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[Title] WHAT REMAINS: *ATHALIE*'S FUTURES

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<MT>WHAT REMAINS: *ATHALIE*'S FUTURES[1]

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<ABH>*Abstract*

This article analyses the representation of futurity in Jean Racine's *Athalie* (1691). *Athalie* is Racine's final play and the second of his 'Christian tragedies', written at the request of Madame de Maintenon for the schoolgirls of Saint-Cyr. It is the culmination of a body of work that foregrounds problems of futurity through emphasis on family, inheritance, and conflicted parent-child relations. Critical theory, and queer theory in particular, are used here to explore the multiplicity of futures staged in the play. This reading of the complex futurity staged in *Athalie* turns on the relationship between Athalie and Joas, the child who symbolises various kinds of future. The discussion therefore begins with Joas, considering the tension between his individual fate and the collective (Jewish, Christian, and French) futures he symbolises. In her confrontation with the futures Joas may symbolise, and her quasi-maternal proposal of alternatives, Athalie can be read as a paradigmatic figure of 'queer maternity' (Power, 2012).

[1] With thanks to Jennifer Rushworth and Simon Park, and to the anonymous readers at *French Studies*. Thanks also to all the students with whom I have discussed *Athalie*, especially Sarah Wright.

<ABH>*Résumé*

<ABT>

Athalie (1691) est la dernière pièce de Jean Racine, et la deuxième des 'tragédies chrétiennes' qu'il écrivit pour les étudiantes de Saint-Cyr à l'instigation de Madame de Maintenon. Cet article porte sur la représentation du futur dans cette pièce en tant que point culminant de l'ensemble de l'œuvre racinienne dans laquelle la problématique de l'avenir s'articule souvent autour du traitement de la famille et du patrimoine. Nous soulignons l'importance du genre dans la représentation du futur dans *Athalie*, et nous choisissons une approche théorique féministe et *queer* pour élaborer cette argumentation. Cette lecture s'appuie surtout sur une analyse de la relation entre Athalie et Joas, l'enfant qui symbolise plusieurs futurs potentiels. Nous commençons donc par une discussion de Joas, et nous considérons le conflit entre Joas comme individu et Joas comme symbole du futur de la collectivité (juive, chrétienne, ou française). Ensuite nous analysons la temporalité que représente Athalie. Nous interprétons son refus du futur incarné par Joas, et ses gestes quasi maternels envers cet enfant, comme une manifestation paradigmatique de la 'maternité *queer'* (Power, 2012).

<TX>Jean Racine's *Athalie* (1691) is based on an Old Testament episode from the Book of Kings.[2] In the biblical account, Athalie/Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel and Ahab, goes on a murderous rampage against her own family after the death of her

[2] 2 Kings 11.

parents and son, and re-establishes the worship of Baal in Judaea.[3] But one grandchild, named Joas in Racine's retelling, survives the slaughter, thus preserving David's line and the genealogical path to the Messiah. Joas is saved by his aunt, Josabet, and brought up in secret in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, under a false name (Éliacin). When Joas is seven, the high priest Joad (husband of Josabet) reveals the child and his true identity to loyal Jews, to inspire them to rise up against the pagan queen. Their uprising is successful, and Athalie is put to death. Racine stages the day of her downfall.

<P>This was Racine's last work and the second of his 'Christian tragedies', written after his post-*Phèdre* hiatus. Unlike his earlier plays, neither *Esther* (1689) nor *Athalie* were intended for a public audience. They were instead written at the request of Madame de Maintenon for the students of Saint-Cyr, a school established in 1684 for the education of impoverished young noblewomen. In the early days of the school the students put on various plays, possibly including Racine's *Andromaque*.[4] Theatre was the object of a degree of moral opprobrium in this period, and some were scandalized that young women might be exposed to any sort of public view as actors; ultimately, theatrical performances were halted.[5] Initially, however, Madame de Maintenon asked Racine to write the Biblically-inspired plays to provide more morally edifying material for the students than *Andromaque*'s pagan passions. In the wake of the troubling latent eroticism of *Esther*, Racine then produced *Athalie*, a play without a love plot: a drama about divine providence, centred on a symbolic child

[3] I refer to the characters by their names in Racine's play rather than by their biblical names.

[4] See Georges Forestier, *Jean Racine* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), p. 689.

[5] See Sylvaine Guyot, 'Notice', in Jean Racine, *Théâtre complet*, ed. by Alain Viala and Guyot (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013), pp. 985–92 (p. 986).

whose future is at stake, and the woman who tries to destroy him.[6] In this article, I analyse Racine's representation of futurity in *Athalie*, with an emphasis on the gendered nature of this representation, using critical theory, and queer theory in particular, to explore the multiplicity of futures staged in the play.

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<TX>Anxiety about the future is a key element of pathos in neoclassical tragedy, and is explicit in *Athalie* through its emphasis on providence and use of prophecy. Joad's prophecy in act III is introduced by an anticipatory thrill: 'Mais d'où vient que mon cœur frémit d'un saint effroi?'[7] The futures he predicts are dreadful, and redemptive, as summarized by the chorus: 'Ô promesse! Ô menace! ô ténébreux mystère! | Que de maux, que de biens sont prédits tour à tour!' (III. 8. 1212–13). The struggle over a future which is all at once threatening, hopeful, and hard to read ('Ô promesse! Ô menace! ô ténébreux mystère') is part of an intricate representation of time and progress in *Athalie*, of which the extended temporal structure in particular within Racine's œuvre has been noted.[8] The time of the play (the day of Athalie's fall) is overlaid by the thousands of years of religious history that are at stake.

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[6] Guyot notes that some considered *Esther* provocative (ibid.).

[7] Jean Racine, *Athalie*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Georges Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), pp. 1017–84, III. 7. 1129. All references to Racine's text will be to this edition.

[8] On Racine and temporality, see Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine* (Paris: Seuil, 1963), p. 58; Odette de Mourgues, *Racine*, *or the Triumph of Relevance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 23; and Sylvaine Guyot, 'Performance and Historicity in Racine's *Mithridate*: On the Dynamics of Temporal Order in the Seventeenth Century', *Early Modern French Studies*, 38 (2016), 132–47, especially pp. 132–35 and 144. On time in *Athalie*, see Harriet Stone, 'Making Time: Memorializing History in *Athalie*', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 38 (1998), 95–104, and Susan

<P>Racine's choice of the Athalie story was less obscure then than it may now seem. In writing *Esther* and *Athalie*, he adapted Judaeo-Christian subjects for a pious court at a time when history and theology were deeply connected, and concerned with providential futurity. A large number of pedagogical texts were published over the course of the seventeenth century; Jewish teaching practices, and the Book of Kings especially, were held as pedagogical exemplars.[9] Pre-Christian Jerusalem figured in this intellectual context as the centre of a Christian antiquity, more ancient than the Greeks and influential upon them, so that Racine's turn from Greek to biblical sources was not a deviation but a deepening of his commitment to the ancients.[10] Racine, *historiographe du roi* in the 1680s, was acquainted with the Abbé Fleury, who wrote on pedagogy and Jewish custom, and with Bossuet, whose *Histoire universelle* (1681) recounts the history of Christianity in terms of God's promises to Moses, and refers to the Athalie story.[11] The late-seventeenth-century

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Maslan, 'Melancholy Racine: Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* and Literary Jews', in *Walter Benjamin's Hypothetical French 'Trauerspiel'*, ed. by Hall Bjørnstad and Katherine Ibbett (= special issue, *Yale French Studies*, 124 (2013)), pp. 64–78. On changing conceptions of time in seventeenth-century France, see Roland Racevskis, *Time and Ways of Knowing under Louis XIV: Molière, Sévigné, Lafayette* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003).

[9] See Fabrice Preyat, 'L'Influence du "Petit Concile" de Bossuet sur l'*Athalie* de Racine, ou la christianisation des mœurs sous Louis XIV entre historiographie juive et française', in *Racine et l'histoire*, ed. by Marie-Claude Canova-Green and Alain Viala (Tübingen: Günter Narr, 2004), pp. 129–68 (p. 142).

[10] Ibid., p. 153.

[11] See Georges Forestier, 'Notice', in Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Forestier, pp. 1709–31 (p. 1711); for analysis of the influence on Racine of Fleury's *Mœurs des Israëlites*, see Preyat, 'L'Influence du "Petit Concile" de Bossuet', especially pp. 133–46. On the Athalie/Athaliah story, see Richard Parish, *Catholic Particularity in*

elite audience was immersed in these ways of thinking about history, time, and cultural inheritance.[12] They would likely have understood themselves on some level as future outcomes of the struggles fought out in *Athalie*, that is, as inheritors of Joas's legacy.

<P>Performed by children in the first instance, with a plot centred on a sacred child, *Athalie* is the culmination of a body of work that foregrounds problems of futurity through emphasis on family, inheritance, and parent–child relations that are complex to say the least. Agamemnon's attempted sacrifice of Iphigénie, Thésée's mistaken vengeance against Hippolyte, and Néron's treatment of Agrippine, are but three salient examples. As Wes Williams puts it, 'the monstrous logic of heredity and the remainder' pulses through Racine's plays.[13] *Athalie* is an inheritor of the earlier works, and resonates with their echoes. The best-known is a reference to the description of Néron in the preface of *Britannicus* as a 'monstre naissant': Athalie's advisor, Mathan, refers to Joas as 'Quelque monstre naissant [qui] dans ce temple s'élève' (II. 6. 603). The many descriptions of Joas as 'un reste', and 'un rejeton' ('cher rejeton', for example, IV. 5. 1457) further link him semantically to Aricie in

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Early Modern France: 'Christianity Is Strange' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 38.

[12] The private audiences of *Athalie* at the home of the Duchesse de Bourgogne, following its cancellation at Saint-Cyr after only three semi-public rehearsals, would have been conversant with these issues; see Preyat, 'L'Influence du "Petit Concile" de Bossuet', p. 143, n. 44.

[13] Wes Williams, *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture: Mighty Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 229.

Phèdre and Astyanax in *Andromaque* in particular: all three are the remainders of nearly extinguished family lines, fragile links to a future beyond the text.[14]

<P>Issues of heredity are also gender issues. Troublesome, even monstrous mothers (Agrippine, Phèdre) populate Racine's works, as well as the broader literary landscape — for instance Pierre Corneille's *Médée* and *Rodogune*, both of which have been cited as important intertexts for *Athalie*.[15] Racine wrote his final play, described by Roland Barthes as 'un conflit mythique des sexes', for schoolgirls, in a culture highly concerned with both gender and with teaching practice, and in the wake of much debate on the education of women (satirized by Molière in *L'École des femmes* and *Les Femmes savantes*.[16] Madame de Maintenon's approach at Saint-Cyr was influenced by Fénelon's *Traité sur l'éducation des filles* (1687) which, according to Domna Stanton, held 'the badly educated descendants of Eve' responsible for 'most of the evil in the world' (ibid., p. 109). And yet, as Forestier points out, Madame de Maintenon was highly ambitious for her pupils, wishing to rival the best education available to boys: in commissioning Racine to write plays for Saint-Cyr, she was

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[14] Williams, *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture*, pp. 290–96. Leo Bersani also emphasizes the connection between Joas and Astyanax, children saved amidst 'scenes of carnage'; Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), p. 5. On the survivor-children of the Bible (of whom the paradigmatic example is Isaac, Abraham's potential sacrifice), see the second part of Jacques Derrida's *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), especially the chapter 'Plus qu'un', pp. 190–206 on their status as traces and/or testaments in themselves.

[15] See Forestier, *Jean Racine*, p. 714.

[16] Barthes, *Sur Racine*, p. 128. On the range of educational theories in seventeenth-century France, and the treatment of gender therein, see Domna C. Stanton, *The Dynamics of Gender in Early Modern France: Women Writ, Women Writing* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 89–122.

emulating the Jesuits of the Collège Louis-le-Grand, who employed Marc-Antoine Charpentier to write music for their five-act tragedy, *David et Jonathas*, in 1688.[17] The paradoxical combination of female power and misogyny that led to the commissioning of *Athalie* for an institution that both elevated and policed young women (and their morality) is borne out in the ambivalent status of the eponymous protagonist. Athalie at least initially holds her own in a masculine sphere, and is powerful and in some lights sympathetic — but she is also the incarnation of a version of female evil: a murderous mother, a tyrant, and a godless queen.[18]

<P>The intimate connection between this play and the beliefs and tastes of Bossuet's circle and the late-seventeenth-century court may account in part for its relative lack of popularity today. Although *Athalie* is celebrated for the magisterial hypothyposis of Athalie's dream-speech in act II, and was described as Racine's masterpiece in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is now one of the least read and least performed of the œuvre.[19] Perhaps there is diminished appetite for what Sylvaine Guyot describes as 'un théâtre chrétien qui ne laisse froid ni ne séduise

[17] See Forestier, *Jean Racine*, p. 691.

[18] On Racine and gender, see Joan DeJean, 'Fictions of Sappho', *Critical Enquiry*, 13 (1987), 787–805; Derval Conroy, 'Gender, Power, and Authority in *Alexandre le grand* and *Athalie*', in *Racine: The Power and the Pleasure*, ed. by Eric Caldicott and Derval Conroy (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2001), pp. 55–74; Véronique Desnain, 'Les Faux Miroirs: The Good Woman / Bad Woman Dichotomy in Racine's Tragedies', *Modern Language Review*, 96 (2001), 38–46; and Stanton, *The Dynamics of Gender in Early Modern France*, especially pp. 63–66.

[19] See, for example, Voltaire, 'Discours sur la tragédie, à Milord Bolingbroke', in *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, V: *Writings of 1728–1730*, ed. by Robert Niklaus and John Renwick (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998), pp. 156–83 (p. 175).

outrageusement'.[20] Richard Parish, moreover, describes act V as potentially a kind of liturgical break that may be 'disquieting' for the audience: 'we may feel that [if liturgy has superseded theatrical illusion] theatre has given way to worship'.[21] Still, it is hard to read *Athalie* as the straightforward purging of evil in preparation for Christian redemption when Athalie herself is such an ambivalent character, especially if considered in the tradition of the Racinian *héros moyen*, stimulating pity as well as fear; indeed, Parish has pointed out both the ambiguity of the play and Athalie's potential goodness (ibid., pp. 31–41).

<P>Ultimately, Athalie may be a strangely sympathetic figure, for a mass-murderer of children. Equally, emphasis on Joas's childlike purity and on his role as guardian of the future could also be somewhat 'disquieting'. Lee Edelman's theory of 'reproductive futurism' offers a way of exploring that potential disquiet. Differentiating between individual children and the symbolic Child, Edelman argues that the figure of the Child as naïve symbol of future possibility is positioned in heteronormative culture against queerness, which is represented as negative and anti-future (he seeks to re-appropriate this anti-futurity).[22] In this conflict, 'the sacralisation of the Child necessitates the sacrifice of the queer' (ibid., p. 28). Athalie can be read not only as a queer figure sacrificed in the name of the symbolic Child (Joas-as-future), but also as a figure of 'queer maternity'. This phrase is taken from Nina Power, who argues that feminism and queer theory can come together in

[20] Sylvaine Guyot, *Racine et le corps tragique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2014), p. 223.

[21] Richard Parish, *Racine: The Limits of Tragedy* (Tübingen: Günter Narr, 1993), p. 41.

[22] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), Chapter One: 'The Future is Kid Stuff', pp. 2–31.

analysis of the figure of the 'queer mother', who is 'structurally placed as the warden of the future but actually refuses this future'.[23]

<P>There is a significant tradition of using critical theory to read Racine, and queer theory in particular — and of using theory to read futurity in Racine (for example, Leo Bersani's *A Future for Astyanax*, analysed in some detail below).[24] This article contributes to these critical seams by bringing together queer and feminist approaches, via Power's concept of 'queer maternity'. Theoretical readings of early modern literature are often criticized as anachronistic, or as cavalier about the singularity and contingent nature of the works in question.[25] The aim here is rather to connect early modern text and modern theory through a kind of comparative method; clearly there is no perfect correlation between modern accounts of gender and sexuality, and the treatment of Child-as-future in *Athalie*. The seventeenth century had its own highly diverse gender theories, as well as its own ideas about childhood. It could be that some of these — such as Philippe de Berlaymont's *Paradisus puerorum*, which identifies the child's voice as the locus of miracle-inducing purity

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[23] Power developed this argument explicitly in response to Edelman's neglect of gender (and women) in his account of 'reproductive futurism'; Nina Power, 'Motherhood in France: Towards a Queer Maternity', *Paragraph*, 35 (2012), 254–64 (p. 256).

[24] As well as Barthes's *Sur Racine*, and Bersani's *A Future for Astyanax*, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 75–81. Michael Hawcroft gives a succinct account of the various critical approaches to Racine before 1990 in *Word as Action: Racine, Rhetoric, and Theatrical Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 1.

[25] See, for example, Joseph Harris, 'What Butler Saw: Cross-Dressing and Spectatorship in Seventeenth-Century France', *Paragraph*, 29 (2006), 67–79. Harris critiques readings of early modern theatre influenced by Judith Butler that pay insufficient attention to early modern gender and theatrical norms.

— seem to engage in a version of 'reproductive futurism', but the intention in this discussion is not simply to harvest the past for more material that fits Edelman's thesis.[26] Nor is it to engage in what Carla Freccero calls 'perverse anachronism', productive though that approach can be.[27] In his analysis of Racine, Roland Racevskis concludes that 'literature that is most worth rereading speaks to us differently over time, requiring us to evaluate its historically anchored meaning as well as to elucidate issues of our own times'.[28] In this spirit, the resources of critical theory are deployed here to offer an account of gender and queerness in this currently somewhat under-read play: to make a case for a queer feminist reading of the future in *Athalie*, without erasing the play's seventeenth-century context. I turn first to Joas and the multiple, and potentially conflicting, futures he represents, before arguing that in her confrontation with those futures and her proposal of alternatives, Athalie can be read as a paradigmatic figure of queer maternity.

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<SH>*A future for Joas*

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[26] Nicholas Hammond, 'The Child's Voice: Knowledge and Inexperience in Seventeenth-Century France', in *Evocations of Eloquence: Rhetoric, Literature and Religion in Early Modern France. Essays in Honour of Peter Bayley*, ed. by Nicholas Hammond and Michael Moriarty (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 163–74 (p. 164). In his analysis of *Athalie* in this piece, Hammond reads Joas in the context of seventeenth-century pedagogical theory and writing on the childhood.

[27] Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 3. Freccero does not abandon historicism; rather, she aims to 'queer historicist imperatives' through the 'wilfully modern act' of identifying a 'prolepsis of queer in early modernity'. The slashes in the title of her book emphasize this discontinuity.

[28] Roland Racevskis, *Tragic Passages: Jean Racine's Art of the Threshold* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008), p. 186.

<TX>Joas's future is both the problem and the outcome of *Athalie*. The five acts are structured around the revelation of his identity, and conflict over his future(s). In act I, Joad laments Athalie's pagan regime and discusses the possibility of Joas's existence with the doubting Abner. In act II, Athalie storms into the temple to examine the child she thinks she has seen in a dream, without knowing Éliacin/Joas's identity. She finds him strangely appealing, and tries to adopt (or corrupt) him. In act III, Athalie's advisor Mathan plots against the temple, Josabet is in anguish over the threat to Joas, and Joad issues his prophecy of the destruction of the temple and the dawn of a New Jerusalem. In act IV, Joas is crowned in the temple and they prepare for conflict with Athalie. Each act except the last is concluded with the chorus reflecting on the action; the incorporation of a chorus marks another formal difference between *Esther* and *Athalie* and Racine's other works. In act V, Athalie confronts Joad, with Joas hidden behind a curtain. The curtain is lifted, Joas's true identity and lineage is revealed, and the stage opens (the only time that stage machinery is used in a Racine play); armed Levites surge onto the stage to defend their king and Athalie is defeated, but before leaving the stage she issues an injunction, or curse, to Joas.

<P>The vision of the future at the close of *Athalie* is thus both promise and curse. Joas's survival preserves the path to future redemption, and Athalie's death is the fulfilment of God's promised vengeance against his enemies. But before her death, Athalie calls on Joas to profane the altar and to avenge her, and her father and mother (V. 6. 1789–90). The final words are then spoken by Joad, the prophet, to the cursed child:

> <XTV>Par cette fin terrible, et due à ses forfaits,
> Apprenez, roi des Juifs, et n'oubliez jamais
> Que les rois dans le ciel ont un juge sévère,

L'innocence un vengeur, et l'orphelin un père. (V, 8, 1813–16)

<TX>This threatening speech projects into multiple future moments.[29] Addressing Joas as King of the Jews, Joad reminds his audience that the child is a descendant of David and ancestor of the Messiah. He charges him with never forgetting God's status as judge, avenger, and adoptive father, the 'jamais' extending the timeframe indefinitely. The threat of punishment also evokes Joas's trajectory in the biblical narrative framing Racine's plot: the adult Joas will grow up to murder the next high priest, Zacharie (Joad's son, who also appears in *Athalie*). Racine refers to this murder in his preface as the outcome of 'le funeste changement de Joas', and it is explicitly referenced in Joad's pivotal prophecy at the climax of act III.[30] The suggestion is that Athalie's curse is therefore partly effective, as she will live on in Joas's later crime, and may be its cause: Harriet Stone reads the curse as Athalie's 'haunting of the future'.[31]

<P>Joas's individual future and the collective futures that he symbolizes thus have conflicting trajectories. A modulation between individual and collective fates is articulated by the chorus, and echoed in formal terms in the variation between single and multiple voices. One voice opens act II, scene 9, after the first encounter between Athalie and Éliacin/Joas, asking, 'Quel sera quelque jour cet enfant merveilleux?' (II. 9. 752). Then the ensemble praises his virtuous resistance to Athalie's attempted adoption (which they characterize as an attempted seduction), before the scene

[29] Lucien Goldmann describes the final lines as the voice of an 'ange exterminateur' in *Le Dieu caché: étude sur la vision tragique dans les 'Pensées' de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 446.

[30] Racine, preface to *Athalie*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Forestier, pp. 1009–1016, (p. 1013).

[31] Stone, 'Making Time', p. 102.

becomes a generalized discussion of temporality and futures. A single voice asks, twice: 'Combien de temps, Seigneur, combien de temps encore | Verrons-nous contre toi les méchants s'élever?' (II. 9. 810–11), effectively asking how long it will be before permanent peace is restored. Another voice then questions the merit of 'ce vertu sauvage' represented by Athalie's impious rule; Athalie is explicitly linked with neglect of the future and a prioritization of transient earthly pleasures and desires (II. 9. 820–26: the chorus prefers the 'plaisirs si doux' of prayer, II. 9. 817). Joas is on the side of the spiritual, but only for now. One voice exclaims, 'Mon Dieu, qu'une vertu naissante | Parmi tant de périls marche à pas incertains' (II. 9. 788–89). Here we might hear another echo of the phrase 'monstre naissant' — will Joas become an incarnation of virtue or monstrosity? That we know he will be first one, then the other, introduces an element of pathos, reiterated in Joad's prophecy and in act IV when Joad is moved to tears by the thought of how Joas will be eventually be corrupted by power: 'ils vous feront enfin haïr la vérité' (IV. 3. 1400).

<P>A future for Joas the individual, then, is a sad one; the loss of his childhood innocence may be another object of pre-emptive mourning here, in a play written for children. Is the collective and/or symbolic future more hopeful? Bersani's reading of *Andromaque* frames the question of the Child-remainder in relatively optimistic terms; his concern is whether, and how, this future hero can escape the destructive theatre of repressed passions staged across Racine's œuvre.[32] Bersani posits Astyanax as a survivor of this 'explosion': 'the child, the future, the blank page of the play', who represents 'nothing less and nothing more than the value of pure possibility'; his survival represents the advent of a new order, an 'escape from tragedy' (ibid. p. 50). According to Bersani, Astyanax escapes the circularity of the

[32] Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, p. 5.

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repetitious tragic plot for a story, as yet unwritten, that *might* enable the emergence of different kinds of self.[33]

<P>In a differently historicized reading, however, Astyanax and Joas are indeed signs of a new order, but not so much blank pages, with more in common than Bersani's reading of Astyanax suggests. Early modern audiences were likely to be familiar with Astyanax as the mythic Trojan founder of France, a story that developed in the Renaissance and was popularized by Pierre de Ronsard in his unfinished *Franciade* (1572).[34] Astyanax in *Andromaque* might also then be symbolic of the new world order in which France was fashioning itself as a pre-eminent inheritor of the classical world. Joas, meanwhile, has his own complicated ethical future as king and as murderer, as well as being a mere link in the chain leading to salvation: a seventeenth-century audience might have understood him as symbolic both of the Christian order to come, and of fallen man's struggle to act according to faith.[35] Moreover, in the context of contemporary attacks on Jansenism, and of the recent expulsion of France's Protestants in 1685, both the survival of Joas and the purging of Athalie also evoke a new culture of religious conformity; a few decades later, Voltaire

[33] Bersani — who starts his critical story with Racine and ends with Jean Genet, and with the *Histoire d'O* by Pauline Réage [Dominique Aury] — implies that 'a future for Astyanax' is a literary future ('the possibility of a new mode of desire'), culminating in the 'unrepressed scenes of desire' that occur in some twentieth-century narrative fiction (ibid., p. 310).

[34] See Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

[35] The Fall was an especially pressing theological matter in this period. On seventeenth-century discussions of the Fall, see Michael Moriarty, *Early Modern French Thought*, II: *Fallen Nature, Fallen Selves* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), Chapter Two, 'Original Sin', pp. 109–56.

read *Athalie* as a pagan queen's struggle against religious zealotry.[36] Susan Maslan, meanwhile, argues that critics have been too quick to treat Racine's Jews simply as 'future Christians'. Her view is that an allegorical reading of the temple as Port-Royal or the play as an exploration of Christian sectarianism overlooks Racine's engagement with seventeenth-century Jewish culture and ritual in both *Athalie* and *Esther*. Maslan sees this as another level of religious plurality at stake in the final plays, and as a further layer of affective ambiguity, since by preserving the ancestor of Jesus the Jews are laying the foundations of the future criminalization and marginalization of their descendants who do not convert.[37] Overall, then, Joas's futures are multiple — a mixture of awe-inspiring and awful.

<P>A future for Astyanax might be, as Bersani has it, a freer exploration of desire and sexuality in literature, but it is also a future for France. A future for Joas might be both a future for Christianity and for Judaism, and a future for Christian France, or for France's discomfited experience of religious plurality. Racine seems to imply that on one level, Joas *is* the future of France when he draws a parallel, in his preface, between Joas and Louis XIV's grandson, on whose 'vivacité' and

[36] See David Williams, 'Voltaire et la tragique racinien', in *La Réception de Racine à l'âge classique: de la scène au monument*, ed. by Nicholas Cronk and Alain Viala, *SVEC*, 2005:08 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005), pp. 121–32 (pp. 129–30). See also Alain Viala, *Racine: la stratégie du caméleon* (Paris: Seghers, 1989), p. 246. Goldmann reads the play rather differently, as a critique of tyranny and threat of divine punishment against the king and court (*Le Dieu caché*, pp. 442–46). Some contemporaries also read *Esther* as an allegory of the persecution of Huguenots (see Forestier, *Jean Racine*, pp. 711–12).

[37] Maslan, 'Melancholy Racine', pp. 64–66 and 68.

‘discernement’ Joas’s exceptional qualities are modelled.[38] In the two plays, mythological and Christian narratives are drawn into a kind of singular national origin story, particularly if we recall the late-seventeenth-century tendency to consider Jewish antiquity as the most ancient civilization, as mentioned above. It may then be telling that *Andromaque* is one of the plays that contemporary accounts suggest was staged at Saint-Cyr before the ‘Christian tragedies’ — and it certainly adds to the complex gender dynamic at work in that institution that these masculine genealogies of national and religious identity were, at least initially, performed by girls.

<P>Joas’s role in this genealogical scheme is as symbolic facilitator, since he himself is doomed to sin. For Edelman, the symbolic Child is less a subject position than a sublimation of individual and collective subjectivities.[39] In the modulation between individual and collective, the play stages the struggle inherent to such sublimation. This is explicit in the central climax, in act III, when Josabet’s fear for the mortal life of her adoptive son leads her to doubt the symbolic future he is supposed to represent. She begs Joad to keep him hidden, to postpone his symbolic role for some better future moment (‘Réservons cet enfant pour un temps plus heureux’, III. 6. 1053). Racevskis sees a further parallel here between Josabet and Andromaque in both characters’ desperation to keep their children safe.[40] Conversely, in act IV, during the preparations in the temple for conflict with Athalie the emphasis is more on genealogy and Joas’s symbolic status. Before his coronation, Joad addresses him as ‘mon fils’ (IV. 1. 1267); after the diadem has been placed on his

[38] Racine, preface to *Athalie*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Forestier, p. 1011 — presumably not intending to suggest that this prince will grow up to be similarly murderous.

[39] Edelman, *No Future*, p. 3.

[40] Racevskis, *Tragic Passages*, p. 183.

head, he is ‘cher rejeton d’une vaillante race’ (IV. 1. 1457) and a voice in the chorus calls him ‘chère et dernière fleur d’une tige si belle’ (IX. 6. 1491). In the sublimation of his individuality and the limitations on his own agency, Joas seems to be an inverse symbol in comparison with Esther, who reveals herself to the king and to the audience, which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reads as ‘a model for a certain simplified but highly potent imagining of coming out and its transformative potential’.[41] Rather, when the curtain lifts, Joas is revealed (‘outed’, perhaps) by others who inscribe him with symbolic meaning that marginalizes his individual life. Models of queer liberation suggested by Sedgwick and Bersani for *Esther* and *Andromaque* are not so readily available for Joas in *Athalie*.

<P>But it is Athalie, not Joas, who is better remembered, as Racine explains in his justification for his naming the play *Athalie*, lending an ironic gloss to the constant emphasis in the main body of the play on the true name of Joas/Éliacin:

> <XTT>Elle a pour sujet Joas reconnu et mis sur le trône; et j’aurais dû dans les règles l’intituler *Joas*. Mais la plupart du monde n’en ayant entendu parler que sous le nom d’*Athalie*, je n’ai pas jugé à propos de la leur présenter sous un autre titre, puisque d’ailleurs Athalie y joue un personnage si considérable, et que c’est sa mort qui termine la pièce.[42]

<TX>What remains, then, is Athalie and her exemplary death, as much if not more than Joas’s exemplary survival.

<P>Athalie’s exemplary moral evil is that she is a child-killer, in the past and potentially in future. Stone suggests that our awareness of the way in which Athalie

[41] Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 75.

[42] Racine, preface to *Athalie*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Forestier, p. 1010.

troubles historical memory, and temporality, ought not to lessen this evil or imply that she should be rehabilitated.[43] But just as Edelman's symbolic Child is not a real child, and Joas is valuable to Joad and to Judaeo-Christian history not as an individual life so much as a symbol of God's promise to the Jews, so we can read the dead children of Athalie's past as symbols, and as metaphors. The question of the remainder is less about an individual than about a struggle for control of both past and future. In the play, Athalie is not punished directly because of her murderous past actions, but because she threatens the future fulfilment of past promises. Appropriately, given the ambiguity of prophetic vision as staged in *Athalie*, Athalie's dream — while accurate in its prediction of her doom, and of the child's pivotal role therein — does not precisely predict the outcome of the play; she is murdered not by Joas but by Levite soldiers inspired by the coming of the symbolic Child. She is sacrificed in his name, but not by his hand. He only pierces her heart metaphorically. *Athalie* can be read metaphorically on a broader level: as a drama about reproduction, in the sense that child-bearing, child-rearing, and child-murder are about history, time, and creation; early modern literature is replete with reproductive metaphors of this kind.[44] Athalie's role in this mother–child drama, moreover, might be anti-Child, and anti-future, but is not necessarily anti-child. In the next section I turn to Athalie's relation to temporality and the style of her resistance to a Child-oriented future.

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[43] Stone, 'Making Time', pp. 101–02.

[44] On reproduction as metaphor, see Stephen Guy-Bray, *Against Reproduction: Where Renaissance Texts Come From* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 8; Guy-Bray acknowledges his own debt to Edelman on p. 21. On reproductive metaphors in early modern culture, see also Williams, *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture*, Chapter Three, 'Montaigne's Children: Monsters, Metaphors, and the Imagination', pp. 121–68.

<TB>

<SH>*Athalie's futures*

<TX>Time itself is queer at the opening of *Athalie*. Critics have noted that the tension of the play turns upon a conflict of temporal orders: between 'biblical time' and 'tragic time' (Parish), or between pagan past, Jewish present, and Christian future (Maslan).[45] I suggest a further layer of conflict between progressive genealogy or 'patriarchal time', and non-normative temporality or 'queer time'. By standing against the futures orchestrated by Joad in the name of God, and symbolized by Joas, Athalie seems to represent and even to inhabit a version of 'queer time', defined by Judith Halberstam as existing (at least in part) 'in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction'.[46] A sense that time is 'queer' in that it does not follow the expected or normative temporal sequence is expressed in the opening lines. Abner presents Athalie as an aberration in time ('Que les temps sont changés!', I. 1. 5) because she has reverted to paganism, turning away from the transcendent future offered by the Jewish God, and rejecting messianic temporality. Athalie, who is Joas's grandmother and later his would-be adoptive mother, seems then to be the antithesis of the future safeguarded by Joas's survival; the embodiment of Edelman's 'no

[45] Parish, *Racine: The Limits of Tragedy*, p. 12; Maslan, 'Melancholy Racine', p. 73.
[46] Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 1. See also Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 3. Jennifer E. Row uses the concept of queer time to analyse Isaac de Benserade and Corneille: Row, 'Queer Time on the Early Modern Stage: France and the Drama of Biopower', *Exemplaria*, 29 (2017), 58–81. Row identifies temporality as queer 'when desires fail to conform to temporal norms, eliciting rushing or slowness that jars against prescriptive rhythms or deviates from hetero-reproductive ends' (ibid., pp. 60–61).

future'. And yet, although she directly threatens his life, and the collective futures of the Jewish and Christian peoples, Athalie also offers Joas a kind of liberation from the symbolic order in which he is placed by Joad, and in so doing, she represents a kind of 'queer maternity'.

<P>The first reference to Athalie as interruption in time is explicitly gendered as the product of 'l'audace d'une femme' (I. 1. 13). Her transgression of gender norms may be what led Barthes to emphasize Athalie's masculinity, and her status not as potential mother to Joas but as an alternative father.[47] This gendered transgression is characterized by Joad as betrayal of the 'true' past (that is, the 'true' patriarchy):

> <XTV>Le reste pour son Dieu montre un oubli fatal,
> Ou même, s'empressant aux autels de Baal,
> Se fait initier à ses honteux mystères,
> Et blasphème le nom qu'ont invoqué leurs pères. (I. 1. 17–20)

<TX>*Athalie*'s temporal paradigm is a religious, effectively millenarian patriarchal sequence. Joad commands Abner to recognize the true God ('Un Dieu tel aujourd'hui qu'il fut dans tous les temps', I. 2. 320), operating in a singular temporal regime, *un temps*. Athalie challenges both singular temporal regime and genealogy through her loyalty to an alternative patriarch (Ahab), and also through her maternal line, as the daughter of Jezebel. Her attempts to negotiate a non-violent resolution to this conflict by attempting to adopt Joas, thereby reconciling the divided bloodline, is another way in which she acts against the story of a singular genealogy. As an alternative to violent conflict, when Athalie tries to adopt Joas she issues an invitation to plural futures, and plural faiths: 'J'ai mon Dieu que je sers; vous servirez le vôtre' (II. 7.

[47] Barthes, *Sur Racine*, p. 127.

684). This future does not require a single linear trajectory — narrative, biological, or religious — to eradicate others: it does not, as Barthes noted, require tragedy at all.[48]

<P>Here there may be a further parallel with *Andromaque*. Barthes writes that Pyrrhus desires above all to establish a new order of action, and of temporality: 'une nouvelle administration du temps qui ne sera plus fondée sur le retour immuable des vengeances'.[49] To this extent Pyrrhus, and his hostility to Astyanax as symbolic Child, might also be incorporated into a putative queer Racine canon. A parallel between Pyrrhus and Athalie is strengthened by the fact that, as well as threatening him, Pyrrhus also makes a gesture towards adopting Astyanax. Athalie, like Pyrrhus, wants to break with the past and a predetermined future, ultimately by violent means; both are thwarted by the symbolic Children who represent the reach of the past (Trojan or Jewish) into the future.

<P>Athalie's anti-futurity is gendered, at least partially anti-patriarchal, and potentially anti-tragic. It can also be read as queer: not only in its sheer opposition to patriarchal structures and reproduction, but in its embrace of non-reproductive pleasures, which can in themselves be metaphors for queer sexualities.[50] The line

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[48] Barthes, *Sur Racine*, p. 131. See also Judith Butler on 'gender trouble' (that is, challenging gender norms) as an invitation to future plurality: '[t]he culturally constructed body will [ultimately] be liberated, neither to its "natural" past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities'; Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 34 and 93. Despite Edelman's various critiques of Butler (for example, *No Future*, p. 113), her 'open future' is thus not exactly antithetical to his 'no future': both are opposed to singular narratives and to the heteronormative reproductive mode.

[49] Barthes, *Sur Racine*, p. 85.

[50] See Guy-Bray, *Against Reproduction*, p. 175. See also Michel Foucault's identification of 'les corps et les plaisirs' as a potential location of resistance to

between these is thin in the chorus's critique of Athalie's prioritization of 'plaisirs' and 'désirs', briefly discussed above:

> <XTV>Rions, chantons, dit cette troupe impie;
> De fleurs en fleurs, de plaisirs en plaisirs,
> Promenons nos désirs.
> Sur l'avenir, insensé qui se fie.
> De nos ans passagers le nombre est incertain.
> Hâtons-nous aujourd'hui de jouir de la vie;
> Qui sait si nous serons demain? (II. 9. 820–26)

<TX>The material pleasures of *Athalie* are not necessarily or solely metaphors for non-reproductive sexuality; they are also aesthetic ('de fleurs en fleurs'). This pagan pleasure-seeking is figured by the chorus as an eternal present with no future. The choir laments the result of this neglect of the future: 'ces malheureux' will never see the eternal splendour of 'ta cité sainte'; though they may weep and tremble they will not have access to 'tes clartés immortelles' (II. 9. 828–31).[51] Finally, 'Une Voix, Seule' concludes this chorus scene (and act II), posing the key question, that is, what will remain for those who have thus far avoided thinking about the future:

> <XTV>De tous ces vains plaisirs où leur âme se plonge,

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hegemonic power; Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, I: *La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. 208.

[51] This evokes Jacques Lacan's point that, in a play dominated by the future-oriented keywords 'crainte' and 'trembler', the crucial fear in *Athalie* ought to be fear of God — but this fear and awe has to be anticipatory: no use weeping and trembling in the moment itself; Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, III: *Les Psychoses, 1955–56* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), pp. 300–03.

Que leur restera-t-il? Ce qui reste d'un songe

Dont on a reconnu l'erreur. (II. 9. 833–35)

<TX>According to the chorus's reading of the drama, on the side of the 'enfant merveilleux', what remains is Christian virtue and access to a heavenly kingdom; on the other, the remainder is but the 'reste' of a dream in which the error of unbelief is revealed. This, of course, evokes Athalie's famous dream monologue that the audience has just heard in act II, scene 5, in which she describes a vision of Jezebel ('pompeusement parée') turning from shadow to bloody flesh:

<XTV>Son ombre vers mon lit a paru se baisser;

Et moi, je lui tendais les mains pour l'embrasser.

Mais je n'ai plus trouvé qu'un horrible mélange

D'os et de chair meurtris, et trainés dans la fange,

Des lambeaux pleins de sang, et des membres affreux,

Que des chiens dévorants se disputaient entre eux. (II. 5. 501–06)

<TX>In the contemporary theological context, this image of Jezebel's corpse reads as an expression of anxiety about the mortal body and the mere material as bloody remainder, without the promise of redemptive future transcendence.[52]

<P>Athalie is drawn by her dream into the irresistible teleological scheme that ends in tragedy. She enters the scene claiming that she does not want to focus on the past; her presentism is anti-past as well as anti-future. This is a different articulation of the 'oubli fatal' condemned by the chorus:

[52] For a discussion of contemporary writing on salvation, see Parish, *Catholic Particularity in Early Modern France*, Chapter Eight, 'Particularity and Salvation', pp. 188–206.

<XTV>Je ne veux point ici rappeler le passé

Ni vous rendre raison du sang que j'ai versé.

Ce que j'ai fait, Abner, j'ai cru le devoir faire. (II. 5. 465–67)

<TX>She initially describes her successes in the present tense ('par moi Jérusalem goûte un calme profond', II. 5. 473), but then moves into the imperfect: 'je jouissais en paix du fruit de ma sagesse' (II. 5. 484; note the invocation of the 'fruits' of her wisdom, rather than of her reproductive function). The dream itself is then presented as an interruption in time, just as she was presented herself as an interruption in act I: 'Mais un trouble importun vient, depuis quelque jours | De mes prospérités interrompre le cours' (II. 5. 485–86). Athalie's 'trouble' spreads to her advisor Mathan in the next act, in the stage direction '*(Il se trouble)*': such is his anxiety about the outcome of the conflict that he cannot even finish his sentence. He, too, has been interrupted (in fact, he interrupts himself): 'Avant la fin du jour… on verra qui de nous… | Doit… Mais sortons, Nabal' (III. 6. 1041–42).

<P>That Athalie and Mathan are ineluctably drawn into the redemptive future that will destroy them makes the play, as John D. Lyons puts it, a 'providentialist masterpiece'.[53] The dream monologue is the moment at which Athalie begins to give way to this outcome, drawn to an interpretation of her dream as a sign of her coming death (ibid., p. 153):

<XTT>De tant d'objets divers le bizarre assemblage

[53] John D. Lyons, *The Phantom of Chance: From Fortune to Randomness in Seventeenth-Century French Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 153–55, p. 155.

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Peut-être du hasard vous paraît un ouvrage.

Moi-même quelque temps honteuse de ma peur,

Je l'ai pris pour l'effet d'un sombre vapeur.

Mais de ce souvenir mon âme possédée

A deux fois en dormant revu la même idée:

Deux fois mes tristes yeux se sont vu retracer

Ce même enfant tout prêt à me percer. (II. 5. 515–22)

<TX>Here, we might read the 'bizarre assemblage' of 'objets divers' drawn into a single 'ouvrage' as the symbolic beginning of the end of Athalie's pluralist project: she is being drawn into both the singularity of the divine scheme and into the tragic framework by the affecting dream-vision of the child ready to pierce her heart.

<P>This speech is not, though, the first reference to her 'trouble'. When she first appears, it is in a weakened state: 'Non, je ne puis: tu vois mon trouble et ma faiblesse' (II. 3. 435). She can barely stand: in fact, she sits. This makes her first appearance echo that of her counterpart in *Phèdre*, who arrives on stage, announces her weakness, and is given the same stage direction after the same length of time (four lines): 'elle s'assied' (p. 1032).[54] Wes Williams writes that Mathan's problem — his failure — is that he does not realize that he is in a Racine play, so he cannot read his own reference ('un monstre naissant') as a warning; arguably, Athalie has a similar problem in that she cannot recognize that her own response to her vision will be her undoing; she cannot avoid the trap faced by all Racine's morally compromised (anti-)heroines (Hermione, Roxane, Phèdre, to name but three).[55] Athalie is haunted by a

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[54] Racine, 'Phèdre et Hippolyte', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Forestier, pp. 821–76, (p. 826.)

[55] Williams, *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture*, p. 289.

literary matrilineal heritage as well as by her own mother, and trapped by the narrative demands of tragedy.[56]

<P>Athalie thus faces a reckoning with a dual inheritance from the bad woman of the Bible and the doomed women of Racine. Véronique Desnain places Athalie on the bad side of a 'good woman'–'bad woman' dichotomy replicated across Racine's œuvre; in this case the 'good woman' is Josabet, the archetypal 'good mother' who saved Joas as an infant.[57] It seems incontrovertible that Athalie dies because she is not only bad, but a 'bad woman', and a failed mother, rejected by Joas who recognizes Josabet as his true and 'unique mère' (IV. 4. 1413). This was a clear lesson on womanhood for the schoolgirls of Saint-Cyr. But Athalie cannot sustain herself as 'bad woman', and begins to revert to a different model of femininity, and to feel the 'trouble' of remorse for her past crimes, to Mathan's regret:

> <XTT>Ce n'est plus cette reine éclairée, intrépide,
> Élevée au-dessus de son sexe timide,
> Qui d'abord accablait ses ennemis surpris,
> Et d'un instant perdu connaissait tout le prix.
> La peur d'un vain remords trouble cette grande âme:
> Elle flotte, elle hésite; en un mot, elle est femme. (III. 3. 871–76)

<TX>Before she appears on stage, Athalie transgresses patriarchal progression, and crosses the boundary of masculine space by entering the temple. But once she is physically present, she is forced to confront her past, feels remorse, and becomes

[56] The dissonances and resonances between Racine's troubled heroines recall Butler's notion of gender performance as 'imitation without an origin' (*Gender Trouble*, pp. 137–38).

[57] Desnain, 'Les Faux Miroirs', pp. 43–44.

trapped in a gendered narrative that is presented by Mathan as her path to undoing: a melancholic kind of gender identification in which Athalie's troublesome 'woman-ness' fixes her tragic trajectory.[58] Athalie's rejection of traditional maternity and duty to children-as-future is thus equivocal. She had attempted to create her own regime and to embrace temporary, material and aesthetic pleasures: to serve something other than reproduction. However, she is drawn back to the Child and to a form of femininity that is not available to her, before moving back to a position of defiance expressed in her final malediction, framed as a mother's dying wish. Athalie, refusing prescribed futures, and haunted by her own mother and by the child she has failed to kill, might then — on this symbolic level — be a paradigmatic early modern example of 'queer maternity'.[59]

<P>Ultimately, the actions that draw Athalie to her downfall, under the sign of Jezebel, are anti-Child, but not necessarily anti-child. Many critics have noted Athalie's 'evil', as well as her problematic potential goodness. Lucien Goldmann, moreover, reads Athalie's evil — as well as the evil wrought by Joas as king — as symbolic of the radical evil of the mortal world; his comments find a sort of parallel in Stanton's observation that Fénelon held poorly educated women generally responsible for all worldly evil.[60] Re-assessing Athalie's worldliness, her pleasures,

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[58] Butler identifies a connection between gender identification and melancholia, via Freud and Kristeva (*Gender Trouble*, pp. 57–63). Conroy argues that 'Athalie dies not because of her return to what is essentially a gender construction of Woman, but rather because she is, in reality, a woman in power, a threat to the patriarchy which must be removed' ('Gender, Power and Authority', p. 73).

[59] For Power, queer maternity involves refusing the structures of motherhood from the position of '*already being a mother*' ('Motherhood in France', p. 256).

[60] Goldmann, *Le Dieu caché*, p. 443.

and her 'radical' evil, through a feminist and queer lens, further complicates the extent to which Athalie is good or bad. If Athalie is an example of 'queer maternity', her semi-maternal gestures, often read as monstrous and corrupting, could instead be read in this light: namely her tentative embrace of Joas, her attempt to incorporate him into her anti-reproductive world of alternative pleasures, and her railing against his indoctrination by Joad and Josabet. In act II, scene 7, Athalie asks Joas, 'Quels sont donc vos plaisirs?' (II. 7. 672), and when she discovers his limited aesthetic world, she says, 'Je plains le triste sort d'un enfant tel que vous' (II. 7. 678). Perhaps Athalie regrets the child's incorporation into a future that there may be good reasons to refuse. Since Joas grows up to murder the next high priest, and to embrace worldly things over spiritual ones, it could be that he will ultimately agree with Athalie, despite his horrified 'pour quelle mère!' at the end of the scene (II. 7. 702). That murder, supposedly, is the fulfilment of her curse; perhaps it is also the fulfilment of a promise. Pushing this reading to what might be its limit, the concept of queer maternity could also incorporate the aesthetic dimension of Athalie's 'plaisirs si doux', in which Athalie would be a variant of another kind of 'bad mother' figure, the 'art monster' who sacrifices her caregiving duties on the altar of creativity.[61] Athalie created her own regime and her own palace of pleasures, she created her own renown,

[61] The question of whether a woman can be creative and an adequate mother and/or caregiver was still being debated recently, and is likely to be so for some time to come: see Claire Dederer, 'What Do We Do with the Art of Monstrous Men?', *Paris Review*, 20 November 2017, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/11/20/art-monstrous-men> [accessed 11 February 2020], and Rebecca Solnit's response, 'Women's Work and the Myth of the Art Monster', *Literary Hub*, 12 December 2017, <https://lithub.com/rebecca-solnit-on-womens-work-and-the-myth-of-the-art-monster> [accessed 11 February 2020].

and to do so, she murdered many children, and nearly one more; the slippage between the literal and metaphorical here is likely to be one of the most lasting affective ambiguities of the play's reception.

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<SH>*Conclusion*

<TX>In this article I have explored the gendered and potentially queer aspects of Racine's treatment of futurity in *Athalie*. Future-oriented disquiet is a condition of this play, part of Racine's experimentation with tragic affect in the absence of any fixed definition of catharsis in the wake of the 'tristesse majestueuse' of *Bérénice* and the moral ambiguity of *Phèdre*.[62] Parallels and continuities between *Athalie* and *Andromaque* have been made clear. Beyond this, future work could certainly draw out more of the many connections between this play's version of futurity and that of those earlier works, in terms of both temporality and heredity — as well as the broader salience of 'queer maternity' in analysis of the embattled, often violent mothers of seventeenth-century drama. A longer analysis of the future of *Athalie* might also address its troubled afterlife in performance history terms, addressing questions of staging, direction, and dramatic convention in one of Racine's least-staged works.[63]

<P>Writing about Racine from a twenty-first-century vantage point is, in a sense, to write in the future. One reason for the relative lack of enthusiasm for *Athalie*

[62] Racine, preface to 'Bérénice', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Forestier, pp. 450–52 (p. 450).

[63] One example of this is Kate Tunstall's 'Racine in 1796 and 1910, or Racine "à l'usage de ceux qui voient"', in *La Réception de Racine à l'âge classique*, ed. by Cronk and Viala, pp. 190–205. Tunstall describes the reception of *Athalie* in the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, as text in the first instance and in early cinema in the second.

today could be an apparent disjuncture between Racine's context and that of twenty-first-century ethical and theatrical norms. Later audiences, from Voltaire to the present, who are less familiar with, or less sympathetic to, seventeenth-century Catholic worship, or to the gender conventions that gave Madame de Maintenon authority and influence, alongside a will to suppress other kinds of female power, might understand the tragedy of *Athalie* as the staged elimination of a powerful woman, of religious plurality, and of pleasures that are, not necessarily, but possibly, queer.

<P> Athalie can indeed be read as a powerful woman, a 'queer mother' defeated by a zealous patriarchy; as a symbol of queer resistance to patriarchal norms, sacrificed for the sake of the symbolic Child. The affecting spectacle of the threatened child, Joas, before and after the diadem is in place and the curtain lifted, is also a troubling one for all the apparent simplicity of his language and of the emphatic pity he inspires in Josabet and Joad (as well as in some audiences). His future is problematic at best, cursed at worst, and emphatically not his own, since he is more valuable as Child than as a child. Still, a risk here would be reducing *Athalie* to the sum of this potential subtext, without sufficient attention to contextual or intertextual readings. The play is also partly a cautionary tale about the consequences of misreading symbols, or reading them as incontrovertible evidence of the dominance of a singular historical or ideological narrative, when the future as Racine has staged it in this play is in fact inherently multiple, a mixture of promise and curse. In this account of the future in *Athalie*, critical theoretical readings are a further kind of contextualization: that is, they offer the possibility of engaging in a critical reckoning with the past from a contemporary perspective without erasing the difference of that past. The ethical and political issues at stake in this play's treatment of futurity —

reproduction, motherhood, ideological and religious plurality — are as sensitive today as they were in the seventeenth century, but differently so. Gender and queer theory enable a re-assessment of the complex dynamics at work in *Athalie*, and at Saint-Cyr, in which Athalie, the powerful, defeated woman, is perhaps a mirror image of Madame de Maintenon and her models of femininity and authority.