Lessing's "Philotas" and Crébillon

Author(s): Alice A. Scott

Source: *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Apr., 1922), p. 173

Published by: [Modern Humanities Research Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3714447>

Accessed: 21-12-2015 02:52 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Modern Humanities Research Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Modern Language Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Mittag vom 2. Juni 1911 ist nur eine Besprechung von Gräfs Schrift und trägt den Untertitel 'Ungedruckte Briefe an Goethe,' und nicht, wie Goedeke angibt, 'Ungedruckte Briefe von Goethe.'

H. G. FIEDLER.

OXFORD.

LESSING'S 'PHILOTAS' AND CRÉBILLON.

Lessing's *Philotas* has been brought into connection with his Plautine studies, has been regarded as an imitation of the Greek drama, as a consequence of literary rivalry with Cronegk, and has been discussed as a reflection of the military spirit of the age, but it has not hitherto been considered in the light of the French *tragédie classique*. In Crébillon's *Idoménée*, written in 1703, we find a son who kills himself to save his father. The hero's attitude to life and death is that of Philotas to the exclusion, however, of the love-element; Lessing's boy-hero being too young for its introduction. In both plays the young prince dies in triumph with the consciousness of having brought peace to his father; and in both the setting of the final scene is similar: a prince about to die justifies his action to a king who is at first angry and then deplores his son's tragic end. There are few witnesses; in *Philotas* the old general Strato, in *Idoménée* the statesman Sophronyme and a confidant with guards in the background. This French play might also be brought into connection with Lessing's fragment, *Kleonnis*, which depicts the tender affection of a father for his son and his grief at the thought of possibly losing him.

Crébillon's *Pyrrhus* (1726) is the story of a similar attempted sacrifice, not on behalf of a father, but of a foster-father, the conflict being brought to a happy conclusion this time by the heroism of Pyrrhus. In this play we find a prince in each of the camps of the warring kings, and the one can only be freed by the surrender of the other. The question of exchange is not, however, so simple as in *Philotas*, for in delivering up Pyrrhus, Glaucus would not merely liberate an enemy, but also destroy a friend. Pyrrhus himself, as impetuous as Philotas and as contemptuous of death, goes out to meet his end; and like Philotas, he does not hesitate to express his opinion of his enemy's policy. In the French play, however, the love-motive adds fresh complications. That Lessing was under any indebtedness to Crébillon it would be difficult to prove; but the plot of his *Philotas* marks it out as distinctly analogous to the type of tragedy cultivated by the French poet.

ALICE A. SCOTT.

LEEDS.