

**HEATH'S MODERN
LANGUAGE SERIES.
CORNEILLE'S HORACE**

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PIERRE CORNEILLE.

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HORACE

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

I. DATE

HORACE was the second of the great plays of Corneille, following the *Cid* after an interval of some three years. The first representation occurred early in the year 1640, presumably at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. This date is established through a letter of Chapelain, the author of the Academy's *Sentiments sur le Cid* to Balzac, written on the ninth of March of that year, in which he says: « Pour le combat des Horaces, ce ne sera pas sitôt que vous le verrez, pour ce qu'il n'a encore été représenté qu'une fois devant son Éminence, et que, devant que d'être publié, il faut qu'il serve six mois de gagne-pain aux comédiens.»¹

The causes for this long silence were varied. Foremost among them was without doubt the discouragement consequent upon the *Quarrel of the Cid*. In the beginning Corneille's pride was wounded, and he threatened that he would give cause for further discussion in the near future.² This attitude of defiance, however, soon changed into complete apathy, which still oppressed the poet in

¹ The seeming slur contained in this phrase disappears when it is understood that copyrights did not exist in the XVII. century, and that a play when published became common property, and could be represented by any troupe of actors, that might wish to do so.

² It is to remarks of this nature that must be referred the following sentence from the *Lettre du désintéressé au Sieur*

the beginning of the year 1639. Under date of January 15 of that year we have another letter of Chapelain to Balzac, written in Paris, in which he says: « Corneille est ici depuis trois jours et d'abord m'est venu faire un éclaircissement sur le livre de l'Académie pour ou plutôt contre le Cid, m'accusant, et non sans raison, d'en être le principal auteur. Il ne fait plus rien, et Scudéry a du moins gagné cela, en le querellant, qu'il l'a rebuté du métier, et lui a tari sa veine. Je l'ai, autant que j'ai pu, réchauffé et encouragé à se venger, et de Scudéry et de sa protectrice, en faisant quelque nouveau Cid, qui attire encore les suffrages de tout le monde, et qui montre que l'art n'est pas ce qui fait la beauté; mais il n'y a pas moyen de l'y résoudre, et il ne parle plus que de règles, et que des choses qu'il eût pu répondre aux académiciens, s'il n'eût point craint de choquer les puissances, mettant, au reste, Aristote entre les auteurs apocryphes, lorsqu'il ne s'accommode pas à ces imaginations.»

Another portion of his time was taken up with the duties incident to his position as *conseiller et avocat général à la table de marbre des eaux et forêts de Rouen*. Here also he was beset with worry and care. A certain François Hays had obtained an appointment sharing the office with the poet, thus reducing the revenues by half. Corneille appealed, and, though we are ignorant of the outcome of the suit, we may be certain that it caused him anxiety. Then, as the oldest of the children, family cares fell upon his shoulders. His father died on February 12, 1639, and the management and division *Mairat*, one of the documents in the famous Quarrel. The author said: « Si par de petites escarmouches vous amusez un si puissant ennemi, vous dissiperiez un nuage qui se forme en Normandie, et qui vous menace d'une fureuse tempête pour cet hiver » (i. e. the winter of 1637). The reference is too indefinite to warrant the conclusion often drawn that it indicates the initial preparations for Horace.

of the property as well as the education of the younger brothers and sisters were left in his hands.

The time was, however, not all spent in brooding, and attending to the demands of the struggle for existence. He studied Aristotle and Horace, and much of the intimate knowledge of Roman history which characterizes his later work was probably gained from reading pursued during these years. His visit to Paris and his interview with Chaplain may have incited him to put his hand again to the plough.

The new play was presented to the public within a year after this visit. Made wise by the surprises that awaited him after the unheralded appearance of the *Cid*, Corneille resolved this time to conciliate, if possible, those who would be influential in directing public opinion. He decided to read the play in private to certain gentlemen, who had been prominent in the *Quarrel of the Cid*. The reading took place at the house of Boisrobert, a close friend of Richelieu's, but we have only a few meager details concerning the scene itself. The Abbé d'Aubignac, the future author of the *Pratique du Théâtre* (1657) was present, and he gives us the names of some of the other gentlemen who had been invited.¹ These were Chapelain, Barreau, Charpi, Faret and L'Estoile, most of them members of the Academy, and men whose judgment and taste could not be ignored.

The host seems to have praised the play; at least this is the inference which may be drawn from the following anecdote in the *Menagiana*.² « M. Corneille reprochait un jour à M. de Boisrobert qu'il avait mal parlé d'une de ses pièces, étant sur le théâtre. 'Comment pourrais-je

¹ *Troisième dissertation concernant le poème dramatique en forme de remarques sur la tragédie de M. Corneille, intitulée l'Œdipe.*

² Vol. II, p. 162.

avoir mal parlé de vos vers sur le théâtre, lui dit M. de Boisrobert, les ayant trouvés admirables dans le temps que vous les barbouilliez en ma présence? Il voulait dire par là que M. Corneille lisait mal ses vers, qui étaient d'ailleurs très beaux, lorsqu'on les entendait dans la bouche des meilleurs acteurs du monde.» Chapelain criticised the end of the play, calling it « brutale et froide,» and outlined another dénouement.¹ D'Aubignac found fault with the play on the same score,² and advanced criticisms against the position occupied by Valère in the play.³ We do not know how Corneille accepted these criticisms at the time, though it is evident that they did not cause him to change the form of his play. D'Aubignac's censures appeared in print seventeen years later (1657), and then Corneille, made bold by the established success

¹ This information is gathered from a letter of Chapelain to Balzac under date of November 17, 1640, where he wrote as follows: « Dès l'année passée, je lui dis qu'il fallait changer son cinquième acte des *Horaces*, et lui dis par le menu comment; à quoi il avait résisté toujours depuis, quoique tout le monde lui criât que sa fin était brutale et froide, et qu'il en devait passer par mon avis. Enfin, de lui-même, il me vint dire qu'il se rendait et qu'il le changerait, et que ce qu'il ne l'avait pas fait était pource qu'en matière d'avis, il craignait toujours qu'on ne les lui donnât par envie et pour détruire ce qu'il avait bien fait. Vous rirez sans doute de ce mauvais compliment, pour le moins si vous êtes comme moi, qui me contente de connaître les sottises sans m'en émouvoir ni fâcher . . . »

² « La mort de Camille par la main d'Horace, son frère, n'a pas été approuvée au théâtre, bien que ce soit une aventure véritable, et j'avais été d'avis, pour sauver en quelque sorte l'histoire, et tout ensemble la bienséance de la scène, que cette fille désespérée, voyant son frère l'épée à la main, se fût précipitée dessus: ainsi elle fût morte de la main d'Horace, et lui eût été digne de compassion comme un malheureux innocent; l'histoire et le théâtre auraient été d'accord.» *Pratique du Théâtre*, p. 82.

³ « Le discours mêlé de douleur et d'indignation que Valère fait dans le cinquième acte s'est trouvé froid, inutile et sans