself and not completely distressed by her fears and remorse:

> Seigneur, il faut enfin que je vous ouvre un coeur
> Qui long-temps devant vous dévora sa douleur. (v. 665-666)

Actually, Sémiramis comes to make a confession to Assur of what has been troubling her, which up to now she has kept as a secret. Sémiramis breaks her silence as a sign of strength, which is the more surprising since she is acting as the supreme ruler. She begins her confession by remembering the glorious days of her rule which aid her to forget her crime:

> Tranquille, j'oubliai, sans crainte et sans ennuis,
> Quel degré m'éleva dans ce rang où je suis
> Des Dieux, dans mon bonheur, j'oubliai la justice. (v. 673-675)

Assur asks about Sémiramis' fears of the gods to which she answers: "Le cendre de Ninus repose en cette enceinte / Et vous me demandez le sujet de ma crainte! / Vous!" (v. 683-685). Assur is the only character in the play who never fears or considers the justice of the gods, who refuses to believe in the existence of Ninus' ghost,and who never feels any remorse. He is completely isolated in his evil.

Sémiramis' new security comes from the message she has received from the oracle:

> Babylone doit prendre une face nouvelle
> Quand, d'un second hymen allumant le flambeau,
> Mère trop malheureuse, épouse trop cruelle,
> Tu calmeras Ninus au fond de son tombeau. (v. 723-726)

Sémiramis, who has always refused to marry again in order not to have a master and share her power, has decided to remarry out of her fear of the gods. Sémiramis, however, does not reveal the name of her future husband

and the second act ends with Assur's belief that he is the chosen one. Sémiramis' silence brings about Assur's assumed happiness, until he discovers that Arzace is the chosen one.

With her marriage Sémiramis expects to find forgiveness from the gods and her husband and peace again. This trust in the message of the oracle will cause the reversal of her fortune, for while expecting forgiveness she will encounter vengeance and death. This reversal is highly ironic since the oracle is correct. Babylone will begin a new era with a second marriage and only then will Sémiramis calm the ghost of Ninus at the bottom of the tomb, because the marriage the oracle refers to is not Sémiramis' marriage. The oracle refers to Arzace's and Azéma's marriage, the legitimate heirs to the throne, and Ninus' calm in the depths of the tomb will come from Sémiramis' death. Sémiramis' mistake is the interpretation of the oracle as she has already misunderstood the ghost's voice.

Oracles are an important component of Greek tragedy and the tradition continues in seventeenth century French tragedy. Although the oracles always foretell future actions, there are many instances of error in judgment in their interpretation: Racine's Iphigénie is an example of it. When the oracle's decree is disclosed by Calchas, Agamemnon finds out that the gods demand the sacrifice of a daughter of the blood of Helen: Iphigenia must be sacrificed. Agamemnon believes that the gods demand his daughter and the conflict emerges from this certainty of his. Iphigenia is saved by Calchas' explanation of the oracle in the last scene of the play. It is not Agamemnon's daughter who must be sacrificed,

but a new Iphigenia, daughter of Helen, who was concealed at birth and has lived under the name of Eriphyle. Racine also uses an ambivalent oracle in La Thébaide or Les Frères ennemis. In following Racine, Voltaire is not only immersing himself in a literary tradition, but is also trying to bring the political nature of his play to the foreground.

The beginning of the third act marks very clearly Sémiramis' mistake and her delusion: "Otane, qui l'eût cru, que les Dieux en colère / Me tendaient en effet une main salutaire?" (v. 775-776). Otane is the first person to know that Arzace is the chosen one by Sémiramis to be her husband. Sémiramis explains to Otane that she felt something for Arzace from the very first moment that she saw him: "A son premier aspect tout mon coeur étonné / Par un pouvoir secret se sentit entraîné" (v. 793-794), which parallels the same feeling expressed by Arzace; nature recognizes the blood ties that unites them. Sémiramis feels for Arzace "de plus nobles tendresses" (v. 819), which points more to maternal love than to erotic love.

The theme of the cri de sang dates to Heliodorus' Aethiopica and ranges from an instinctive knowledge of consanguinity to a sympathy felt towards a charcter upon first meeting, which will be explained after a recognition by the voice of nature or the call of blood. The public became so accustomed to it that the mere mention of an affinity, like the preceeding one, would indicate that the charcter belongs to the same family. In many instances the cri du sang creates confusion or conflict, as will be seen, between sexual love and family affection. This theme also appears in its negative form, that is, the failure of the tie of

blood to enable someone to recognize other family members just as Sémiramis fails to recognize Agénor, or the case of Oedipus, the most striking example.[23]

Oroes, whom Sémiramis has called to witness the marriage ceremony, confirms Sémiramis' belief that Arzace is the favorite of the gods, but Sémiramis does not reveal to Oroes that Arzace is her future husband, thus the suspense is maintained until the last scene of the third act. Their convesation is highly ironic since each is concealing from the other some form of knowledge. Sémiramis does not reveal the name of her future husband, and Oroes does not tell her that Arzace is her son. Oroes' assurances that Arzace is the favorite of the gods, reinforce in Sémiramis her interpretation of the oracle.

Voltaire stages this scene with great care to produce the impact he was looking to have on his audience. The stage for the coronation appears in great splendour in order tocreate an even greater contrast with the ghost of Ninus that appears at the end of this scene. So, surrounded by the priests, her attendants, Azéma, Arzace and Assur, to the surprise of all, Sémiramis announces that her choice is Arzace. At that very moment thunder is heard, the tomb shakes, and the ghost of Ninus comes out from the tomb and addresses Arzace:

> . . . Tu règneras, Arzace;
> Mais il est des forfaits que tu dois expier.
> Dans ma tombe, à ma cendre il faut sacrifier.
> Sers et mon fils et moi, souviens-toi de ton père:
> Ecoute le Pontife. (v. 1076-1080)

The ghost's address to Arzace confirms once more Sémiramis' belief that her choice is the right one, which will make her reversal of fortune when

she realizes the truth even greater.

Voltaire organizes the fourth act around Arzace's discovery of his true identity and Sémiramis' discovery of Arzace as her lost son. Oroes is the one in charge of revealing the truth to Arzace, the first truth that Arzace learns is Sémiramis' complicity in Ninus' death, and then he is told that Ninus has spoken to avert an incestuous marriage. Before his death, Ninus wrote a letter to Phradate in which he said that he had been poisoned. He accuses Sémiramis, and entrusts his son Ninias to him. Oroes tells Ninias that he has been selected by the gods to act as their instrument.

Arzace's confrontation with Sémiramis is a very dramatic scene marked by Ninias' disturbed state of mind and by his difficulty in confessing what must be said. The dramatic situation achieved by Voltaire will be even better appreciated if one compares this scene with the equivalent one in Crébillon's Sémiramis, in which when asked by Sémiramis who is the man he is defending, Agénor-Ninias identifies him as his father. Ninias' alleged father merely says: "Non, je ne le suis pays, mais voila votre mère." What disturbed Voltaire even more in Crébillon's play is that Sémiramis tries to deny that he is her son and still insists on her erotic pursuit of her son. Voltaire achieved an emotional and dramatic tension that completely escaped Crébillon.

Sémiramis finally learns the truth by reading the letter written by Ninus and after she recuperates from her fainting spell, she begs her son to take her life:

> Eh! bien, ne tarde plus, remplis ta destinée,
> Punis cette coupable et cete infortunée;
> Etouffe dans mon sang mes détestables feux.
> La nature trompée est horrible à tous deux.
> Venges tous mes forfaits, venges la mort d'un père,
> Reconnais-moi, mon fils, frappes et punis ta mère.
> (v. 1373-1378)

Ninias forgives his mother and begs her to keep the secret. He will avenge his father by killing Assur, but no one must know that he is her son; he does not want the throne.

By the beginning of the fifth act the end is already forseeable. Azéma comes to inform Sémiramis that Assur is planning to enter Ninus' tomb without being seen and to kill Ninias when he goes in. Sémiramis reacts as a mother and tells Azéma: "Ma fille, nos destins à la fois sont remplis: / Défendez votre époux; je vais sauver mon fils" (v. 1503-1504). Before entering the tomb, Ninias is alerted by Azéma of Assur's plans, so when Ninias comes out of the tomb with a bloody sword he believes that he has killed Assur. When Assur comes out of the tomb, he is arrested, but Ninias is left in state of confusion not knowing whom he had killed. As Assur realizes the true identity of his antagonist he rejoices, pointing out the woman who comes out of the tomb now. Ninias realizes that he has injured his mother. The gods are blamed for Ninias actions:

> Ah! c'est le dernier trait à mon âme éperdue.
> J'atteste ici les Dieux qui conduisaient mon bras.
> Ces Dieux qui m'égaraient . . . (v. 1658-1660)

Sémiramis dies, but first she forgives her son and gives the lesson to be derived from this spectacle:

> J'en suis assez punie. Il est donc des forfaits
> Que le courroux des Dieux ne pardonne jamais! (v. 1667-1668)

This final scene is highly improbable for it seems impossible that, having heard, "ses cris plaintifs et sourds et mal articulés" (v. 1604), Ninias did not recognize his mother. What saves the scene is the supernatural explanation that the gods blinded and deafened Ninias.

The play concludes with the high priest's words:

> Par ce terrible exemple, apprenez tous du moins,
> Que les crimes secrets ont les Dieux pour témoins.
> Plus le coupable est grad, plus grand est le supplice.
> Rois, tremblez sur le trône et craignez leur justice.
> (v. 1678-1682)

As Ridgway has pointed out, Voltaire could not present on stage a son who would kill his mother knowingly; he would have to do so by chance, by a mistake or divine intervention.[24] Ninias in his compassion, and moderation appears more like an eighteenth century honnête homme than a tragic character, although in his desire to avenge Assur, he resembles Orestes.

In Sémiramis' last words and in the high priest's words we are left with a sense of justice which human beings cannot escape or hide from. If Sémiramis' punishment seems more severe than that of Assur even though she has repented, it is because her sin was against the laws of nature when she killed her husband. Voltaire gives an idea of justice more in tune with the eighteenth century and his own beliefs in an orderly universe than with the world of classical tragedy. Everything seems to be subordinated to the moral perspective he wanted to portray.

Voltaire's Sémiramis is a compelling portrayal of a woman tormented by remorse, who redeems herself from her first crime, by sacrificing herself for her son's life. Sémiramis has become an archetypal mother.

With Voltaire the circle of dramas dedicated to the legendary Babylonian queen closes. However, Voltaire's drama has reached popularity in another artistic medium, opera. Voltaire thought that opera came closest to imitating the atmosphere of classical tragedy, and his tragedy was closer to this medium than what he might have realized. Voltaire's Sémiramis served as the basis for the libretist Gaetano Rossi for Rossini's opera Semiramide. Although Rossini's opera is the best known, the dictonary-Catalogue of Operas and Operettas, lists fifty-three musicians who composed operas based on Sémiramis' legend, making it probably the most frequently treated theme in opera.[25]

Notes

[1]Jack Rochford Vroman, "Voltaire's theatre: the cycle from Oedipe to Merope," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 75(1970), pp. 9-220.

[2]Eleanor J. pellet, "A Forgotten Dramatist, Gabriel Gilbert (1620?-1680?)," The Johns Hopkins Studies in Romance Literatures and Languages, 13(1931), pp. 107-122.

[3]Although Pellet mentions Desfontaines very briefly, a more detailed plot appears in: Clamfort, Dictionnaire Dramatique V. III (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1967), pp. 128-129.

[4]Clamfort, p. 129.

[5]Paul O. LeClerc, "Voltaire and Crébillon père: history of an enmity," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 115(1973), pp. 9-157.

[6]The bull of Pope Leo X of 1515, prohibited the printing of any work which was not first authorized by a churchman, so originally censorship was limited to religious ideas and was carried out by members of the church. Later the faculty of theology at the Sorbonne took over these functions. François I and Louis XIII tried to take over the right of censorship but they met with very strong resistance. In 1658, the controversy was settled and four royal censors were established, independent from the Sorbonne; their function was to oversee the printing of literary works, and this marked the beginning of political censorship. The censors received a pension of 600 francs. Howver, there was no central authority in censorship. The power was divided between the conseil d'état, the parlement, the lieutenant of police and the independent censors. The censorship of plays as a separate category began in the eighteenth century, when the duchesse d'Orléans complained to Louis XIV about Boindin's play Le Bal d'Auteuil, which scandalized her. The king organized a special group to censor plays, their function being to make sure that a play did not contain ideas that opposed the government, morals and the church. Passing judgment on literary merits was not among their duties. By the time Crébillon was appointed as censor there were thirty-two royal censors. LeClerc, pp. 33-38.

[7]LeClerc, p. 40.

[8]Voltaire, Correspondance II, 1739-1748, ed. Theodore Besterman (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), pp. 986-987.

[9]Ronald Ridgway, "La propagande philosophique dans les tragédies de Voltaire," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 15(1961), p. 143.

[10]Ridgway, p. 143.

[11]Ridgway, p. 144.

[12]Voltaire, Correspondance, pp. 1069-1070.

[13]R. Niklaus, "Eriphyle and Sémiramis," Essays on the Age of Enlightenment in Honor of Ira O. Wade, ed. jean Macary (Genève-Paris: Librairie Droz, 1977), pp. 247-254.

[14]Niklaus, p. 249.

[15]Ridgway, p. 147.

[16]Niklaus, p. 250.

[17]Voltaire, Dissertation sur la tragédie ancienne et moderne. Théâtre Complet. Tome III (Paris: Lebrige Frères Libraires, 1834), pp. 5-20.

[18]Voltaire, Dissertation, p. 17.

[19]Voltaire, Dissertation, p. 20.

[20]Voltaire, Sémiramis, ed. Jean-Jacques Olivier (Paris: Droz, 1946). All quotations are taken from this edition and are identified by verse number.

[21]Ridgway, p. 151.

[22]Jean Racine, Théâtre complet, ed. Maurice Rat (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1960), p. 362.

[23]Clifton Cherpack, The Call of Blood in French Classical Tragedy (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), pp. 3-136.

[24]Ridgway, p. 158.

[25]Dictionary-Catalogue of Operas and Operettas, Vol. I. Compiled by John Towers (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), pp. 581-5 2.

CONCLUSIONS

The image of Semiramis that emerges from these plays is varied and complex. It is evident that there has been great freedom in the treatment of her legend, which has not been the case in other themes of situation. An analysis of the plays written about Oedipus and Antigone shows that the circumstances around these figures remain unchanged. This difference may be explained by the lack of a restrictive literary tradition in the treatment of the Semiramis legend, when the first drama based on this theme was written. Since her legend was unknown at the time of Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles, none of them wrote a tragedy about Semiramis. Therefore, when the first drama based on her legend was written by Virués in the sixteenth century, he did not feel compelled to follow a dramatic tradition in presenting her story. This lack of precedent also enabled other writers to exercise complete freedom in using the Semiramis story and adapting it to their own intentions, aesthetic needs and the prevailing taste of their audiences.

In his dramatic portrayal of the Babylonian queen, Virués incorporates all the main elements that had appeared in Diodorus' Natural History: ambition, lust, incest and a glorious and efficient reign; but he also modified them in order to create his Semiramis. For instance, in La gran Semíramis, her ambition was in reality a desire for fame, and through it, immortality. Fame as an aspiration and concern is very much

present in the literature of the Renaissance and the Baroque periods. Semiramis incarnates this goal better than anyone else in Virués's play, since he added India--described as a defeat for her in classical sources--to the list of countries she conquered.

Thus Virués expands Semiramis' triumphs to equal those of Alexander. This addition was inconsistent with the views of some critics who wanted to see in Virués' Semiramis only a wicked character. Even Virués alteration of Semíramis' origin can be construed as a factor partially redeeming her. The appearance of Derceto, Semíramis' mother, as a prostitute, instead of as a nymph dedicated to Diana, is used to explain Semíramis' lust. This use of lust as an inherited trait bolsters her character, because her lust is justified as an inherited weakness, just as in the case of Phaedra, in Seneca's Hippolytus. Becuase of this change Sargent and Weiger have argued that it is impossible to consider Semiramis a tragic character, since her origin was lowly: she was a prostitute's daughter, rather than the offspring of a nymph. However, for Virués it is rank and social position that determine the tragic nature of her character, not nobility of birth. After all the glory he confers upon Semíramis, her fall is even more dramatic and exemplary than those of Menón, Alexandro and Nino.

As a Renaissance man, Virués was concerned about his reputation as a playwright; his craft was important to him; he was conscious of being an innovator and he wanted to be recognized as such. The Semíramis legend offered Virués a perfect medium to try out innovations, one of which became a main feature of the Spanish theater, the three act play. The

estilo nuevo which Virués brought to the stage was a combination of classical precepts and innovations which transformed Greek and Latin tragedy into a contemporary style. Virués' concept of tragedy has its roots in the classical tradition, but is not limited by it. His new style maintains the unities of time and place in each act, but not in the play as a whole. For him, as for Aristotle, the tragic fall of a character was essential to the concept of tragedy, but Virués went a step further, since he believed that each act should be a unit which presents a tragic circumstance of its own. The Semiramis legend was a perfect vehicle for the development of this form, since each act could end with the death of a character of high rank and status.

As Virués states in his prologue, his goal was to write theater with a didactic intention. This objective is linked to his concept of tragedy, for he saw in the sudden change of fortune of his characters the best way to infuse in the audience a desire for virtue. In order to move the spectators, it was not only necessary that the fortune of the characters change, but also that their tragic falls end in death, and that their deaths should be seen on stage or vividly narrated by another character. Virués considered visual elements as catalysts for emotion.

There is a significant irony, a dichotomy that remains unresolved, between Virués' stated moral objectives--to instill a sense of virtue and of the ephemeral nature of fame and wordly success--and his desire for recognition as an innovator in the theater. He seems to accept and admire Semiramis' pagan attributes, without necessarily accepting her as a contemporary model of virtue, perhaps because he could identify with

her quest for fame and immortality.

Semiramis, as portrayed by Virués, is a composite of all the elements of her legend, whereas Calderón selected only ambition, intelligence and beauty as the essence of her personality. Ambition is presented in Virués and so is her intelligence, although not emphasized as much as in Calderón. Her remarkable beauty is a Calderonian addition. Lust and incest are absent from Calderón's play, La hija del aire, probably because at the time he wrote the play he had become a priest. Since Calderón's play is the best dramatic conception of the Semiramis legend, the two personality traits eliminated prove to be inessential to her persona. However, even without incest and lust there is a certain erotic feeling in the play which emerges out of her magnificent beauty and the male reaction to it. In this sense it is power and eroticism which are associated with her and not lust in the wicked form, which has been emphasized by some critics in order to demean her.

Calderón did not write prologues or essays about literary theory and practice, like Virués and Voltaire, so his concept of tragedy must be derived from his plays. La hija del aire is a tragedy in the Spanish style. This needs to be stressed, for the Spanish playwrights, along with the English, did not see any conflict in blending tragedy and comedy in a single drama, unlike the French writers of the seventeenth century who found this practice totally unacceptable.

Although La hija del aire is written in arte nuevo, more than any other Spanish tragedy it resembles Greek tragedy, in particular Euripides' Hippolytus, especially because of the function of the gods in both plays.

The tragic death of Hippolytus is a consequence of the rivalry and the desire for vengeance of the goddesses Artemis and Aphrodite. Aphrodite wins; Hippolytus dies, but his death does not go unpunished since Artemis takes revenge on another human, one as dear to Aphrodite as Hippolytus was to her. An interesting aspect of the battle of the two goddesses is that each must stand aside while the other intervenes in the fate of mortals, so that humans are left unprotected to fend for themselves, without help from their patron goddess. Semiramis' fate, like that of Hippolytus, is determined by a conflict between Venus and Diana. Calderón's Semíramis possesses Venus' beauty; it is this trait which accounts for her rise to power, but also results in her downfall and eventually her tragic death. Her greatest mistakes are her failure to recognize that she is more like Diana than Venus and, because of this, to place her trust and confidence in the latter.

The human vulnerability and helplessness portayed by Calderón's Semíramis constitute part of the essence of her tragic nature; just like Oedipus, each time she tries to flee from the prophecy she further fulfills it. The presence of evil gods and prophecies in a play written by a priest seems contradictory. However, as a mythological play, the action is situated in a pre-Christian era in which free will and grace did not operate. Also Venus and Diana can be seen as representations of the conflicting forces within Semiramis, which she is unable to control and which ultimately lead to her downfall.

The use of the gods in Voltaire's Sémiramis creates a different atmosphere. For Voltaire the use of the gods was a way of imitating Greek

classical tragedy. However, his conscious manipulation is much less effective than that of Calderón in creating the mood of a Greek tragedy: that is, because Voltaire's gods are not depicted as evil and arbitrary, but on the contrary, as fair dispensers of justice. Humans are certain of the existence of gods who punish crimes and reward virtue. The universe is thus perceived as an orderly place; nothing could be more distant from Greek tragedy and from Calderón's Semíramis.

Voltaire thought of Semiramis as a tragic character, but the reader is left with the impression that she acts as an archetypal mother who is willing to sacrifice herself to save her son. She dies because in the orderly universe presented by Voltaire, she must pay for the crime she committed; she does not die as a consequence of a tragic flaw.

This final portrayal of Semiramis is the most unique because her basic situation has changed. She is a glorious queen from the outset of the play and has already been so for fifteen years. The play focuses on her remorse for having taken part in her husbands' death, a feeling that does not appear in Calderón's Semíramis until the moment of her death. Voltaire's play best exemplifies the level of freedom writers have exercised towards the Semiramis legend.

In the dramatic portrayals of Semiramis there are four constant elements: her rule, her marriage to Ninus, her complicity in his death, and their son, Ninias. However, the recurrent appearance of these elements does not mean uniformity; the polyvalence of the legend is preserved in drama.

It is difficult and elusive to classify the Semiramis legend as a

theme of situation, or as a theme of the hero. Semiramis belongs to both categories. She always appears as a queen, but in endless variations. She possesses an evocative power, like that described by Troussou for the theme of the hero. Her name is synonymous with power and with the glory of Babylon. It also evokes eroticism and beauty because of her association with fertility rites. Her persona seems to defy definition, to remain ambiguous, by encompassing all of human nature, from its baseness to its greatness.

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