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Emotions and Affects of the Heroic – An Analysis of Pierre Corneille's Drama Nicomède (1651)

1. Approaching Heroism

A hero or heroine is an exceptional figure characterised by virtues and qualities such as activity, courage, strength, power, greatness and sacrifice. Regardless of those distinguishing features, heroes would not be heroes without communities declaring them as such. The attribution of hero status depends on a community's strategies of medial representation and appropriation, and heroes are rarely conceived as being apathetic, nor do they leave anyone indifferent. Quite on the contrary: it is widely acknowledged that heroes live personally through emotions and affects[1] such as pride, anger and compassion, and that they arouse a range of strong emotions and affects among the groups who admire, love, follow, envy, fear or hate them. More precisely, persons conceived and figures constructed as heroes, such as Joan of Arc, Louis II de Bourbon-Condé, Georges Jacques Danton, Napoléon Bonaparte, Jean Moulin and Charles de Gaulle, are considered as personalities "endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber 243[2]), and so are often depicted as charismatic leaders having a strong emotional or affective impact on their entourage. As for Napoleon, both on the level of factual historical testimony and on the level of fictitious artistic imagination, artists from Stendhal and Victor Hugo to Abel Gance as well as historiographers and biographers[3] repeatedly place emphasis on the hero's charismatic authority and the emotions or affects involved in the interpersonal relations between himself and his enthusiastic admirers and followers.

The idea of a close link between heroes, charisma and emotions or affects goes back to Max Weber's and Pierre Bourdieu's sociological work on charisma and charismatic authority (Weber 241–250 and 1111–1155; Bourdieu 7–29) and has recently been applied in the fields of cultural and literary theory by scholars such as Jean-Marie Apostolidès,[4] Bernhard Giesen[5] and Eva Horn.[6] Within the context of these approaches and the general framework of SFB 948 (see von den Hoff et al. 8), I intend to analyze the emotions and affects of the heroic in relation to Pierre Corneille's drama *Nicomède* (published in 1651), pursuing two major goals: On a broader theoretical level, this essay deals with different understandings of the terms feelings, passions, emotions and affects, which are still seldom conceptualised with sufficient clarity, and proposes an analytical perspective on heroism which combines approaches from the history of emotions and from the theorisation of affect. On a hermeneutical level of literary analysis, I will then explain the emotional and affective dimensions in Corneille's literary construction of his hero Nicomède within the historical context of social norms concerning emotionality and affectivity as well as theories on the emotional and affective impact of theatre in France during Corneille's lifetime.

In one of the paratexts to *Nicomède*, Corneille made a paradoxical assertion: "Voici une pièce d'une constitution assez extraordinaire", he wrote in the letter to the reader preceding the play: "La tendresse et les passions, qui doivent être l'âme des tragédies, n'ont aucune part en celle-ci ; la grandeur de courage y règne seule" (Corneille, *Œuvres II* 639). The heroic figure at the centre of the play, Nicomède, is said to be "un prince intrépide, qui voit sa perte assurée sans s'ébranler". He fights courageously against his enemies and never struggles with his tragic destiny, nor does he try to arouse pity: "[I]l ne cherche point à faire pitié". For this reason he even "sort un peu des règles de la tragédie" and is one of those rare impassive yet triumphant heroes who "n'excite que de l'admiration dans l'âme du spectateur" (ibid. 641). By thus

emphasising a poetics of admiration – one of the strongest passions in the general understanding of Corneille's time[7] – the playwright not only contradicts the dominant Aristotelian model of *eleos* and *phobos*, of pity and fear, but also seems to contradict his own claim to have written a play in which love and passion play no part.

Besides the general interest in outlining a theoretical approach for analysing the literary dimension of the emotions and the affects of the heroic, the obvious incoherence of Corneille's assertions concerning his tragedy *Nicomède* serve as a reason for further investigation on the topic.

2. Emotions and Affects of the Heroic

I will now briefly define the terms I am working with and situate them in the current debate in the humanities on emotions and affects. As I will argue, one term with its related theories cannot be used to the exclusion of the other. However, they have to be carefully distinguished from each other in order to be made functional for different levels of the analysis.

First of all, I understand *emotion*, contrary to its colloquial usage, as the social display of what one might call a feeling, an affect, or – in Corneille's terms – a passion. An emotional expression is, as one of the leading theorists on the history of emotions, William Reddy, puts it, "an attempt to call up the emotion that is expressed, an attempt to feel what one says one feels."[8] In this sense, emotions do not necessarily reveal what one really feels; instead they have to be interpreted in social contexts of communication, such as literature. If we follow a related definition from Eric Shouse, who also places the emphasis on the social and communicative character of emotions, "[w]e broadcast emotion to the world; sometimes that broadcast is an expression of our internal state and other times it is contrived in order to fulfill social expectations" (n.p.). Regardless of whether or not an expressed and communicated emotion is triggered by an actual personal feeling (which would be better investigated in the fields of cognitive psychology and neuroscience), it must be understood as a special form of social interaction which can be analysed by various disciplines of the humanities, such as history, anthropology and cultural studies. In this perspective, I do not seek to reconstruct the ephemeral experience of a "real" emotion but rather take it as a means of communication and try to understand the aesthetic form and the social meaning of the emotional message. We will never know what somebody really felt, but we can try to understand why he or she displayed a specific emotion in a specific context of social communication.

In *The Navigation of Feeling*, Reddy defines his concept of "emotional regimes" as "a set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices and emotives that express and inculcate them" (129; see also his "Against Constructionism", 332–351). Unlike "emotional styles", emotional regimes with their norms and penalties seek conformity and are existentially defining for groups and individuals. In a given historical situation, every community, whether on a small and private or a large and public scale, enforces a specific emotional regime according to which its members have to feel or, more precisely, display what they feel. A hero's display of emotions, be it the legendary wrath of Achilles or, quite at the opposite end of the emotional spectrum, the not less legendary mercy and pacifism of figures such as Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, can never be fully understood without regard to the dominant emotional regimes of the cultural configurations in which they lived. Literature and other arts play an important role in stabilising and destabilising emotional regimes: They can demonstrate their normativity, and they can provide "emotional refuge" – another term coined by Reddy – for deviant emotional discourses and practices. Within this theoretical framework I assume that it is possible to identify a specific heroic sub-regime within the broader emotional regime of a given historical community or even an entire society. As we will see, this sub-regime of the heroic has implications for the display of emotions of both heroes and their social entourage – in actuality as well as in literature. More than any other genre of literature, the textual and performative dramatic art both portrays and constitutes a social context of emotional communication, confronting the dominating emotional regime of a specific historical situation with deviant forms of emotional refuge.

While an emotion is to be seen as a phenomenon of communication, language and discourse, an affect is a "non-conscious experience of intensity", a "passage from one experiential state of the body to another" (Shouse n.p.). Derived from Spinoza's theory of the *affectus*, which focuses on the interaction of bodies, scholars such as Brian Massumi, Nigel Thrift, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Eric Shouse have developed theories on a pre-rational, pre-intentional and

pre-conscious mode of interpersonal relations. Most of these leading affect theorists suggest, as Ruth Ley puts it, that the "affects must be viewed as independent of, and in an important sense prior to, ideology – that is, prior to intentions, meanings, reasons, and beliefs – because they are nonsignifying, automatic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning" (437).

In this sense, affects are regarded as primordial forces in social life which play an important role in the scale of human experience at any time or place and in any culture. Some affect theorists go beyond the interpersonal relations of organic bodies and extend their analyses to the relations between human beings and animals, human beings and architecture, human beings and works of art, etc. Robert Seyfert, for instance, integrates a wide range of bodies into a theory of social affect which is no longer restricted to the field of human experience but understands affect explicitly as a "transmission between and among bodies" (27) within and beyond a human scale. The modes of transmission Seyfert refers to include "language, symbols, touch, smell, indirect nervous transmissions, electricity, etc." (35) and do not presuppose a physical co-presence of the affecting and the affected body but can also be intellectual, spiritual and imaginary, as in the case of affective reactions to religious, moral or political ideas (28).

If one takes a heroic figure as a social body capable of affecting other social bodies such as, for instance, human beings, one could try to explain the specific pattern of their interaction. In the context of this essay, which is mainly interested in the interrelationship between the presence of charismatic heroes and the affective responses from their admirers and followers, my investigation of the text will concentrate on the affects triggered, aroused or provoked within these social bodies. As we will see, different intensities in the affective reactions to heroic figures can be identified depending on whether the admirer is alone or in a group, whether he or she is reading a book, listening to a public lecture or attending a theatrical performance.

To summarise: On the one hand I conceive an emotion as an intentional form of a meaningful communicative utterance which can only be understood by means of a historical contextualisation, and on the other hand I follow the definition of an affect as a historically invariable form of pre-conscious, pre-intentional and pre-linguistic interaction between different bodies, such as human beings, symbols and works of art. Even though an affect as a bodily reaction is prior to human understanding, meaning and sense, I seek to analyse it by rather traditional means of hermeneutical work. As a researcher in the humanities, my aim cannot be to understand the affects of the heroic based on a neural scan of a hero and his or her followers. My intent is rather to try to explain the pre-discursive phenomenon by analysing different kinds of discourses on it. After all, even phenomena sometimes considered to be "Diesseits der Hermeneutik" (Gumbrecht), such as the sublime, the holy, the merely sensual present or the bodily affective, carry meanings of the non-signifying, the pre-rational, etc. As such, they can be included in forms of hermeneutical, semiotic and discursive analysis.

3. Nicomède and the Historical Context of the Fronde Rebellion

Corneille's *Nicomède* is set in the ancient city of Nicomedia located in northwestern Asia Minor around 180 BC. The story is about a young and triumphant prince, Nicomède, and his old and weak father, King Prusias. While Nicomède, who has been brought up and taught by Hannibal in all matters of the heroic,[9] is winning one battle after another at the head of his army, Prusias falls under the evil influence of his second wife Arsinoé and the Roman ambassador Flaminius. They both are trying to get rid of Nicomède in order to establish Arsinoé's son Attale as heir to the throne. But the two half-brothers Attale and Nicomède are competing not only for the throne but also for the same woman, Queen Laodice of Armenia.

On both the political and the amorous level, the play can be understood as an extensive discussion on heroic and unheroic behavior, language, emotions and affects. While the main character Nicomède and his beloved Laodice are portrayed as virtuous heroes from the beginning to the end of the play, Attale is introduced as a character full of hatred and envy. He nevertheless cannot but admire his heroic brother and ultimately becomes the second hero of the play by helping Nicomède to escape from the prison in which he is being held by King Prusias, Arsinoé and Flaminius. In an ultimate *coup de théâtre* which, as Corneille points out in the *Examen* preceding the 1660 edition of the text, is mainly a concession to the "gôut des spectateurs" (Corneille, *Œuvres II* 644), these characters also experience a change of heart due to Nicomède's

heroic conduct and his overwhelming charisma, and the play ends in a melodramatic scene of reconciliation.

When *Nicomède* was first performed on stage in the Hôtel de Bourgogne in Paris in February 1651, France was in the middle of the *Fronde des Princes*, the aristocratic rebellion against Anne of Austria and Cardinal Mazarin, who sought to rule absolutely. The rebellion was led by illustrious members of the aristocracy such as the Prince de Conti, the Vicomte de Turenne, the future Cardinal de Retz, the Mademoiselle de Montpensier and the Prince de Condé, the famous Victor of Rocroi also known as the Grand Condé. He was considered to be one of the greatest military heroes of his time and was supported by a large majority of the population when he and several other *Frondeurs* were imprisoned by Mazarin's troops on 18 January 1650.[10] There is little doubt that *Nicomède* reflects the political situation and can be read as an apologia for the cause of the *Frondeurs* and their leader, the Grand Condé.[11] What added considerably to the play's outstanding success at the time of its staging and cannot have been foreseen by its author was the fact that the Grand Condé was released from prison just a few days before the play premiered. The analogies between the fiction of the play and the historical events were striking; for a moment, a touch of real heroic destiny seemed to imbue Corneille's dramatic art.[12]

4. Emotions of the Heroic in *Nicomède*

As I have stated above, emotions always have to be analysed in social contexts of communication, where historically changing sets of knowledge, values and norms play a decisive role. This is why I suppose that it will only be possible to understand the hero's emotions by taking into account the general emotional regime of the play's time of creation or, more precisely, the contemporary emotional regime of the heroic. In doing so, I will try to find an answer to the question whether Nicomède's emotional model can be interpreted as an affirmative expression of the dominant emotional regime of the heroic or rather as a deviant artistic alternative offering emotional refuge from the general normativity.

Already in the very first scene, when the hero is introduced in an intimate meeting with Laodice, we get to know his main emotional characteristic: not love, but fury: "Enflammé de courroux", burning with wrath like Achilles after the death of Patroclus, Nicomède hurries to the palace in order to take revenge for the murder of his master and heroic role model Hannibal and to end the imprisonment of Laodice.

Lorsqu'à cette nouvelle, enflammé de courroux,
D'avoir perdu mon maître, et de craindre pour vous,
J'ai laissé mon Armée aux mains de Théagène,
Pour voler en ces lieux au secours de ma Reine.
(I, i, 29–33)[13]

The hero then rapidly uncovers more and more of the machinations of his stepmother and the Roman ambassador against the independence of his country and his personal future as the legitimate successor to the throne. In an emotional mixture of fury and pride, Nicomède ironically and aggressively confronts his opponents. In his eyes, Prusias is unable to defend his kingdom from Roman influence, Attale is nothing but his mother's puppet, Flaminius is Hannibal's assassin and Arsinoé, the archetypical stepmother, is the personification of all evil.

In act II, scene iii, Nicomède interrupts his father in the presence of Flaminius and declares his resoluteness to continue fighting for his own cause and that of his country:

Nicomède
Ou laissez-moi parler, Sire, ou faites-moi taire ;
Je ne sais point répondre autrement pour un Roi,
A qui dessus son trône on veut faire la loi.
Prusias
Vous m'offensez moi-même, en parlant de la sorte,
Et vous devez dompter l'ardeur qui vous emporte.
Nicomède
Quoi ? je verrai, Seigneur, qu'on borne vos États,
Qu'au milieu de ma course on m'arrête le bras,
Que de vous menacer on a même l'audace,
Et je ne rendrai point menace pour menace […] ?
(II, ii, 624–632)

When Prusias tells his son to watch his tongue, we can only guess that he is in an emotional state of anger and fury greater than ever before. In light of the indignity of his father's behaviour and the maliciousness of Arsinoé, Attale and Flaminius, the young hero displays emotions of indignation, pride, ardour and anger – emotions that are meant to represent his noble character and temperament. Like a proud and dangerous animal – he is actually called a lion in act V, scene iii – Nicomède instinctively and violently defends his cause and that of his country. Qualities such as his "orgueilleux esprit" (II, iv, 729), "courage fier" (IV, iv, 1378) and "juste colère" (I, v, 355) as well as his being "prompt et bouillant"

(ibid. 357) complete the description of the hero's temperament. For the most part, these qualities represent the moral and emotional ideals of the French nobility in the first half of the seventeenth century, before a profound transformation on all levels of social life, including the emotional dimension, took place in connection with Louis XIV's rise to power.[14]

In his letter to the reader Corneille explicitly refers to the traditional ideals of French nobility when he announces that in the play "tous mes personnages [...] agissent avec générosité" (Corneille, *Œuvres II* 640). I would argue that the term *générosité* is the core element of the emotional regime of many of Corneille's famous heroes, such as the Cid, Horace, Cinna and Nicomède. It derives etymologically from the Latin *generosus* and refers to a man or woman's noble descent and the obligation to act in accordance with the principles of greatness, nobility and magnanimity: "Le généreux est toujours de souche noble et aucun bourgeois ne peut éprouver de la générosité, d'où l'absence de ces deux mots dans les premières comédies de Corneille" (Matoré 650).[15] According to the Aristotelian model, bourgeois characters such as Éraste, Tircis and Alidor could only hold principal roles in Corneille's comedies. By differentiating between a bourgeois psychology and an aristocratic ideology in Corneille's modelling of heroes, Jean Starobinski in his 1954 essay on the playwright also underlines the direct connection of *générosité* and social standing: "[S]elon l'idéologie que Corneille partage avec les nobles, […] [l]a grandeur et la générosité […] sont un apanage reçu par droit de naissance" (726).

Even though the heroic aristocratic model of *générosité* and its emotional regime of pride, "véhémence" (Matoré 650) and impetuosity remain prevalent until the end of the *Ancien Régime*, it is primarily characteristic of the heroic ideals of the aristocracy before and during the *Fronde* rebellion. After the *Frondeurs*' final defeat in 1653, the French nobility had to adapt increasingly to the new political situation of absolutism with its emotional regime of courtly as well as urbane *honnêteté*. A fearless, proud and even partly ferocious hero rebelling against his own king was not to be seen on official French stages for a long time.[16]

As Margot Brink has pointed out recently, a historical transformation in the semantics of anger took place amidst these political and social changes: Anger, which for a long time was considered a "passion noble et héroïque" and was ostentatiously displayed in public, gradually transformed into a much more private "colère civilisée".[17] In fact, the emotional regime of the heroic, as represented in literature, was considerably modified in the second half of the century. Influential authors such as Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Madame de Scudéry, Madame de Lafayette and Bossuet helped to establish a new heroic regime based on quite different emotions, such as humility, compassion, friendship and love.[18] The new social model of *honnêteté* and devoutness began to replace the more traditional model of feudal *générosité* and introduced its own concept of heroism.[19] In a famous eulogy for the Grand Condé published in 1687, the Bishop of Meaux and court preacher to Louis XIV, Bossuet, begins by recalling the key elements of the emotional regime represented in Corneille's play with terms such as valour, magnanimity and vivacity. Ultimately, however, he does call them illusory and void unless accompanied by the religious emotions of piety and humanity:

> A la gloire de la vérité, montrons, dans un prince admiré de tout l'univers, que ce qui fait les héros, ce qui porte la gloire du monde jusqu' au comble, valeur, magnanimité, bonté naturelle, voilà pour le cœur; vivacité, pénétration, grandeur et sublimité de génie, voilà pour l'esprit, ne seraient qu'une illusion si la piété ne s'y était jointe; et enfin, que la piété est le tout de l'homme. […] Loin de nous les héros sans humanité! (Bossuet 3)

The emotional regime of Corneille's *Nicomède*, which can also be understood as a portrait of the Grand Condé, places the emphasis on quite different aspects of the heroic figure. Within a few decades, radical social and moral transformations (Bénichou 1967) took place which required another culture of emotional expression. This is why, compared to the dominant literary models of the second half of the seventeenth century, such as Jean Racine's tragic heroes and Madame de Lafayette's sentimental ones, Corneille's proud heroes appear as emotional outcasts because of their outdated, sometimes even censored and persecuted conception of strong aristocratic individuality.

5. Affects of the Heroic in Nicomède

Having thus analysed the emotional characteristics of the hero Nicomède, I now want to focus on the affective response from his entourage.

As exceptional individuals, heroes often thrust themselves into the public spotlight. In doing so, they trigger strong euphoric or dysphoric affects among their followers and enemies which can be summarised as veneration, admiration and love on the one hand, and fear, shame and hatred on the other. Even though such reactions, be they expressed in reality or in works of art, also need to be historically and culturally contextualised according to the emotional norms and taboos of a given situation, I assume that we are dealing here with a phenomenon of a certain anthropological universality which can be better explained by means of theories on affect than by those on the history of emotions. The strong euphoric as well as the dysphoric reactions so typical of a hero's entourage are direct affective responses to his (often physical) presence. They operate on a pre-rational and pre-intentional level and can thus not be compared with the intentionality of emotional communication. As a figure both fascinating and frightening, a hero belongs, at least to a certain degree, to the sphere of the transcendent, the sacred and the holy, and can therefore be considered a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (Otto) which has its effect on the spectators beyond or, more precisely, before their rational, moral and emotional evaluation.

One of the most typical affective responses to the heroic in Corneille's *Nicomède* is the acclamation and admiration of the charismatic hero. As we have already seen above, the hero Nicomède, who acts in accordance with the emotional regime of noble and heroic *générosité*, is a brave and virtuous fighter who wins the admiration of his supporters as well as his enemies. Most of all, however, he is admired by the anonymous people acclaiming him for his extraordinary talents and qualities as a triumphant military leader. Already in act I, scene i, Laodice assures Nicomède that the people love him as much as they hate King Prusias and that it is not the latter but Nicomède who reigns over a large quantity of souls:

Le Peuple ici vous aime, et hait ces cœurs infâmes,
Et c'est être bien fort que régner sur tant d'âmes.
(I, i, 115–116)

While the signs of Nicomède's great support among the people are encouraging for Laodice, they are frightening for the hero's father, the weak King Prusias. He is aware of the fact that "[d]es Héros tells que lui, ne sauraient obéir", and considers Nicomède's unauthorised return from the army as "un pur attentat sur [son] autorité" (II, i, 374). In the presence of the captain of his guard, Araspe, Prusias expresses his fear of the hero's vengeance for the killing of Hannibal and the imprisonment of Laodice:

[N]e nous flattons point, il court à sa vengeance,
Il en a le prétexte, il en a la puissance,
Il est l'Astre naissant qu'adorent mes États,
Il est le Dieu du Peuple et celui des soldats :
Sûr de ceux-ci, sans doute il vient soulever l'autre,
Fondre avec son pouvoir sur le reste du nôtre.
(II, i, 447–452)

Prusias not only calls Nicomède a rising star, which was a symbol often used for heroic political leadership from Roman antiquity until the reign of Louis XIV and even Napoléon Bonaparte,[20] he also calls him the god of the people and the soldiers, equally adored in all of his kingdom's provinces. Nicomède is now coming – such is Prusias' terrifying thought – to make use of the strong euphoric affect he has over the people in order to stir up ("soulever") a rebellion against him. And he is actually quite right about that. The rebelling Nicomède becomes more and more aware of his charismatic authority and threatens Prusias explicitly:

Soulever votre peuple, et jeter votre armée
Dedans les intérêts d'une reine opprimée ;
Venir, le bras levé, la tirer de vos mains,
Malgré l'amour d'Attale et l'effort des Romains,
Et fondre en vos pays contre leur tyrannie
Avec tous vos soldats et toute l'Arménie,
C'est ce que pourrait faire un homme tel que moi,
S'il pouvait se résoudre à vous manquer de foi.
(IV, ii, 1247–1254)

While Nicomède still makes use of the subjunctive and does not really stir up the army against Prusias, Laodice soon afterwards actually does. When it becomes evident that Arsinoé, Prusias, Attale and Flaminius are hatching a plot against Nicomède and keep him locked in the castle, she incites an uprising in his name. The intensity of the supporters' irrational affectivity, which becomes even stronger through the effects of group dynamics,[21] finally leads to a situation of political chaos and instability.

In act V, scene i, Arsinoé claims not to be afraid of the people's mutiny ("J'ai prévu ce tumulte, et n'en vois rien à craindre : [c]omme un moment l'allume, un moment peut l'éteindre", (1479–1480), but Flaminius, her Roman accomplice who knows about the dangerous dynamics of popular uprisings ("Rome autrefois a vu de ces emotions"), is not quite sure that Arsinoé will succeed in calming the excited crowd:

"Madame, voyez donc si vous serez capable [d]e rendre également ce Peuple raisonnable." In his opinion, only tough measures can help calm the "rabble", as in former Roman days, "[q]uand il fallait calmer toute une populace, [l]e Sénat n'épargnait promesse ni menace, [e]t rappelait par là son escadron mutin" (V, ii, 1539–1549).

As the tension of the situation keeps on rising, the crowd's fury finally leads to the killing of Métrobate and Zénon, two stooges of Arsinoé. In this situation, Cléone, the confidante of Arsinoé, exclaims:

Tout est perdu, Madame, à moins d'un prompt remède :
Tout le Peuple à grands cris demande Nicomède;
Il commence lui-même à se faire raison,
Et vient de déchirer Métrobate, et Zénon.
(V, iv, 1563–1566)

A short time later, the crowd is even about to storm the palace and fight the King's guards in order to liberate the hero. In act V, scene v, Araspe, who is watching over the imprisoned Nicomède, expresses his fear of not being able to resist much longer:

Seigneur, de tous côtés le peuple vient en foule ;
De moment en moment votre garde s'écoule ;
Et suivant les discours qu'ici même j'entends,
Le prince entre mes mains ne sera pas longtemps.
(V, v, 1579–1582)

Nicomède has an almost magnetic effect on the people. He attracts his followers from everywhere ("de tous côtés le peuple vient en foule"). In this situation of intense political crisis, the impotent King Prusias acts with a mixture of resignation and defiance and in a strong cynical tone tells his guard Araspe and his wife Arsinoé to "liberate" Nicomède, the people's "idole", that is, to kill him and present his head to the crowd:

Obéissons, Madame, à ce Peuple sans foi,
Qui las de m'obéir, en veut faire son Roi ;
Et du haut d'un balcon, pour calmer la tempête,
Sur ses nouveaux Sujets faisons voler sa tête.
(V, v, 1585–1588)[22]

However, Arsinoé and Flaminius reject the King's proposition and pressure him to present himself to the crowd in order to win some time for the evacuation of the prisoner through a secret door of the palace.

Montrez-vous à ce peuple, *Arsinoé insists*, et flattant son courroux,
Amusez-le du moins à débattre avec vous :
Faites-lui perdre temps, tandis qu'en assurance
La galère s'éloigne avec son espérance.
(V, v, 1621–1624)

Even before the King has the time to do what is asked of him, Laodice, who does not yet know anything about the latest machinations, approaches Arsinoé and makes her a generous offer to protect her and her accomplices. Although she has massively contributed to inciting this affective response from Nicomède's followers up to this point of the play, she now begins to see the people's rebellion as a crime and feels obliged to restore "solidarité entre têtes couronnées" (Corneille, *Œuvres II* 1494). The crowd's furious energy is beginning to frighten her, too:

Et je viens vous chercher pour vous prendre en ma garde,
Pour ne hasarder pas en vous la Majesté
Au manque de respect d'un grand Peuple irrité.
Faites venir le roi, rappelez votre Attale,
Que je conserve en eux la Dignité royale:
Ce Peuple en sa fureur peut les connaître mal.
(V, vi, 1676–1681)

Instead of accepting Laodice's offer, Arsinoé condescendingly turns it down and callously tells her about the intended evacuation of Nicomède. But in the meantime, the hero has already been freed by Attale, one of his secret admirers, and appears such as a deus ex machina at the beginning of the very last scene of the play. Quite contrary to his prior revengeful and violent behaviour, he now presents himself as a pacifier who forgives his enemies and pleads for a merciful treatment of the rebelling people ("Pardonnez à ce peuple un peu trop de chaleur").23 Very surprisingly, he even starts to speak about his liberators in a pejorative form which until then was only used by Flaminius, and announces that he has finally calmed the furious "rabble" by going before them personally: "Tout est calme, Seigneur: un moment de ma vue [a] soudain apaisé la Populace émue" (V, ix, 1779–1780).

More than anything else, it is the bodily presence of the charismatic hero Nicomède which has a decisive impact on the affective state of the crowd. In one and the same person, he is the military leader who, in the middle of his army, stimulates and encourages his men and the merciful pacifier who cools the affective heat of the angry crowd. As a matter of fact, in his previous play *Le Cid* (1637), Corneille already put an emphasis on the hero's power to provoke strong affects through his bodily presence ("J'allais de tous côtés encourage les nôtres, [f]aire avancer les uns, et soutenir les autres" (*Le*

Cid IV, iii, 1315–1316), but it is *Nicomède* which more than ever before or after in Corneille's texts deals with the idea of the affective dimension of the hero's physical presence. Besides the scene in which the crowd is pacified, numerous other lines from *Nicomède* express this characteristic aspect of charismatic heroism: "[I]l faut votre présence à soutenir ma foi" (I, i, 46); "Tout ce qu'il a fait parle au moment qu'il m'approche ; Et sa seule présence est un secret reproche" (II, i, 419–420); "Le peuple qui vous voit, la cour qui vous contemple, Vous désobéiraient sur votre propre exemple" (II, ii, 511–512). In his famous 1954 essay on the "effet de présence" and various other aspects of Corneille's dramatic work, Jean Starobinski underlines the seminal role of the visual mode of the hero's splendid appearance by interpreting it as the epitome of power: "Qu'est-ce que la toute-puissance, sinon le privilège de n'avoir qu'à se montrer pour être obéi ?" (714)[24]

But what happens when the text's hero receives a physical manifestation on the stage? Many scholars of French literature have already pointed out that Corneille can be seen as the "inventeur d'un théâtre de l'admiration" (Starobinski 722[25]), and the playwright himself largely substantiated this thesis by emphasising a poetics of admiration in the letter to the reader that precedes *Nicomède*: Nicomède, the "prince intrépide" who always acts nobly and heroically, "n'excite que de l'admiration dans l'âme du spectateur". Corneille continues to explain this affect with a strong polemic intent against the dominant Aristotelian model of catharsis: "[L]a fermeté des grands cœurs […] est quelquefois aussi agréable, que la compassion que notre art nous commande de mendier pour leurs misères" (Corneille, *Œuvres II* 641).[26] However, the impact on the spectator is not only meant to be affectively and aesthetically pleasant ("agréable"); it is also considered to be morally instructive. In the *Examen* of his 1660 edition, Corneille takes up the core arguments of the letter to the reader and adds a reflection on the moral effect of admiration: "L'amour qu'elle nous donne pour cette vertu que nous admirons, nous imprime de la haine pour le vice contraire" (ibid. 643).[27]

As Christian Biet and Emma Gilby have shown, various critics of Corneille's time not only saw the pleasure and moral benefits, but mainly stressed the dangers of a poetics of admiration and its potential to provoke strong affects, above all during the public staging of the plays. As an affect, admiration is pre-rational as well as pre-moral and could also lead to the veneration of anti-heroic figures such as rogues, criminals and villains – provided that they present themselves as extraordinary, fascinating and charismatic figures.[28] "Au XVIIième siècle", Biet explains, "l'admiration figure d'abord la stupeur et la surprise devant ce que l'on ne comprend pas" (124). And in *L' œil vivant,* Jean Starobinski comments on the dangerous aesthetics of visual overpowering: "Être fasciné, c'est le comble de la distraction. C'est être prodigieusement inattentif au monde tel qu'il est" (11).

But not only were the affects of admiration perceived as problematic; passions produced in the theatre in general were seen quite critically. In the time of French classicism with its primacy of rational control, the impact of pre-rational affects was commonly considered a threat to mental health and the social order. In their different ideological and epistemological contexts, Jesuit critics such as Jean-François Senault, François Hédelin abbé d'Aubignac and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, as well as Jansenist critics such as Pierre Nicole and Robert Arnaud d'Andilly, warned of the "contagious nature of passions" (Vinken 53) provoked by theatre performances and considered strategies for controlling affects deemed harmful and lacking any moral or social utility. In a recent article, however, Sylvaine Guyot and Clotilde Thouret point out that the general condemnation of strong affects was actually counterbalanced by an endorsement and "un intérêt accru pour le partage collectif des passions au théâtre" (Guyot and Thouret 238) among critics and writers such as Pierre Perrault and Adrien-Thomas Perdou de Subligny.[29] Whether they were full of praise or reproach, writers as well as critics and politicians in seventeenth-century France were very conscious of the ambivalent power that lies in affects. It would be of great interest to investigate accounts from actual experiences incited by the affects from Pierre Corneille's *Nicomède* during its public stagings by analysing letters, diary entries, notes by the theatre companies and other sources, and to compare them to the various other discourses mentioned on the affects of the heroic. However, this large task cannot be performed in this essay.

6. Conclusions

Reading the paratexts of Corneille's *Nicomède*, I wondered about the author's contradictory assertions concerning the status of the passions his play treats and provokes. At the same time, the play was said not to contain any passions at

all and to be about a heroic figure one could but admire passionately. When I investigated this intriguing matter somewhat further, I noticed that I could find many "passions" where, according to Corneille, "grandeur de courage" alone was supposed to reign. As I have shown, there are two different levels of analysis which are of seminal importance for a full understanding of the phenomenon. On the one hand, the play is about a certain set of emotions which are very much influenced by the historical concepts of heroic, that is, aristocratic, conduct (*générosité*) and which can best be investigated using methods from research on the history of emotions. On the other hand, the play is an intense reflection on the crowd's affects (*admiration*), which are stimulated by the charismatic heroic leader Nicomède and which are best explained by approaches from theories on affect. The *emotions* of the heroic are exposed to historical change and can only be understood in their individual cultural context – the emotions displayed by such acknowledged heroic figures as Achilles, Jesus Christ, the Cid, Joan of Arc, Orlando Furioso, Napoléon, Jean Moulin and Nelson Mandela could hardly be more different. The *affects* of the heroic seem to follow a far more stable anthropological pattern and may possibly have universal validity. No matter where and when, each heroic figure is constructed and conceived as being gifted with some kind of charisma, that is, an extraordinary quality which produces an affective response of admiration and acclamation and establishes the hero's authority amongst a group of followers.

As I have argued, the double perspective of historisation and anthropologisation is necessary to come to a full understanding not only of the emotions and affects of the heroic but also of the heroic as a whole. Literary works such as Corneille's *Nicomède* play a decisive role in both the discursive construction of emotions and the performative transmission of affects of the heroic.

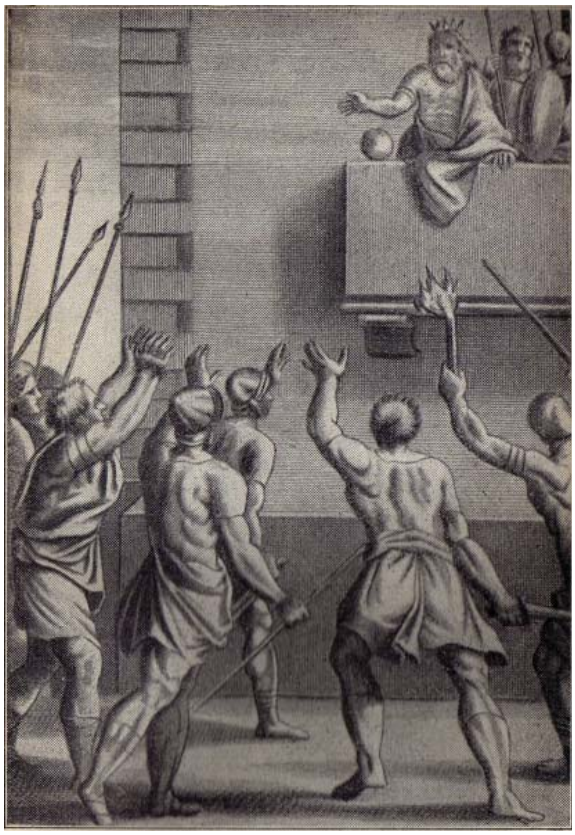

Fig. 1: The frontispiece of the 1660 edition to Pierre Corneille's drama Nicomède, originally engraved by Jean Mathieu.

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1 A differentiation between emotions and affects will take place in the second part of this essay. Until then both terms will be used simultaneously.

2 The citation is taken from one of Max Weber's central definitions of charisma. While Weber is primarily interested in analysing forms of political charismatic leadership, I have adapted his concept in order to explain different forms of heroic leadership.

3 See Benjamin Marquart's recent essay on the construction of the heroic Napoleonic legend by French biographers in the time between the Restoration and the Second Empire (15–26, esp. 18).

4 In his essay on heroism and victimisation, Apostolidès points out that "[g]race à son charisme, le héros possède en effet la faculté unique d'être un incarnateur, c'est-à-dire de rendre visible pendant un temps l'enveloppe communautaire soudant ensemble les individus en un groupe spécifique" (45). The essay was first published in 2003 by Exils Éditions in Paris.

5 Giesen writes about the "personal charismatic bond between heroes and their followers" and focuses on the symbolic, ritual and institutional representations and practices of heroes and victims (11).

6 Referring to Weber's concept of charisma as one form of political leadership, Horn points out that "charisma *as such* (or what he calls 'pure charisma') is a political form based on emotions and affects, on the ever-changing tides of trust, hope, fear and promises" (10).

7 In his book *Les passions de l'âme* (1649), René Descartes, a contemporary of Corneille, reflects upon the origins, the functions, and the right way to deal with passions. For him, "l'admiration est la première de toutes les passions", closely linked to other passions such as pride and humility (see Descartes 190). Similarly, Charles Le Brun points out in his *Conférence sur l'expression des passions* (1678): "l'admiration est la première et la plus tempérée de toutes les passions" (see Le Brun 66). On the topic of admiration in the context of French and German drama theory, see also Biet 121–134 (esp. 124) and Gess 121.

8 William Reddy has developed a theory of *emotives* as types of speech acts with the key concepts of *emotional regime* and *emotional refuge*, which he applies to different historical formations of societies as a whole, specifically the French context between 1700 and 1850. In contrast, Barbara Rosenwein has coined the term *emotional communities*, referring to the possible coexistence of different *emotional regimes*. For a good overview of their theories, see Jan Plamper's interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns: Plamper 237–265. Reddy's quote refers to page 240.

9 The construction of a heroic genealogy is one of the most frequent strategies of a person's or a figure's heroisation. This is why in Corneille's play Laodice calls Nicomède the reincarnation of his master Hannibal: "vous me feriez peur, […] [s]i le grand Annibal n'avait qui lui succède, S'il ne revivait pas au Prince Nicomède" (Corneille, *Nicomède* III, iii, 909–912).

10 According to Jonathan Dewald, the Grand Condé was a very well-known "popular hero", above all in the middle of the century (210). In her recent biography, which must be read as a contemporary attempt at heroisation, Simone Bertière has called the Grand Condé a "héros fourvoyé", a "hero who went astray", referring to Condé's role during the *Fronde* rebellion and his temporary alliance with the Spaniards.

11 Nevertheless, Jacques Delon has pointed out that "[l]e personnage de Nicomède ne renvoie […] pas au seul Condé" and that when writing his tragedy Corneille was also inspired by other popular public figures of the *Fronde* rebellion such as the Cardinal de Retz and Pierre Broussel, a magistrate of Paris. As the hero Nicomède is above all known for his military achievements, I still assume it more probable that the Grand Condé served as the main contemporary model. As Delon also writes, "[l]e héros de la pièce ne doit pas grand-chose au récit des chroniques latines", from which Corneille officially claims to have taken his characters (345–346).

12 For a meticulous reconstruction of the play's historical dimension and its "interprétation pro-condéenne", see the annotations in Corneille, *Œuvres II* 1471–1476. For an even broader discussion of the political implications of Corneille's work during the time of the *Fronde* rebellion, see Couton 2008.

13 In her recent paper on heroism in early Irish literature, Sarah Erni has shown that the emotion of fury is also very typical of heroic figures such as the Ulster warrior Cú Chulainn (53–63). The *furor heroicus* is indeed a topos used in the construction of a great variety of literary heroes and heroines (see also Birkhan 9–39).

14 For a discussion of various aspects of these profound changes and their impact on the culture of heroism, see Bénichou as well as Hepp and Livet.

15 See the explication of the term *généreux* by Goerges Matoré in François Bluche's *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*: Matoré 650. For the philosophical implications of the term, see also Schöpf.

16 The semantic change of the word *générosité* reflects this situation. *Générosité* signifies more and more a purely moral disposition which is no longer restricted to the specific social standing of aristocracy. In this sense it is still in use today.

17 See Brink 127–144. In her study on the short novels of French classicism, Roxanne Roy concludes that "[l]'emportement propre à la colère et au désir de vengeance pouvant compromettre l'ordre social ([…)] le courtisan doit donc apprendre à contenir ses transports violents" (293–294). As Norbert Elias has pointed out, the process of civilisation in seventeenth-century France can essentially be conceptualised as an increase in the moral penalisation of strong emotions such as anger, fury, and hate.

18 Jonathan Dewald explains the evolution of the seventeenth century's discussions about social values with emotional implications such as friendship and love. His book offers many elements for a historical reconstruction of the constant shaping of new emotional regimes in light of the changing ideas of personal and civic (emotional) life (esp. 104–145).

19 On the topic of a new conception of heroism in the context of the culture of courtly and urbane *honnêteté*, see also Galland-Szymkowiak and Chariatte.

20 See Ernst H. Kantorowicz's famous essay (published in 1963) on the solar iconography of political leadership.

21 In the context of theories on group and mass psychology from Gustave Le Bon and Sigmund Freud, Eva Horn emphasises the intensifying effect of the affective dynamics within groups admiring and following a charismatic leader (esp. 4–5).

22 The frontispiece of the 1660 edition of the play (Fig. 1), originally engraved by Jean Mathieu, is a visualisation of the king's unfulfilled wish to calm the furious crowd.

23 The sudden moral conversion of Laodice and Nicomède, who show mercy to their enemies, is a dramatic turn which, in a similar manner, had already been applied by Corneille in his tragedy *Cinna ou la clémence d'Auguste* (1641). Given that Laodice and Nicomède are *de facto* in the position which *de jure* only belongs to the ruling king and queen, I assume that, within the dramatic universe of Corneille, mercy (*clémence*) is the most heroic virtue available to rulers.

24 Within the SFB 948, Andreas Gelz and Jakob Willis analyse the semantics of the hero`s splendour, radiance or brilliance in French literature between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

25 See also Georges, Biet, Rubidge, Lyons, Merlin-Kajman and Forestier.

26 Bradley Rubidge has shown that there is actually "an Aristotelian basis for including admiration in the category of the tragic emotions" as the latter "also discusses the role of the marvelous (*to thaumaston*) and of surprised asthonishment (*ek-plêxis*)" (321). However, these notions were little known and discussed in Corneille's time.

27 Joseph Harris has brought out clearly that, according to Corneille's poetics, the moral benefit comes not only from emulation of virtues but also from repudiation of vices (669).

28 The dissociation of heroic and anti-heroic figures is indeed a very difficult, perhaps even impossible task, as the attribution of the respective status is essentially bound to certain perspectives of the followers and enemies of one and the same person or figure.

29 Referring to spectacular representations of power under Louis XIV, Doris Kolesch has explained how the performativity of emotions and affects was systematically used for the construction of social cohesion.

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