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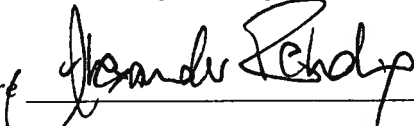
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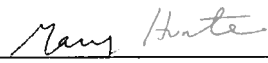
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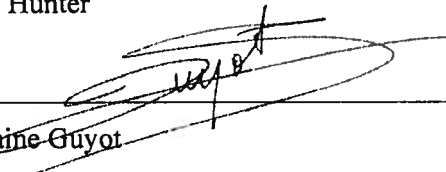
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Les filles de l'Opéra in the Early Eighteenth Century

A dissertation presented by

Gina Rivera

To the Department of Music
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of Music

Harvard University
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Les filles de l'Opéra in the Early Eighteenth Century

Abstract

Celebrated or berated as scandalous presences on and off the operatic stage, the Parisian singers and dancers known as *les filles de l'Opéra* endured some of the most heated cultural critiques of the early eighteenth century. Jérôme de La Gorce and Georgia Cowart have assessed the controversial morality of the *filles de l'Opéra*, yet musicologists have not explored critiques of these women for what they reveal about historical mentalities, from ideas about performance as possession or effacement, absorption or theatricality, to the doubt into which the operatic genre itself was cast.

The critical reception of the *filles de l'Opéra* amounts to a meaningful early modern discourse about the performer as a powerful, autonomous, even dangerous creative individual and is a significant reflection of theatrical taste in flux in these years. Letters of Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé (1694–1733) as well as vignettes in manuscripts compiled by the abbé Jean Nicolas de Tralage, dit Tillemon (1620–1698) and Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, comte de Maurepas (1701–1781) describe noted performers including Catherine Nicole Le Maure (1704–1786), Marie Pélissier (1707–1749), Marie Sallé (1707–1756), and Marie Anne de Cupis de Camargo (1710–1770). Reactions to their gestures, voices, and choreography were replete with anxiety that these women might provoke a revolution at the Opéra during an era when debates raged about lyric tragedy as entertainment. Whereas Le Maure won praise from Aïssé for her guts and fortitude, Pélissier presented a newer, more threatening theatricality that fueled popular fascination with artifice and deception.

When writers used such language to frame operatic practice, they explored sophisticated notions not just about mores but about performance, poetics, and genre. Well before Romantic commentaries on the virtuoso, the discourse on the *filles de l'Opéra* amounted to an integrated critical language that placed musicality, technique, gesture, sexuality, and morality on equal footing as evaluative categories. The lengths to which writers went to discern what made these women

culturally significant shed light on a complicated social, moral, and corporeal understanding of opera and its performance that was peculiarly Parisian.

Contents

Preface	vii
Sources.....	xi
Popularity	xix
Flux	xxvi
Epistemology	xxxii
Summary	xxxviii
 Chapter One: Context	1
Personalities	9
Morality	20
Libel	28
Publicity.....	32
Contagion.....	55
Noise	68
 Chapter Two: Marie Anne de Cupis de Camargo and Marie Sallé	84
Physicality	92
Masculinity	107
Eloquence	115
Pantomime	130
Virtue.....	136
 Chapter Three: Marie Pélissier and Catherine Nicole Le Maure	148
Rivalry	157
Artifice	162
Intrigue	175
Sincerity.....	192
Monstrosity.....	208
 Chapter Four: Sacrilege.....	229
Pancrace	244
Parody	262
Jansenism.....	272
Penitence	281
Authority	292
 Conclusion	297
 Bibliography	307

For Sonny

Le chant ne veut rien dire: c'est en cela que
tu entendras enfin que je te le donne;
aussi inutile que le brin de laine,
le caillou, tendus à sa mère par l'enfant.

— Roland Barthes

Preface

L'opéra n'est pas interdit aux femmes. C'est vrai. Les femmes en sont la parure, direz-vous, l'ornement indispensable à toute fête. Et elles chantent. Mieux, elles occupent la scène: sans cantatrice, pas d'opéra. Mais le rôle de parure, d'objet décoratif, n'est pas le rôle déterminant: et les femmes, sur la scène d'opéra, chantent, immuablement, leur éternelle défaite. Jamais l'émotion n'est si poignante qu'au moment où la voix s'élève pour mourir. Regardez-les, ces heroïnes. Elles battent des ailes avec la voix, leurs bras se tordent, les voici à terre, mortes. Regardez-les, ces femmes qui peuplent la salle, accompagnées de pingouins en uniforme peu variés: elles assistent, elles ornent.¹

Opera is not forbidden to women. It is true. Women are its jewels, you say, the ornament indispensable at every festival. And they sing. Even better, they fill the stage: no singer, no opera. But the role of a jewel, a decorative object, is not the deciding role; and on the operatic stage women perpetually sing their eternal undoing. The emotion is never more poignant than at the moment when the voice lifts itself up to die. Look at these heroïnes. With their voices they flap their wings, their arms writhe, and then there they are, dead on the ground. Look at these women who fill the theater, accompanied by penguins in uniforms that scarcely vary: they are present, they are decorative.

What the philosopher and feminist Catherine Clément claims in this quotation holds true for sopranos of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly those who sang great tragic roles beyond the scope of comic opera. These women sang their undoing, coming to pieces before an audience that expected as much. This was a mostly metaphorical undoing, of course, for singers do not really die the deaths we see thematized in their stories on stage. For Parisian singers and dancers at the Opéra in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, those commonly called *les filles de l'Opéra*, an entirely different undoing confronts us. These women have fallen into obscurity, their names not widely known except for fleeting references in street songs and satires collected in manuscript in the eighteenth century. As research by Virginia Scott has shown, this widespread anonymity is in large part the result of conventions of describing and addressing actresses in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when inside the theater, women were referred to as mademoiselle, yet in public they were described using an article; thus the great *tragédienne* Adrienne Lecouvreur (1692–1730) was known as La Lecouvreur while her predecessor Marie Desmares (1642–1698) was known as La Champmeslé and years later the celebrated dancer

¹ See Catherine Clément, *L'opéra, ou la défaite des femmes* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1979), 13.

Marie Anne de Cupis de Camargo (1710–1770) became La Camargo.² This was not an honorable designation but a dishonorable substitute, a reflection of prevailing social beliefs that actors and actresses were not entitled to the titles they had adopted, particularly since words like madame and mademoiselle were indications of social rank instead of modes of polite address. The tradition of replacing the first names of performers with an article has left us in many cases with limited means of tracking these women down in the records of productions at the Opéra. As research by Nathalie Lecomte has shown, of the nearly ninety women who appeared as dancers at the Opéra in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, we know the full names of only eighteen, and even these were never published in historical printed livrets.³

Among those who wrote about women on stage at this time, the author and salonist Gédéon Tallemant, sieur des Réaux (1619–1692) always used the article, reflecting his contempt for actresses in the theater. The correspondent Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé (1694–1733), who was personally acquainted with Lecouvreur, was well aware of the social implications of the term mademoiselle and also used the article. As Scott has explained, as the eighteenth century progressed, writers were less given to this practice and relied on the term mademoiselle even in cases where actresses were the subject of scrutiny; thus the biographical accounts of women on stage at the Comédie-Française and the Opéra by François Parfaict (1698–1753) and Claude Parfaict (1701–1777) and the playwright and libertine novelist Pierre-François Godard de Beauchamps (1689–1761) as well as anecdotal accounts by Louis Petit de Bachaumont (1690–1771), the dramatist Charles Collé (1709–1783), the abbé Léonor-Jean-Christine Soulas d’Allainval (1700–1753), and Jean Dumas d’Aigueberre (1692–1755) all use some form of mademoiselle, which as research by Joan

² See Virginia Scott, *Women on Stage in Early Modern France: 1540–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1. On the related case of the anonymity of female authors and the anonymous publication of their works, see Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France*, Gender and Culture, ed. Carolyn Heilbrun and Nancy Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 2.

³ See Nathalie Lecomte, “The Female Ballet Troupe of the Paris Opéra from 1700 to 1725,” in *Women’s Work: Making Dance in Europe before 1800*, ed. Lynn Brooks (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 100.

DeJean has shown, is still beset by ideological baggage, by an understanding of women as vulnerable and socially dependent rather than respectable and recognizable by a family name alone.⁴ In the realm of literature and literary criticism the terms *madame* and *mademoiselle* replaced the full names of bourgeois and aristocratic women writers in these years, establishing a code that would persist into the nineteenth century and obscure the complex relationship women maintained with what Nancy Miller has called the signature, akin to the Foucauldian *nom d'auteur*, the foundation of modern authorial identity and the public gesture by which an individual signifies her desire to be identified as the author of a literary corpus.⁵ As DeJean has explained, during the *ancien régime* a woman became an author not only when she made the novel the site of speculation on politicized questions about societal organization or the right to marry freely but when she exercised the full power of the authorial signature and thus reconstituted authorship as a political act.⁶ While not authors in their own right, women on stage in the theater ultimately walked a fine line between the conspicuous, public presentation of themselves as performers and the paradoxical fact that they were, *mutatis mutandis*, so infrequently able to capitalize on the signature, the public acknowledgment of their full names and their full creative and interpretive powers.

⁴ See Claude Parfaict and François Parfaict, *Dictionnaire des théâtres de Paris, contenant toutes les pieces qui ont été représentés jusqu'à présent sur les différens théâtres françoise, & sur celui de l'Académie royale de musique*, 7 vols. (Paris: Rozet, 1767), Pierre-François Godard de Beauchamps, *Recherches sur les théâtres de France: depuis l'année onze cens soixante-un, jusques à present*, 3 vols. (Paris: Prault, 1735), Louis Petit de Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la republique des lettres en France, depuis MDCCLXII jusqu'à nos jours, ou Journal d'un observateur*, 36 vols. (London: John Adamsohn, 1777), Charles Collé, *Journal et mémoires de Charles Collé sur les hommes de lettres, les ouvrages dramatiques et les événements les plus mémorables du regne de Louis XV (1748–1772)*, 3 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1868), and Léonor-Jean-Christin Soulas d'Allainval, *Lettre a Mylord *** sur Baron et la Demoiselle Le Couvreur, ou, L'on trouve plusieurs particularitez theatrales* (Paris: Antoine de Heuqueville, 1730). See also Scott, *Women on Stage in Early Modern France*, 6, and DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, 3.

⁵ See Nancy Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing*, Gender and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 17. See also Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?," *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie* 64 (1969), 79.

⁶ See DeJean, *Libertine Strategies: Freedom and the Novel in Seventeenth-Century France* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1981), 45.

Taking the comments of Clément out of their original context and moving them into the realm of early modern French theater poses several problems, namely that the structure and expressive goals of operatic works in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were dramatically different from those of French and Italian opera in the nineteenth century, to say nothing of Wagnerian opera.⁷ In the domain of French lyric tragedy or *tragédie lyrique* we encounter no *prima donna* as such, no female lead who eclipses her colleagues in the production, no Mimì or Violetta who dies a dramatic death from the ravages of consumption. The *tragédie lyrique* modeled on French classical drama in the tradition of Pierre Corneille (1606–1684) and Jean Racine (1639–1699) glorified the French monarch in its allegorical prologues and gave such weight to choruses and danced *divertissements* that little room was left for a single soprano to rise above other members of the production, even above the popular male *haute-contre*, to superstardom.⁸ These comments about the disappearing soprano nevertheless remain relevant to women active in the early years of French

⁷ On the structure of historical French operatic works, see Norman Demuth, *French Opera: Its Development to the Revolution* (Sussex: Artemis Press, 1963), Caroline Wood, “Orchestra and Spectacle in the *tragédie en musique* 1673–1715: Oracle, *sommeil* and *tempête*,” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 108 (1981–1982), 25–46, Geoffrey Burgess, “Ritual in the *Tragédie en musique* from Lully’s *Cadmus et Hermione* (1673) to Rameau’s *Zoroastre* (1749),” Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1998, David Charlton, *French Opera, 1730–1830: Meaning and media* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), Downing Thomas, *Aesthetics of Opera in the Ancien Régime, 1647–1785*, Cambridge Studies in Opera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Blake Stevens, “Solitary Persuasions: The Concept of the Monologue in French Opera from Lully to Rameau,” Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2007.

⁸ As popular as their female counterparts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the men who sang in *tragédie lyrique*, particularly those in *haute-contre* roles, remain, with few exceptions, little known today. Noted Lullian performers included Bernard Clédière and Louis Gaulard Dumesnil, while later singers included Antoine Boutelou (1665–1740) at the turn of the eighteenth century, as well as Jacques Cocherneau (1680–1734), Louis Mantiennne, and Thomas-Louis Bourgeois (1676–1750). Two highly successful *haute-contre* performers active during the years following the debut of Jean-Philippe Rameau in Paris were Denis-François Tribou (1695–1761) and Pierre Jélyotte (1713–1797), the latter the subject of a detailed biographical study by the musicologist Arthur Pougin (1834–1921). Successors to Tribou and Jélyotte included François Poirier, Jean-Pierre Pillot, and Joseph Legros (1739–1793). See Arthur Pougin, *Un ténor de l’Opéra au XVIIIe siècle: Pierre Jélyotte et les chanteurs de son temps* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1905). See also Mary Cyr, “On Performing 18th-Century *Haute-Contre* Roles,” *The Musical Times* 118/1610 (1977), 293. On the paradoxical masculinity of the *haute-contre* voice and on heroic roles written for this range, see Sarah Nancy, “The ‘Deaf Ear’ of Classicism: Searching for the Female Voice in French *Tragédie Lyrique*,” *Theatre Research International* 31/2 (2006), 122.

operatic practice. We know that they sang to great acclaim in works of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687), André Campra (1660–1744), Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764), and others; we also know from contemporary printed pamphlets and rhymed verse that they led varied, adventurous social lives outside of the theater. At the same time we know little about their vocal artistry or their status as cultural icons in their day. The details of their staged feats and their private lives are largely lost to us today, making the construction of a critical history of these women all the more challenging. They were present; they were decorative; they have all but disappeared.

Sources

What we do have are the street songs, satires, and epigrams collected in manuscript in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the abbé Jean Nicolas de Tralage, dit Tillemon (1620–1698), the noted cartographer and print collector, and Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, comte de Maurepas (1701–1781), a diplomat, satirist, and man of letters. These texts paint a complex picture of a group of women who were often regarded as little more than prostitutes. The negative associations between prostitutes and actresses and dancers at the Opéra prevailed in part because of historical contempt for the acting profession.⁹ Women appearing in satires and epigrams in the manuscripts of Maurepas and Tralage were the subject of a number of rhetorical and critical tropes that emphasized their loose morals, their proclivity to pregnancies, their monstrous physical appearance, and even more their monstrous confusion or subversion of the workings of the operatic genre as didacticism and spectacle.

⁹ On disdain for the acting profession in the eighteenth century, particularly in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, see Patrick Coleman, *Rousseau's Political Imagination: Rule and Representation in the Lettre à d'Alembert* (Geneva: Droz, 1984), 99. On the politics of reputation among actresses in the eighteenth century, see Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). On the history of the connection between the actress and the whore in the cultural imagination and in real life, particularly in the cases of Betty Boutell and, in the eighteenth century, Charlotte Charke and Margaret Leeson, see Kirsten Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and In Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). These uneasy distinctions are discussed at length in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

These references to monstrosity sprang from a long critical tradition that linked the inexplicable or aberrant with the concept of monstrosity as hybridity.¹⁰ As research by Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park has shown, monsters elicited wonder at its most iridescent, linked sometimes to horror, sometimes to pleasure, and sometimes to repugnance.¹¹ This horror sprang from the confusion or hybridization of categories, whether animal or human, female or male, as well as from the perceived violation of normative morality.¹² At home in ancient philosophy as well as in the material and scientific cultures of the middle ages and Renaissance, the fascination with monstrosity only intensified in the early decades of the French eighteenth century, as the annals of the Académie royale des sciences defended the anatomical study of animals and monsters on the grounds that it furthered the understanding of the normal human body, and writers on the plastic and performing arts elaborated on monstrosity in descriptions of painting, poetry, and performers on stage.¹³ References to monstrosity not as the locus of physiological deviation but as a metaphor for

¹⁰ The literature on the epistemology of monstrosity in the eighteenth century is extensive. See Georges Canguilhem, “La Monstruosité et le monstrueux,” *Diogenes* 40 (1962), 27–42, Patrick Tort, *L’ordre et les monstres: le débat sur l’origine des déviations anatomiques au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1980), Hélène Merlin, “Où est le monstre? Remarques sur l’esthétique de l’âge classique,” *Revue des sciences humaines* 188 (1982–1984), 7–32, Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), Andrew Curran and Patrick Graille, “The Faces of Eighteenth-Century Monstrosity,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21/2 (1997), 1–15, Zakiya Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine: Magic, Medicine, and the Marvelous in the Time of the Scientific Revolution* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), and Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*, Theory, Culture & Society (London: Sage Publications, 2002).

¹¹ See Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1998), 20.

¹² See Arnold Davidson, “The Horror of Monsters,” in *The Boundaries of Humanity: Humans, Animals, Machines*, ed. James Sheehan and Morton Sosna (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 51.

¹³ See Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Histoire du renouvellement de l’Académie royale des sciences en M.DC.XCIX. et les éloges historiques* (Amsterdam: Pierre de Coup, 1709), 11. See also Jacques Roger, *Les Sciences de la vie dans la pensée française du XVIIIe siècle*, 2de éd. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1971), xxix, and Tort, *L’ordre et les monstres*, 222.

what lay beyond the limits of knowledge swirled around the *filles de l'Opéra* and the repertories they performed.¹⁴

The monster of critical discourse in these years was both a biological malformation and a generic designation, a term for a composition of marked hybridity or irregularity that did not conform to established conventions or expectations. This second species of monstrosity attached itself, to give just one example, to the dramatic works of Corneille, who in an *épître dédicatoire* described his *L'Illusion comique* (1636), a dramatic work that mingled comedy and tragedy, as a *pièce capricieuse* and an *étrange monstre*, a variable, even volatile text and a peculiar monster.¹⁵ As research by Jonathan Mallinson has shown, in the early decades of the seventeenth century a number of dramatists stressed the value of comedy as an entertainment that need not uphold an express moral purpose, with Corneille himself defending this view in the prefaces to published editions of *La suivante* (1634) and *Le menteur* (1643), both of which espoused the right of dramatic works to provide pleasurable entertainment instead of solemn didacticism.¹⁶ A later preface to *Le menteur* went so far as to assert that aesthetic appreciation rather than moral decency is the ultimate mark of good judgment.¹⁷ The generic ramifications of monstrosity and its connotations of unprecedented or unfathomable innovation that did not follow traditional rules were at home in the perspective of the scholar Antoine Furetière (1619–1688), whose *Dictionnaire universel* described monstrosity as *monstrueux, se dit figurément en Morale. Un Dictionnaire est un travail monstrueux. Cet homme a une vivacité d'esprit, une memoire monstrueuse, prodigieuse. Un vers monstrueux* (“monstrous, expressed figuratively in terms of Morality. A Dictionary is a *monstrous* undertaking.

¹⁴ See Charles Dill, “Rameau’s Imaginary Monsters: Knowledge, Theory, and Chromaticism in *Hippolyte et Aricie*,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55/3 (2002), 476, and idem, *Monstrous Opera: Rameau and the Tragic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 12.

¹⁵ See Pierre Corneille, *L'ILLUSION COMIQUE: COMÉDIE* (Paris: François Targa, 1639).

¹⁶ See G. Jonathan Mallinson, “Defining comedy in the seventeenth century: moral sense and theatrical sensibility,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume III: The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 261.

¹⁷ See Corneille, *Oeuvres de Pierre Corneille*, 2 vols. (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1648), II.

This man has a lively wit, a *monstrous*, prodigious memory. A *monstrous* verse”).¹⁸ Beyond congratulating himself on the prodigious task of compiling a great dictionary, Furetière draws attention to a key facet of the epistemology of monstrosity that would persist into the eighteenth century, when the monstrous was both biologically and metaphorically something of a portent, an exception, an object of great fascination related to the Latin *prodigium*, connoting an omen or wonder.¹⁹

Writers on the performing arts also moved beyond typical theatrical grievances and monstrosity tropes to a more nuanced critique of women on stage; they elaborated on connections between the *filles de l'Opéra* and broader cultural issues of the day, from disenchantment with the monarchy and the clergy to the religious and political upheavals surrounding the heretical branch of French Catholicism known as Jansenism. Commentators connected the *filles de l'Opéra* to these broader cultural issues with such regularity and fervor that despite the insults heaped on them elsewhere in the critical literature, these women were clearly regarded as more than mere trivialities. Indeed their power and influence over male patrons was the subject of numerous satires and epigrams. Concerned that the *filles de l'Opéra* would prevail upon their patrons and ultimately bring about their demise or emasculation, writers took steps to warn the public of the dangerous nature of these women, going so far as to recommend that premonitory placards and posters be placed above the doors of the Opéra.²⁰

¹⁸ See Antoine Furetière, “MONSTRUEUX,” in *Dictionnaire universel, contenant generalement tous les mots françois, tant vieux que modernes, et les termes des sciences et des arts*, 3e éd., rev. corr. & augm. par Basnage de Bauval, 3 vols. (Rotterdam: Leers, 1708), II.

¹⁹ See Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine*, 3, Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 6, Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 12, Jeffrey Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Cohen (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4, Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 34, and Sarah Miller, *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body*, Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture, ed. George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.

²⁰ See Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d’Argens, *Lettres morales et critiques sur les differens états et les diverses occupations des hommes* (Amsterdam: Le Cene, 1737), 104.

The encyclopedic manuscript sources of critical commentary on these women, sources that also contain vast amounts of documentary and satirical material related to political developments, intrigues at court in Versailles, royal mistresses, religious upset, and theater life, have received little literary attention and have not factored significantly in recent musicological studies of early modern Paris. Together with the *Chansonnier Clairambault*, which spans fifty-seven volumes, the collection of epigrams and street songs known as the *Chansonnier Maurepas*, compiled under the direction of the comte de Maurepas, is at forty-two volumes among the largest *chansonniers* in the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. As Robert Darnton has explained, many Parisians in the early decades of the eighteenth century picked up scraps of paper scribbled with verse from cafés and public gardens, subsequently storing them in their apartments. Collectors with sufficient finances to do so had their secretaries transcribe these verses and street songs into ordered registers known as *chansonniers*, among the most famous of which is the collection of Maurepas, incorporating excerpts of medieval French verse in its earliest volumes and chronicling Parisian political culture through to the middle of the eighteenth century when its volumes stop.²¹ Although it does not appear in the *Encyclopédie* of Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert (1717–1783) or in the musical dictionary of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), the term *chansonnier* was also used to refer to those who sang street songs, while *chanteur* described a performer at the Opéra.²² Lewis Seifert has sketched a profile of the compilation of the Maurepas *chansonnier*, in which the genealogist Pierre Clairambault (1651–1740) played a significant role, as well as a detailed account of the authorship of a number of its texts, penned by the likes of the poet Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711), the fabulist Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695), and Racine.²³ As for Tralage, who lends his name to several compilations of manuscript verse and ephemera in the collections of the

²¹ See Robert Darnton, *George Washington’s False Teeth: An Unconventional Guide to the Eighteenth Century* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 66.

²² See Laura Mason, *Singing the French Revolution: Popular Culture and Politics, 1787–1799* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 20.

²³ See Lewis Seifert, “Masculinity and Satires of ‘Sodomites’ in France, 1660–1715,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 41/3–4 (2001), 39.

Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, he was the nephew of Gabriel Nicolas de La Reynie (1625–1709), the first *lieutenant général de police* of Paris. Tralage had been entirely devoted to the study of geography and cartography, from which he composed a *recueil géographique* containing over two thousand texts on geography housed first in the library of the abbaye de Saint-Victor de Paris, situated at the foot of the montagne Sainte-Geneviève on the left bank, until the destruction of Saint-Victor following the Revolution, and later in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. A separate manuscript collection he collated comprises literary anecdotes and poems and is gathered in four volumes in the fonds français of the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. It is from this collection that a number of details about the lives and patrons of female performers in the theater can be reconstructed.²⁴

The conceptual and epistemological issues raised by the variety of satirical texts in these manuscript collections have been summarized by the cultural historian Roger Chartier, who in describing the related context of scurrilous books and pamphlets from later in the French eighteenth century, has outlined questions posed by contributors to a volume on cultures of print and the politics of the Revolution in the research of Darnton, among them: Were the authors of pamphlets, libels, and scandalous chronicles angry hack writers expressing their frustration? Or did they write at the behest of ministers, aristocrats, and bankers who commissioned these works for their own political or financial gain? Did the publishers of subversive literature print items because they made a profit by doing so, or should we believe in their ideological commitments to the politics of these works? And do books generate revolutions? Did the wide circulation of texts on monarchical corruption and degeneracy at court engender a transformation in public thought, loyalty, and

²⁴ See Paul Lacroix, *Notes et documents sur l'histoire des théâtres de Paris au XVIIIe siècle par Jean Nicolas du Tralage, extraits, mis en ordre et publiés d'après le manuscrit original par le bibliophile Jacob* (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1880). On the biography of Tralage, see Louis-Gabriel Michaud, *Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne, ou histoire, par ordre alphabétique, de la vie publique et privée de tous les hommes qui se sont fait remarquer par leurs écrits, leurs actions, leurs talents, leurs vertus ou leurs crimes*, nouv. éd., 45 vols. (Paris: Desplaces, 1854), XXX, 552, and the *Oeuvres de Molière*, nouv. éd., ed. Eugène Despois and Paul Mesnard, Grands écrivains de la France, 13 vols. (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1893), XI, 72.

subjectivity? Or were critical texts capable of being read and understood in less subversive ways?²⁵ These questions are not only at the heart of investigations of print culture and its antecedents in the large manuscript collections compiled by the likes of Tralage and Maurepas; they also drive what Darnton has referred to as the social history of ideas, a field that addresses the dynamic between texts and their social contexts. By searching out what he has called the lived experience of literature, by tracing historical public thought, in the form of literary sources and patterns of reading, through the entire fabric of society, Darnton has sought to show how ideas rooted in literature figured concretely in social and political transformations in the second half of the eighteenth century.²⁶ It is not impossible to reconstruct the analogous historical understanding of music, its performance, and its performers that comes down to us from the manuscript sources that detail the escapades of the *filles de l'Opéra* and related developments in the operatic genre and its axiology early in the eighteenth century.

Among other relatively obscure sources related to these encyclopedic *chansonniers*, the most notable is the tradition of the *bibliothèque bleue de Troyes*, a collection of books largely by anonymous authors, intended for a rural and at times barely literate audience, produced inexpensively with poor impressions, on blue paper, southeast of Paris in Troyes.²⁷ As research by the historian Robert Mandrou (1921–1984) has shown, *littérature de colportage* or items hawked by peddlers that constitute the literature of *la culture populaire en France sous l'ancien régime* (“popular culture in France during the ancien régime”), has been eclipsed by *la culture savante* and largely ignored by modern historians, further contributing to the obscurity of the *bibliothèque*

²⁵ See Roger Chartier, “*Un garçon plein d’esprit mais extrêmement dangereux*: The Darnton Subversion,” in *Into Print: Limits and Legacies of the Enlightenment: Essays in Honor of Robert Darnton*, ed. Charles Walton (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 5.

²⁶ See Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 212.

²⁷ See Alexandre Assier, *La bibliothèque bleue depuis Jean Oudot 1er jusqu’à M. Baudot, 1600–1863*, Bibliothèque de l’amateur champenois (Paris: Champion, 1874), 11.

bleue.²⁸ From almanacs to refashioned medieval romances to astrology to farces to condensed versions of popular contemporary novels, poetry, and trivia, the volumes of the *bibliothèque bleue* sought to meet the demand for reading material outside the commercial realm and outside the prevailing tastes of the upper class. In this sense the *bibliothèque bleue* encouraged what Dorinda Outram has described as the spread of emergent Enlightenment ideals from the middle class to the aristocracy above and the workers below.²⁹ This flowering of nascent Enlightenment ideals was precisely what Geneviève Bollème has described as the new *morale sociale* and *esprit critique*, the new social morality and critical ethos that emerged as readers replaced their taste for astrology and mythology with an interest in science and history, indicating their sympathy with Enlightenment ideals as a liberating force that culminated in the Revolution.³⁰

The vogue for *littérature de colportage* was only one component of a culture of reading that centered on the intensive study of a small number of books and periodicals in private and only later in the eighteenth century focused on reading extensively and on the creation of large private and state libraries.³¹ The volumes of the *bibliothèque bleue* were in fact read aloud by the few rural residents who were literate during the *veillée paysanne*, the informal evening gathering during which villagers of both genders came together to pursue common tasks from sewing to minor repairs.³² The *bibliothèque bleue* crossed over into the musical domain in instances when operatic

²⁸ See Robert Mandrou, *De la culture populaire aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: la Bibliothèque bleue de Troyes* (Paris: Stock, 1964), 11.

²⁹ See Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 2d ed., New Approaches to European History 7 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 25.

³⁰ See Geneviève Bollème, *Les almanachs populaires aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: Essai d'histoire sociale*, Livre et sociétés: études et mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la civilisation du livre 3 (Paris: Mouton, 1969), 123.

³¹ See Rolf Engelsing, "Die Perioden der Lesergeschichte in der Neuzeit. Das statistische Ausmaß und die soziokulturelle Bedeutung der Lektüre," *Archiv für die Geschichte des Buchwesens* 10 (1970), 945. See also Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 120.

³² See Michel Vernus, *La veillée: découverte d'une tradition*, Collection Archives vivantes (Yens sur Morges: Cabédita, 2004), 181.

texts in the age of Lully were parodied and refashioned into homilies and farces; at the same time modern musicological scholarship has yet to treat such instances as more than secondary to the issues surrounding the reception of Lullian staged works.³³ Whether the Opéra cultivated symbiotic relationships with the proliferation of these printed farces or with parodies of current staged works shown in the Parisian fair theaters is a question that draws into its orbit the significance of obscure manuscript and printed sources for the reception history of French opera and the role performers and performance played in maintaining the circulation and popularity of staged works before the public eye.³⁴ The public for the performing arts at this time was organized as much around institutional as around marginal productions and texts, something that affected the manufacture and distribution of satires about the *filles de l'Opéra* in unpredictable ways.

Popularity

For all the critical focus on their danger and monstrosity, the *filles de l'Opéra* stand at the center of a separate paradox, not that their misadventures remain difficult to trace or that their successes as performers never quite outshined their poor standing in social circles, but that the institution of opera in Paris in the early eighteenth century was growing in prestige while its performers remained the subject of considerable critical disdain. The Opéra, in other words, was at odds with itself. Male and female performers were subject to censure, women for their association with sexual scandal and immorality and even some of the most popular leading men, particularly those who sang *haute-contre* roles, for the thin and forced sound of their voices.³⁵ There was a long

³³ See Herbert Schneider, *Die Rezeption der Opern Lullys im Frankreich des Ancien régime*, Mainzer Studien zur Musikwissenschaft 16 (Tutzing: Schneider, 1982), and idem, *Chronologisch-thematisches Verzeichnis sämtlicher Werke von Jean-Baptiste Lully (LWV)* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1981).

³⁴ On the relationship between the Parisian fair theaters and the Opéra, see Maurice Barthélemy, "L'opéra-comique des origines à la Querelle des Bouffons," in *L'Opéra-comique en France au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Philippe Vendrix, Collection Musique, Musicologie (Liège: Pierre Mardaga, 1992), 9–78.

³⁵ See Cyr, "On Performing 18th-Century *Haute-Contre* Roles," 295.

tradition of distaste for castrati.³⁶ As research by William Weber has shown, the Parisian public also took issue with the administration of the Opéra in these years, headed as it was by a number of amateurs who brought the bare minimum of expertise to the development and curation of its repertory.³⁷ One contemporary observer claimed that such directors *ne connaissent ni en poésie, ni en musique, ni en danse; ils ont pris l'Opéra comme une ferme dont ils veulent tirer le plus qu'ils pourront* ("know neither poetry, nor music, nor dance; they have taken the Opéra as a farm from which they want to harvest as much as they can").³⁸ At the same time the popularity of lyric tragedy, which had remained a mainstay in the repertoire since the seventeenth century, was giving way to new experiments in the genre that would not be called *opéra-ballet* with consistency and regularity until well after the middle of the eighteenth century.³⁹ The poet and playwright Louis de Cahusac (1706–1759) set forth a working definition that distinguished lyric tragedy as dramatic vastness from *opéra-ballet* as a series of striking miniatures.

L'Opéra imaginé par Quinault est une grande action suivie pendant le cours de cinq actes. C'est un tableau d'une composition vaste, tels que ceux de Raphaël et de Michel-Ange. Le spectacle trouvé par La Motte est un composé de plusieurs actes différents, qui représentent chacun une action mêlée de divertissements de chant et de danse. Ce sont de jolis Vateau des miniatures piquantes, qui exigent toute la précision du dessin, les graces du pinceau et tout le brillant du coloris.⁴⁰

The Opera imagined by Quinault is a great action followed during the course of five acts. It is the tableau of a vast composition, such as those of Raphael and Michelangelo. The spectacle discovered by La Motte is one composed of several different acts, which each represent an

³⁶ See Lionel Sawkins, "For and against the Order of Nature: Who Sang the Soprano?," *Early Music* 15/3 (1987), 320.

³⁷ See William Weber, "*La musique ancienne* in the Waning of the Ancien Régime," *The Journal of Modern History* 56/1 (1984), 62.

³⁸ See François-Henri-Joseph Castil-Blaze, *L'académie impériale de musique: Histoire littéraire, musicale, choréographique, pittoresque, morale, critique, facétieuse, politique et galante de ce théâtre de 1645 à 1855*, 2 vols. (Paris: Castil-Blaze, 1855), I, 169.

³⁹ See Charlton, *Opera in the Age of Rousseau: Music, Confrontation, Realism*, Cambridge Studies in Opera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 94.

⁴⁰ See Louis de Cahusac, *La Danse ancienne et moderne, ou Traité historique de la Danse*, 3 vols. (The Hague: Jean Neaulme, 1754), III, 108. On modern reappraisals of these distinctions, see James Anthony, "The French Opera-Ballet in the Early 18th Century: Problems of Definition and Classification," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 18/2 (1965), 197–206.

action blended with *divertissements* of singing and dance. From the delightful Watteau come these striking miniatures, which demand all the precision of drawings, all the graces of the brush and all the brilliance of color.

While the operatic genre itself was in a state of flux, the demand for skilled performers at the Opéra remained constant, making the *filles de l'Opéra* a vital part of the production of Parisian staged works even as writers struggled to regard these women as crucial to the dissemination and popularity of the operas they attended and scrutinized. There are exceptional cases in which some of these women were lauded yet subsequently not forgotten, notably that of the brazen and combative contralto Julie d'Aubigny, dite La Maupin (1670–1707), who was the subject of a novel of romance, intrigue, and biographical fabrication by Théophile Gautier (1811–1872).⁴¹ For too many others, fame was a part of their lives only in the early decades of the eighteenth century.

The women referenced in this study, the sopranos Catherine Nicole Le Maure (1704–1786) and Marie Pélissier (1707–1749) as well as the dancers La Camargo and Marie Sallé (1707–1756), rallied the elusive force that was just beginning to be regarded as public opinion in the years of their rise to prominence as Parisian performers. The emergence of public opinion in the eighteenth century is a phenomenon that has captured the attention of modern philosophers and sociologists, particularly Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas. Whereas Foucault regards the early modern development of public opinion as a discursive phenomenon linked to the coinage of the term and its association with the idea of an ultimate authority to which vehicles of power remained accountable, for Habermas public opinion amounts to the sociological phenomenon of public ideas debated by private individuals in a mixture of media and publicity that pervades domestic life and the workings of the state, constituting what he calls the public sphere.⁴² For Habermas this public sphere

⁴¹ See Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1834), and the related studies, Joséphine Van den Bossche, “*Mademoiselle de Maupin* ou l’incarnation du symbole,” Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1992, and Marlène Barsoum, *Théophile Gautier’s Mademoiselle de Maupin: Toward a Definition of the androgynous discourse*, Currents in comparative Romance languages and literatures 102 (New York: Lang, 2001). The principal biographical work on La Maupin remains Gabriel Letainturier-Fradin, *La Maupin (1670–1707): sa vie, ses duels, ses aventures* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1904).

⁴² See Foucault, *L’ordre du discours: leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), and Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit:*

manifests as a move away from the representational culture of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, in which the opulence of Versailles represented something that overwhelmed individuals beyond the point of critical reflection or resistance. As research by Lisa Graham has shown, one crucial aspect of the public sphere was its development in salons, museums, and academies, where it was to an extent free from absolutist and corporate constraints; in this schema individuals first learned to formulate opinions in the aesthetic realm, later transferring their critical perspective to the political arena.⁴³

Joan Landes has interrogated these notions, claiming the emergence of the public sphere in France was accompanied by a sharp gender differentiation that confined women to the domestic sphere particularly at the time of the Revolution, making the public sphere essentially and not just contingently masculine.⁴⁴ Erica Harth has echoed this sentiment, warning against the temptation to celebrate salon culture as a true liberation for women.⁴⁵ For Landes, the bourgeois public sphere that filled the vacuum left by the fall of the absolute monarchy was associated with gender conceptualizations Rousseau had made explicit earlier in the century, notions that were institutionalized in politics after the Revolution and construed as part of what she has called an elaborate defense against the power and public presence of women.⁴⁶ As research by Steven Kale has shown, central to nearly all attempts to explain the exclusion of women from public life in the Revolutionary era is the role the *Lettre à d'Alembert* (1758) played in shaping the growing

Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, Politica 4 (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962). See also Gabriel de Tarde, *L'opinion et la foule* (Paris: Alcan, 1901).

⁴³ See Lisa Jane Graham, *If the King Only Knew: Seditious Speech in the Reign of Louis XV* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 2000), 5.

⁴⁴ See Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 7.

⁴⁵ See Erica Harth, *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 24.

⁴⁶ See Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 203.

resentment of public women in the final decades of the ancien régime.⁴⁷ According to Sarah Maza, the charges of immodesty and corruption that Rousseau leveled at actresses extended to all women involved in the public life of the ancien régime as hostesses, salonists, and objects of desire.⁴⁸ Tracing the popularity and persistence of the *filles de l'Opéra* as public figures in the early eighteenth century demands a certain sensitivity to the ways in which gender has not been fully accounted for in theories of the origin of the public sphere or in histories of women, salons, and sociability. As research by Richard Scholar has shown, the dynamic between women in public life and their male and female detractors fueled a volatile social and political consciousness well before the Revolution, when the idea of the inclusivity of salons was a utopian exaggeration.⁴⁹

The codification of public opinion was not limited to sociological and philosophical inquiry in the twentieth century. As research by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann has shown, writers and philosophers from John Locke (1632–1704) and David Hume (1711–1776) to Rousseau debated topics from the concept of the climate of opinion to the law of reputation and public opinion, always with an emphasis on the dimension of social pressure and the belief that governing bodies rested on public opinion.⁵⁰ Decades earlier the author and librettist Antoine Houdar de La Motte (1672–1731) had described public opinion with specific reference to literature and literary criticism.⁵¹ As research by DeJean has shown, one of the earliest recorded instances of the term in French is among the writings of Jean-François Paul de Gondi (1613–1679), who spoke of *ces fânetomes d'infamie que*

⁴⁷ See Steven Kale, “Women, the Public Sphere, and the Persistence of Salons,” *French Historical Studies* 25/1 (2002), 130. See also Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, ed. Marc Buffat, Collection Garnier Flammarion (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), 96.

⁴⁸ See Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France*, Studies on the History of Society and Culture 18 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 168.

⁴⁹ See Richard Scholar, *The Je-ne-sais-quoi in Early Modern Europe: Encounters with a Certain Something* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 90.

⁵⁰ See Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, “Public Opinion and the Classical Tradition: A Re-evaluation,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 43/2 (1979), 143.

⁵¹ See Antoine Houdar de La Motte, *Réflexions sur la critique*, 2de éd., corr. & augm. (Paris: Grégoire Du Puis, 1716), 114.

l'opinion publique a formez pour éprouvanter les ames du vulgaire (“these infamous phantoms that public opinion has generated to frighten vulgar souls”) and thus provided evidence that the term itself and the concept it signified existed almost a full century earlier than writers like Habermas have acknowledged.⁵² The Jesuit author and rhetorician René Rapin (1621–1687) likewise spoke of public opinion in the context of dramatic theory and the believability of characters in the theater, as when he declared that *le merveilleux est tout ce qui est contre le cours ordinaire de la nature* (“the marvelous is everything contrary to the normal order of nature”) and *le vray-semblable est tout ce qui est conforme à l'opinion du public* (“the probable is all that conforms to public opinion”).⁵³ In the last two decades of the eighteenth century the poet and dramatist Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740–1814) recorded the increasing prominence of public opinion with great interest.

Depuis trente ans seulement, il s'est fait une grande & importante révolution dans nos idées. L'opinion publique a aujourd'hui en Europe une force prépondérante, à laquelle on ne résiste pas: ainsi, en estimant le progrès des lumieres & le changement qu'elles doivent enfanter, il est permis d'espérer qu'elles apporteront au monde le plus grand bien, & que les tyrans de toute espece frémiront devant ce cri universel qui retentit & se prolonge pour remplir & éveiller l'Europe.⁵⁴

In only thirty years, a great & important revolution has taken place in our ideas. Public opinion now has, in Europe, a preponderant power one cannot resist: thus in estimating the progress of enlightenment & the change it must produce, one can hope that it will bring the greatest good to the world & that tyrants of all kinds will tremble before the universal cry that reverberates through & fills & awakens Europe.

As Darnton has written, public opinion was an emergent phenomenon in the French eighteenth century and yet like many of the *filles de l'Opéra*, it remains elusive today. At times the workings of public opinion and the public sphere are clear in historical documents, where they are even mentioned by name by the likes of Mercier, and at times these phenomena are obscured by social and political affairs, from the *galant* yet ambiguous rhetoric of salon culture to the unpredictable,

⁵² See Jean-François Paul de Gondî, *La conjuration du comte Jean-Louis de Fiesque* (Cologne: n.p. 1665), 67. See also DeJean, *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 9.

⁵³ See René Rapin, *REFLEXIONS SUR LA POETIQUE DE CE TEMPS, ET SUR LES OUVRAGES DES POETES ANCIENS & modernes*, 2de éd. (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1675), 34.

⁵⁴ See Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, nouv. éd., 8 vols. (Amsterdam: n.p., 1782), II, 491.

polarizing language that swirled around the French monarch.⁵⁵ It remains a challenge to track the transformation involved in what Chartier has described as the rise of a new political culture in which the passive spectators of baroque theater were gradually replaced by an active public of critical readers and thinkers.⁵⁶

Darnton has resolved in his recent historical studies not to define public opinion in the manner of Foucault and Habermas but to follow it through the streets of Paris, tracking social and political messages through the media of their time, the scraps of paper and couplets of verse that became the likes of the *Chansonnier Maurepas*.⁵⁷ I have followed much the same course of action in constructing a new reception history of the *filles de l'Opéra*. Since these women cannot speak for themselves and have not left documentary autobiographical accounts or detailed correspondence, except in one or two cases, the path to the reconstruction of their lives and their performances is the very path of the scraps of paper and rhymed verse about them that circulated at court and in the streets of Paris.⁵⁸ This is not to suggest that the reception history of the *filles de l'Opéra* can be pieced together as easily as from the compilation of a series of old, scribbled verses. I would like to suggest instead that these women were the subject of satirical speech and writing at a turbulent time in French musical thought, when the Opéra came face to face with questions about the poetics

⁵⁵ See Darnton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2010), 12. See also Jeffrey Ravel, *The Contested Parterre: Public Theater and French Political Culture, 1680–1791* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 5. On the influence of the hostesses and participants in Parisian salons and the significance of the *galant* aesthetic to a repertory of French *airs* and song texts in an earlier context, see Catherine Gordon-Seifert, *Music and the Language of Love: Seventeenth-Century French Airs* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 25.

⁵⁶ See Chartier, *Les origines culturelles de la Révolution française* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 48.

⁵⁷ See Darnton, *Poetry and the Police*, 13, idem, “An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” *The American Historical Review* 105/1 (2000), 25, and idem, “Public Opinion and Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” in *Opinion*, ed. Peter-Eckhard Knabe, *Concepts et symboles du dix-huitième siècle européen* (Berlin: Spitz, 2000), 166.

⁵⁸ On the considerable correspondence of the soprano Sophie Arnould (1740–1802), portions of which appear in Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *Sophie Arnould d'après sa correspondance et ses mémoires inédits* (Paris: Charpentier, 1885), see Albéric Deville, *Arnoldiana: ou Sophie Arnould et ses contemporains; Recueil choisi d'Anecdotes piquantes, de Réparties et de bon Mots de Mlle Arnould* (Paris: Gérard, 1813).

of staged works, the relationship between texts and their musical settings, and the complex culture of celebrity and excoriation into which popular performers were swept up. The material in historical manuscript collections sheds light on the behavior of the *filles de l'Opéra* in and outside of the theater as well as on aesthetic and political anxieties percolating below the surface of contemporary operatic practice.

Flux

The *filles de l'Opéra* were considered not just polarizing social and sexual figures but compelling performers in their own right, capable of influencing patrons in the theater and inspiring generic change in French opera, which was moving from a repertory of lyric tragedy and the *tragédie en machines* or *pièce à machines*, from which it drew significant inspiration in the seventeenth century, toward new developments in *opéra-ballet*, a genre Georgia Cowart has described as among the most representative of the aristocratic Parisian public sphere, even though Rebekah Ahrendt has recently called into question the assumption that lyric tragedy or lighter genres like the *opéra-ballet* should be considered exclusively courtly or even exclusively French.⁵⁹ As research by Victoria Johnson has shown, in the midst of definitions of Lullian opera as lavishness in the seventeenth century, the grammarian Pierre Richelet (1626–1698) referred to the costumes and astonishing machinery of lyric tragedy, at the same time referencing earlier works of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, dit Molière (1622–1673) as well as elements of the *tragédie en machines* popular at the théâtre du Marais on the rue Vieille du Temple on the right bank, repertories that combined almost all of the elements of dance, decoration, and machinery that would also contribute to the dense spectacle of lyric tragedy.⁶⁰ As Richard Taruskin has pointed out, it was significant that Corneille admitted

⁵⁹ See Georgia Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV & the Politics of Spectacle* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), xxiii. See also Rebekah Ahrendt, “A Second Refuge: French Opera and the Huguenot Migration, c. 1680–c. 1710,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011, 3.

⁶⁰ See Victoria Johnson, *Backstage at the Revolution: How the Royal Paris Opera Survived the End of the Old Regime* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 147. See also Pierre Richelet, *DICTIONNAIRE FRANÇOIS, CONTENANT LES MOTS ET LES CHOSES, PLUSIEURS NOUVELLES REMARQUES SUR LA LANGUE FRANÇOISE: Ses Expressions Propres, Figurées & Burlesques, la Prononciation des Mots les plus difficiles, le Genre des Noms, le Régime des Verbes:*

music only into the *pièce à machines*, a play that adulterated its dramatic seriousness for the sake of spectacle in the form of flying machines on which deities descended or winged chariots took off.⁶¹ These mechanical feats had become so ingrained in cultural and aesthetic consciousness that any genre that dared to compete with Lullian lyric tragedy or the *tragédie en machines* needed to be able to rival the sheer force of visual spectacle inherent in these works. The answer, it would seem, lay in the striking visual appeal of dance. The *opéra-ballet*, which more heavily privileged dance and *divertissements*, saw such significant growth in popularity in the first two decades of the eighteenth century that the scholar and playwright Nicolas Boindin (1676–1751) was moved to write *Car la danse est, comme vous sçavez, l'ame d'un Ballet, & moins il est chargé de paroles, plus il y a d'apparence qu'il réussira* (“Because dance is, as you know, the soul of a ballet, & the less charged *opéra-ballet* is with words, the more there is of an appearance that it will succeed”).⁶² The increasing prominence of *opéra-ballet* as the century progressed did not obscure the talents of dancers and singers; instead it foregrounded their innovations in choreography and technique, which became the subject of critical acclaim as well as a measure of suspicion.

In the opera house as in spoken theater in the classical tradition, the French were quick to malign novelty and artifice especially among women, seeing in such choreographic and dramaturgical innovations little more than pretense and the degradation of traditional values like modesty, decorum, and restraint. The *filles de l'Opéra* were not immune to condemnation, as Pélissier was taken to task for introducing feints and artifice into her theatrical work while Le Maure won praise for avoiding these tricks. In the realm of dance, commentators drew similar comparisons between the effortful choreographic style of La Camargo and the simpler, more serene steps of Sallé. The celebration or derision of these women would seem to suggest that their

Avec Les Termes les plus communs des Arts & des Sciences: LE TOUT TIRÉ DE L'USAGE ET DES BONS AUTEURS DE LA LANGUE FRANÇOISE, 2 vols. (Geneva: Jean Herman Widerhold, 1680).

⁶¹ See Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, The Oxford History of Western Music 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 87.

⁶² See Nicolas Boindin, *Lettres historiques sur tous les spectacles de Paris*, 2 vols. (Paris: Pierre Prault, 1719), II, 129.

innovations as well as their questionable behavior beyond the confines of the Opéra drew attention for the most real and visceral reasons, ranging from expressions of horror over the public health threat these women posed to disgust at their variously bold, immodest, even masculine approaches to performance as well as their ridicule of male members of the audience in the theater.⁶³ Moved by the striking pantomimes and even more striking cultural symbolism of the performers they disdained and idolized, commentators were convinced they confronted revolutionary theatricality among the *filles de l'Opéra*; members of the audience made their voices and criticisms heard in the theater parterre just as much as in the satires and epigrams that fill the manuscript collections of Maurepas and Tralage.

At the heart of the clamor over the *filles de l'Opéra* was a considerable amount of critical turmoil surrounding the gradual move from a repertory of lyric tragedy to *opéra-ballet* and *ballet héroïque* at the Opéra. These new genres, considerably lighter, less didactic, and more frivolous than the solemn lyric tragedy, were replete with danced *divertissements* and pantomime that drew fire from conservative writers for their focus on flashy physical display; they nevertheless manifested what one later writer has described as a *changement de goût* and a *nouvelle orientation des esprits*, a radical change in taste and a new orientation of souls among the French public.⁶⁴ Lullian lyric tragedy, while it had also foregrounded danced *divertissements*, was held up as a generic example in which livret poetry was paramount, in which rhyme and cadence were not obscured by an overabundance of musical complexity or a disproportionate reliance on the visual spectacle of dance; yet even Lully did not entirely escape critical censure for some of the structural flaws inherent in the operatic genre. Deeply embedded in the reception of lyric tragedy in the last decades of the

⁶³ See *Le Gazetier cuirassé, ou anecdotes scandaleuses de la Cour de France* (London: n.p., 1777), 126, *Le Gazette noir par un homme qui n'est pas blanc, ou Oeuvres posthumes du Gazetier cuirassé* (London: n.p., 1784), 197, and the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses; Années 1705 à 1710. Vol.^e XXIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12644, folio 48.

⁶⁴ See Barthélemy, *André Campra: sa vie et son oeuvre (1660–1744)*, *Vie musicale en France sous les rois Bourbons* (Paris: Picard, 1957), 46.

seventeenth century were anxieties about contemporary aesthetic and social changes, including the gradual demise of what Buford Norman has called the heroic dramaturgical ideal, coupled with the rise of absolutism, capitalism, and the increasing influence of women as laborers, authors, and socialites.⁶⁵ These anxieties mingled with even older concerns about the primacy of the French language and the transformations it underwent when spoken tragedy evolved not altogether seamlessly into the *tragédie en musique*.⁶⁶ A number of writers from the soldier and essayist Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, seigneur de Saint-Évremond (1613–1703) to the abbé Gabriel Bonnot de Mably (1709–1785) and Toussaint Rémond de Saint-Mard (1682–1757), advocating operatic reform, decried the imbalanced relationship between music and poetry in opera, treating the livrets of Philippe Quinault (1635–1688) as ideal texts to be upheld and respected, never obscured.⁶⁷ Even as changing public tastes threatened the demise of lyric tragedy well before the middle of the eighteenth century, it remained what was considered to be the superior operatic genre, and as research by James Anthony has shown, composers received more money for the production of lyric tragedies than for works in other genres.⁶⁸

Writers and audiences alike admired lyric tragedy as genre, viewing it as representative of French culture, an encapsulation of what Diana Reese has called the universally human at the

⁶⁵ See Buford Norman, *Touched by the Graces: The libretti of Philippe Quinault in the context of French Classicism* (Birmingham: Summa, 2001), 5.

⁶⁶ On the realignment of the boundaries separating lyric tragedy from spoken tragedy, and on reactions to the former conceived as a case of simply adding music to the latter, see Dill, *Monstrous Opera*, 38, Catherine Kintzler, “De la Pastorale à la Tragédie lyrique: quelques éléments d’un système poétique,” *Revue de musicologie* 72/1 (1986), 80, and idem, *Jean-Philippe Rameau: splendeur et naufrage de l’esthétique du plaisir à l’âge classique* (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1983), 75.

⁶⁷ See Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, seigneur de Saint-Évremond, “Sur les opéras,” in *Oeuvres meslées*, 12 vols. (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1684), XI, 87. See also Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, *Lettres à madame la marquise de P... sur l’opéra* (Paris: Didot, 1741), and Toussaint Rémond de Saint-Mard, *Réflexions sur l’opéra* (The Hague: Jean Neaulme, 1741).

⁶⁸ See James Anthony, *French Baroque Music from Beaujoyeulx to Rameau*, rev. ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 117.

threshold of culture.⁶⁹ In demarcating the line between contemporary literary culture and its historical antecedents, tragedy came to be regarded over the course of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century as both addressing this distinction and performing it on stage.⁷⁰ When the genre of the *tragédie en musique* was faced with mounting production costs and threatened by the popularity of new musical styles in the early eighteenth century, audiences mourned its decline. As research by Robert Isherwood has shown, the Opéra from which Lully had made a fortune was over 500,000 *livres* in debt by the middle of the eighteenth century, at which time the Parisian fair theaters were flourishing at its expense.⁷¹ As research by Charles Dill has shown, the public was paradoxically responsible for this debt and decline, having not supported the production of new lyric tragedies through attendance at the Opéra even as they did support works of *opéra-ballet* in this manner.⁷² At the same time it is important to remember that it was not the inherent aesthetic and cultural value of Lullian lyric tragedy that was in question, but its practical ability to survive. Royal legislation enacted in the second decade of the eighteenth century, contemporaneously with the foundation of the Opéra-Comique, sought to stabilize the *tragédie en musique* by setting up repertorial arrangements at the Opéra, where a newly composed lyric tragedy would open each winter season in late October as well as each summer season, with one older, Lullian lyric tragedy kept on hand to replace a new work in the event of diminished receipts.⁷³ While the *opéra-ballet* solved some of the problems the Opéra had in aspiring to mount a genre that was truly popular with the public, it could not replace the cultural significance of lyric tragedy, and the resulting tension

⁶⁹ See Diana Reese, *Reproducing Enlightenment: Paradoxes in the Life of the Body Politic: Literature and Philosophy around 1800*, Interdisciplinary German cultural studies 5 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 116.

⁷⁰ See Peter Szondi, *Versuch über das Tragische* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1961), 58.

⁷¹ See Robert Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 37.

⁷² See Dill, "The Reception of Rameau's *Castor et Pollux* in 1737 and 1754," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1989, 296.

⁷³ See Jacques-Bernard Durey de Noinville, *Histoire du théâtre de l'Académie royale de musique en France, depuis son établissement jusqu'à présent*, 2de éd. (Paris: Duchesne, 1757), 127.

between opera as popularity and opera as solemn and significant cultural symbol would go on to provide much of the critical context for the reception of the staged works of Rameau.

The *filles de l'Opéra* who sang and danced in works of *opéra-ballet*, even as they continued to perform in revivals of Lullian lyric tragedy, confronted a body of critics and patrons who worried ceaselessly about the generic changes these performers supported and inspired at the Opéra, where staged works were increasingly becoming affairs of the heart instead of the mind, of the alluring movement of an arm or leg instead of the eloquence of sung poetry, where they were, in effect, actualizing a transformation Blair Hoxby has attributed to early modern tragedy in general, which he has called a theatrical rather than a poetic art.⁷⁴ This tension between tragedy as theatrical transport and tragedy as literary didacticism was at the center of debates about the relationship between spoken tragedy and the *tragédie en musique* early in the eighteenth century, when lyric tragedy, although it stemmed from the same aesthetic doctrine as its spoken counterpart, was a separate genre in its own right, something that even contemporary audiences did not completely understand. As Cynthia Verba has pointed out, lyric tragedy was in fact an almost complete inversion of spoken tragedy in its goals and means; where spoken tragedy was serious and edifying, lyric tragedy was a *divertissement*, an entertainment, the aim of which was to enchant the spectator.⁷⁵

These concerns about the integrity of the French operatic genre, which since its inception had been revered as a literary medium rather than a musical or visual one, percolated below the surface of a vibrant critical culture that mingled the rhetoric of monstrosity with debates about how the *filles de l'Opéra* on stage problematized aesthetic and epistemological distinctions between what was perceived as natural, eloquent, and graceful and what was considered unnatural, belabored, and

⁷⁴ See Blair Hoxby, "What was Tragedy? The World we have Lost, 1550–1795," *Comparative Literature* 64/1 (2012), 19.

⁷⁵ See Cynthia Verba, "*Jean-Philippe Rameau: splendeur et naufrage de l'esthétique du plaisir à l'âge classique* by Catherine Kintzler," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38/1 (1985), 171.

artificial.⁷⁶ These complex, forceful distinctions were rooted in several historical intellectual frameworks that came to bear on the criticism of the arts more broadly and on attendant written and spoken assessments of musical and theatrical performers.

Epistemology

The first of these intellectual frameworks concerned the progressive autonomy of the plastic and performing arts in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The effects of the artistic experience on listeners and viewers began to be filtered less through the lens of mimesis, or the understanding of everything from painted portraits to poetry to performance in light of how it mimicked or represented more perfect models in nature, than through the lens of aesthetics, or the appreciation of the arts through judgments based on sentiment, sensibility, and taste. Aristotelian philosophy, from which French thought at this time had inherited the concepts of *ratio*, or the innate governing faculty of reason, and catharsis, by which individuals were purged or purified of emotions through the experience of feelings of intense pity and fear in tragic theater, became a means of understanding spoken tragedy and musical performance as direct imitations of the emotions through utterance and song.⁷⁷ It is nevertheless important to remember that in the context of natural philosophy, Aristotle had pursued questions of how, what, from what, and why phenomena must be as they evidently are, situating knowledge in the perceptions of the senses.⁷⁸ As research by Michael Moriarty has shown, in the Aristotelian perspective nothing comes into the mind that does not originate in and through the senses, an axiom that would trouble subsequent rationalist thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷⁹ In the context of Cartesian philosophy, which advocated

⁷⁶ See Étienne Gros, *Philippe Quinault: sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Édouard Champion, 1926), 715.

⁷⁷ On pleasure, understanding, and emotion in Aristotelian aesthetics, see Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). On catharsis, see Dana LaCourse Munteanu, *Tragic Pathos: Pity and Fear in Greek Philosophy and Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁷⁸ See Ian Maclean, *Logic, Signs and Nature in the Renaissance: The Case of Learned Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 117.

⁷⁹ See Michael Moriarty, *Early Modern French Thought: The Age of Suspicion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 95.

the imitation and expression of the passions in a strictly rational manner, an Aristotelian mimetic approach to the performing arts nevertheless thrived in French literary and linguistic discourse, particularly in the writings of Boileau, who advocated simplicity, propriety, allegiance to the ancient unities of time, place, and action, and *vraisemblance*, variously translated as verisimilitude or probability, in the creation and appreciation of French spoken tragedy.⁸⁰ As research by Cowart has shown, lyric tragedy in these decades drew less on violent, cathartic portrayals of passionate emotion than on a considerably more mild French pastoral tradition with its own *galant* literary parallels.⁸¹ In this sense early lyric tragedy was never destined to conform to the model of ideal tragedy upheld by Boileau, who famously disdained the operatic genre in satires at the end of the seventeenth century.⁸² With the proliferation of the *galant* aesthetic in salon conversation, letter writing, poetry, dilettantism, and the danced *divertissements* at the heart of Lullian lyric tragedy, all of which privileged the pleasures of sensation rather than reason, numerous points of tension arose between a more rigid Aristotelian mimetic framework and an emergent system of aesthetic judgment based on the senses and in particular a new conception of *bon goût* or good taste in the evaluation of the arts.⁸³ In many respects the interrogation of mimesis sprang from changes in the constitution of the

⁸⁰ See Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *L'art poétique de Boileau* (Paris: Delalain, 1815). Boileau originally published his seminal reflections on poetry along with his tract on notions of the sublime from antiquity, together with other writings in the *Oeuvres diverses du sieur D***: avec le Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours, traduit du grec de Longin* (Paris: Denys Thierry, 1674).

⁸¹ See *French Musical Thought, 1600–1800*, ed. Georgia Cowart, Studies in Music 105 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 2.

⁸² See Boileau, *Oeuvres complètes de Boileau*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1867), I, 92.

⁸³ On the critical concept of taste in early modern France, see Rémy Saisselin, *Taste in Eighteenth-Century France: Critical Reflections of the Origins of Aesthetics, or an Apology for Amateurs* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), and Moriarty, *Taste and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). On the use of *goût* in its broadest sense in French musical aesthetics, as a marker of the popularity of specific genres, see Lionel de La Laurencie, *Le goût musical en France* (Paris: Joanin, 1905), and Georges Snyders, *Le goût musical en France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Vrin, 1968). On contrasting uses of *goût* in critical discourse later in the eighteenth century, when writers used the damning label of bad taste or *mauvais goût* to assert their authority over others in order to shape the French literary canon in their own image, see Jennifer Tsien, *The Bad Taste of Others: Judging Literary Value in Eighteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). On the *galant* aesthetic and

critical public for the performing arts, ranging from the emergence of painting as an amateur art to the feminization of spectators in the theater, something Boileau had considered a particularly troubling phenomenon, and finally from the surplus of *honnêtes hommes* and *honnêtes femmes*, who cultivated considerable enthusiasm for writing and reading.

This tension between mimesis and sensibility led to a conceptual shift away from Cartesian and Aristotelian *ratio* in the middle of the eighteenth century toward a new epistemology that celebrated not just representation but the medium of such representation, the technical and expressive means by which poets and performers brought language, music, and gesture to bear on the transmission of meaning in rhymed verse or staged works. Aware of philosophical trends in England, where Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and Locke radically departed from Cartesian thought by asserting that sensory experiences, rather than innate ideas, constituted the basis of human knowledge and judgment, a number of continental writers developed an understanding of the plastic and performing arts that relied more than ever before on *sensibilité*, the appreciation of beauty, and the cultivation of *goût* or taste as alternatives to the primacy of reason.⁸⁴ We see this new aesthetic sensibility emerge in the writings of the Swiss theologian and philosopher Jean-Pierre de Crousaz (1663–1750) and the abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos (1670–1742).⁸⁵ It blossoms more fully in the work of the Jesuit mathematician and philosopher Yves-Marie André (1675–1764) and the abbé Charles Batteux (1713–1780).⁸⁶ As research by Dill has shown, among the more innovative aspects of their

libertinage, see Alain Viala, *La France galante: essai historique sur une catégorie culturelle, de ses origines jusqu'à la Révolution*, Littéraires (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2008), 149.

⁸⁴ On the rejection of Cartesian philosophy in England, see Samantha Frost, *Lessons from a Materialist Thinker: Hobbesian Reflections on Ethics and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), and Peter Anstey, *John Locke and Natural Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸⁵ See Jean-Pierre de Crousaz, *Traité du beau* (Amsterdam: François l'Honoré, 1715), and Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, nouv. éd., 3 vols. (Paris: Pierre-Jean Mariette, 1733).

⁸⁶ See Yves-Marie André, *Essai sur le beau, où l'on examine en quoi consiste précisément le beau dans le physique, dans le moral, dans les ouvrages d'esprit, & dans la musique* (Paris: Guérin, 1741), and Charles Batteux, *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe*, nouv. éd. (Paris: Durand, 1747). On the development of an aesthetic vocabulary for musical beauty in the first half of the French

writings was the introduction of notions of sentiment and genius into an epistemological framework in which artistic beauty was not just a quality to appreciate but an element that conformed to rational standards; their exploration of music as more than a mathematical or pedagogical exercise signaled profound changes in aesthetic and philosophical thought.⁸⁷ Brewster Rogerson has described these writers, who flourished after Boileau yet before the critical reign of Diderot and the *encyclopédistes*, as an esoteric tribe lodged in French intellectual history at a trying time, when meditations on the nature of beauty and the reception of the arts variously assimilated and challenged the legacy of Cartesian rationalism.⁸⁸ As Cowart has written, with the increasing acceptance of the senses as criteria for aesthetic judgment came the notion that taste was relative, not universal as it had been for Boileau.⁸⁹ At the same time the concept of taste continued to be driven by the model of the *honnête homme* of Parisian salon culture, the gentleman who espoused a sixth sense of *bon goût* that was socially and historically determined and thus idiosyncratic.⁹⁰ What a number of modern writers have referred to as the paradox or enigma of taste in these years stemmed from what Don Fader has described as a tension between philosophical or academic traditions of criticism and the social world of the aristocracy in which nobility, sentiment, and feeling were most prized.⁹¹ The critical emphasis on the pathetic or sensual effects of art also gave way to

eighteenth century, see Cowart, *The Origins of Modern Musical Criticism: French and Italian Music, 1600–1750*, Studies in Musicology 38 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), and Dill, “French Theories of Beauty and the Aesthetics of Music 1700–1750,” M.Mus. thesis, University of North Texas, 1982.

⁸⁷ See Dill, “French Theories of Beauty and the Aesthetics of Music 1700–1750,” 113.

⁸⁸ See Brewster Rogerson, “The Art of Painting the Passions,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14/1 (1953), 81. On the critical reconciliation of beauty and its appreciation with influences from the philosophy of René Descartes (1596–1650), see Dill, “Music, Beauty, and the Paradox of Rationalism,” in *French Musical Thought, 1600–1800*, 197–210.

⁸⁹ See *French Musical Thought, 1600–1800*, 4.

⁹⁰ See Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, I, 262.

⁹¹ See Don Fader, “The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic: Taste, Rhetoric, and *Politesse* in the 17th-Century French Reception of Italian Music,” *The Journal of Musicology* 20/1 (2003), 5. See also Maria Rika Maniates, “Sonate, que me veux-tu?: The Enigma of French Musical Aesthetics in the

the idea that the appreciation of beauty depended on individual sensibility and to a corresponding sense that taste was relative, although perhaps not as unambiguously as Cowart has suggested.

The intellectual reaction against Cartesianism was not without consequences for evaluations of musical performance. As critical attention shifted to *exécution* or implementation, to the medium of the representation rather than mimesis itself, models of ideal performance at play in French rhetoric since the middle of the seventeenth century, since before what we now recognize as the advent of early modern French opera, came to bear on the critical discourse that swirled around the *filles de l'Opéra* into the eighteenth century. Among the variety of critical perspectives on performance, many of which could easily be confused and conflated, three distinct models emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century. A rhetorical model of performance based on *bienséance*, or the notion of theatrical decorum and propriety derived from ideals in ancient tragic theater, gave way to a second model of performance as civility, in which the actor or singer aspired to a certain invisibility before his or her audience, presenting himself or herself as wholly absorbed in the experience of interpreting and transmitting the poetic text or sung performance, always espousing naturalness and truth and concealing the artifice involved in the portrayal of a theatrical persona. As research by Gerry McCarthy has shown, *bienséance* or propriety, together with *agrément*, the pleasing appearance of a person or performer, linked the inner coherence of the performance itself with the moral and aesthetic expectations of the outside world.⁹² While conventions of *bienséance interne* dictated that characters act in accordance with their rank and nature, *bienséance externe* regulated their decorum. These two decidedly classical perspectives on performance, driven by ideals of the actor or artist as restrained and wholly engrossed in his or her function as an artistic vessel or medium, came face to face with a third, baroque model of performance in which the increasing autonomy accorded to the arts themselves trickled down to those, so to speak, in the trenches, to the poet at his writing desk and the actress declaiming her lines on stage. An increased focus on

Eighteenth Century,” *Current Musicology* 9 (1969), 118, and Dill, “Music, Beauty, and the Paradox of Rationalism,” 201.

⁹² See Gerry McCarthy, *The Theatres of Molière* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 192.

physiological and mechanical aspects of performance led to a surge in the popularity and visibility of technique, effort, artifice or artificiality, and *emphase* as elements of fascination and disdain in French critical discourse.⁹³

This third, baroque model of performance emerged together with concepts of performance as civility to form the basis of an expressive paradigm that the art historian Michael Fried has described in the context of French painting after the middle of the eighteenth century, a paradigm that in some respects also existed within discourses on the mechanics of musical performance. By exposing the persistence of painted figures whose absorption in their activities seems to advance the fictional notion that their beholders do not exist, and the emergence of a shift away from absorption and toward the celebration of action and expression, Fried has revealed a tension between the aesthetics of absorption and theatricality that has resonances decades earlier in the century, when writers debated the ideals they saw reflected in the *filles de l'Opéra* on stage, manifestations of performance as possession, on one hand, and effacement, on the other. At the heart of the dynamic between absorption and theatricality is the work the artist carries out to nuance the paradoxical relationship between painting and beholder, or in the theater, between the performer and his or her audience. This involves finding a way to negate or neutralize the presence of the beholder, to establish the fiction that nobody stands before the painting or the performance. As Fried has explained, the paradox at work here is that only if this fiction of absence is accomplished can the beholder be stopped and held precisely there.⁹⁴ The utter captivation and enchantment of the beholder, or the audience before the performer, is at the heart of the present study, which investigates the reactions of audience members to the *filles de l'Opéra* in the parterre and loges of

⁹³ See Jean Rousset, *La littérature de l'âge baroque en France: Circé et le paon* (Paris: José Corti, 1953), 249, and Claude-Gilbert Dubois, *Le Baroque: profondeurs de l'apparence* (Paris: Larousse, 1973), 12.

⁹⁴ See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 108.

the theater as well as the transformations that took place when these reactions were fashioned into rhymed verse and satires that circulated at court in Versailles and in the streets of Paris.⁹⁵

Summary

The impetus for the present study was a curiosity about theatrical criticism in Paris in the early decades of the eighteenth century, when women were scrutinized for their performances of great tragic roles and when musical performance itself was beginning to gain something of the cultural and philosophical significance we attribute to it today.⁹⁶ Performance in these years was increasingly recognized as a phenomenon in which technique was paramount, in which the concealment of the effort that went into playing and singing and the ability to make execution seem easy and natural amounted to the success of a particular performance.⁹⁷ These decades are also notable for what they reveal about ongoing tensions between music and language. During the first half of the French eighteenth century no stable critical or analytical language existed for the discussion of opera, even as the genre itself remained a lynchpin of cultural and aesthetic

⁹⁵ On the seating areas in the Palais-Royal, their price differences, and the social hierarchy of various spectators, see John Lough, *Paris Theatre Audiences in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 108, and Alan Sikes, *Representation and Identity from Versailles to the Present: The Performing Subject*, Palgrave Studies in Theatre and Performance History (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 45. On the social composition of the parterre at the Opéra and the Comédie-Française, see Henri Lagrave, *Le théâtre et le public à Paris de 1715 à 1750* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972), 207–258, and Ravel, *The Contested Parterre*, 16.

⁹⁶ See Carol MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music in Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 357.

⁹⁷ On the concealment of effort and the avoidance of expressive extremes in rhetoric, see Denis Diderot, *Salons*, ed. Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), III, 148, and Friedrich Melchior Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique, et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal etc.*, ed. Maurice Tourneux, 16 vols. (Paris: Garnier frères, 1877–1882), III, 317. On negative aspects of obvious strain in musical performance, see Johann George Tromlitz, *Ausführlicher und gründlicher Unterricht die Flöte zu spielen* (Leipzig: Adam Friedrich Böhme, 1791), 8, Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule, oder Anweisung zum Klavierspielen für Lehrer und Lerende* (Leipzig: Schwickert, 1789), and Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris: Dunod, 1994), 712. On the impact of French aesthetic theories in Germany, see Bellamy Hosler, *Changing Aesthetic Views of Instrumental Music in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, Studies in Musicology 42 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), 31–68.

consciousness.⁹⁸ When writers in the middle of the century in the wake of Rousseau and a number of other polemical voices in the *querelle des bouffons* adopted Italian concepts and expressions for the discussion of French music, they forced this new terminology into service in what Dill has called a tenuous compromise.⁹⁹ They borrowed a foreign discourse instead of developing a native one, and in the process they referenced concepts not only alien to the French language but from well beyond the domain of the strictly musical, whether they spoke of the heresies of Jansenism, the sexual health of the *filles de l'Opéra*, or the political influence of those who sang songs on the pont Neuf, that nexus of commerce, street theater, renegade dentistry, and prostitution that Colin Jones has called the Eiffel tower of the ancien régime, a site that also lent its name to the *pont-neufs* composed on popular tunes and sold in inexpensive prints.¹⁰⁰ Indeed the culture of gossip, or what we might even call information commerce, was celebrated in the seventeenth century by the poet Jean Loret (1600–1665) in a verse that singled out the pont Neuf as an important site of the transmission of news and vignettes.

On dit encor par-cy, par-là,	People say things here and there,
Les uns cecy, d'autres cela;	Some say this, others that;
Les nouvelles sont assez drues	The news is plentiful
Sur le Pont-Neuf et dans les rues;	On the pont Neuf and in the streets;
On entend divers bruits courans	We hear sundry rumors about
Du Roy, de la Reine et des grands. ¹⁰¹	The King, the Queen, and nobles.

⁹⁸ See Belinda Cannone, *Philosophies de la musique, 1752–1789*, Théorie et critique à l'âge classique 4 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1990), 170.

⁹⁹ See Downing Thomas and Charles Dill, “Disciplines, Interdisciplinarity, and Cultural Studies: A Dialogue on Music’s Place,” in *Cultural Studies 1: A State of the Question*, ed. David Lee Rubin and Julia Douthwaite, EMF: Studies in Early Modern France 6 (Charlottesville: Rockwood Press, 2000), 36.

¹⁰⁰ See Colin Jones, *Paris: The Biography of a City* (New York: Viking, 2004), 136, idem, “Pulling Teeth in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” *Past and Present* 166 (2000), 103, Marc Gagné and Monique Poulin, *Chantons la chanson: enregistrements, transcriptions et commentaires de chansons et de pièces instrumentales*, Ethnologie de l’Amérique française (Quebec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 1985), ix, and Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy*, 63.

¹⁰¹ See Jean Loret, *La Muze historique, ou Recueil des lettres en vers contenant les nouvelles du temps : écrites à Son Altesse Mademoiselle de Longueville, depuis duchesse de Nemours*, nouv. éd., ed. Jules Ravenel and Edouard de La Pelouze, 4 vols. (Paris: Pierre Jannet, 1857), I, 235.

Research by Stéphane Van Damme has reinforced these observations, describing the most popular bridges in Paris in these years as *les lieux privilégiés de la diffusion* or the privileged sites of the dissemination of canards and conversation.¹⁰²

When musical discourse referenced elements from well beyond the sphere of performance or composition, it was not merely a nod to the power of political culture or to the spread of gossip; it fueled an evolving discussion about what constituted transgressive behavior with respect to French music and its performance. At the same time such references fed into the widespread and ancient distrust of music as a bearer of formal meaning and into attendant concerns that music was an irrational or effeminate force that had serious consequences for public thought and behavior, particularly when it presented itself as entertainment or diversion. The scholar and translator Anne Dacier (1651–1720) spoke for a number of commentators before and after her time when she complained of a pervasive sensual impulse in French theater that gave rise to *ces spectacles licentieux qui combattent directement la Religion & les mœurs, & dont la Poésie & la Musique également molles & effeminées communiquent tout leur poison à l’Ame, & relaschent tous les nerfs de l’esprit* (“these licentious spectacles that directly combat Religion & morals, & by which Poetry & Music, equally weak & effeminate, communicate all of their poison to the Soul & set loose the nerves of the spirit”).¹⁰³ As research by Susan McClary has shown, even the plots of the operatic works at the heart of much French musical discourse alluded to broader social or political concerns, playing on the cultural associations of men with order and women with excess; conservative commentators worried to no end that female performers got all the good music in these operas, that even as they stood as figures of fear and anxiety, these women inspired envy through their ability to express themselves in moving ways.¹⁰⁴ As Verba has very recently pointed out, the treatment of gender in

¹⁰² See Stéphane Van Damme, *L’épreuve libertine: morale, soupçon et pouvoirs dans la France baroque*, *Histoires pour aujourd’hui* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 2008), 185.

¹⁰³ See Anne Dacier, *Des causes de la corruption du goust* (Paris: Rigaud, 1714), 27.

¹⁰⁴ See Susan McClary, *Desire and Pleasure in Seventeenth-Century Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 273.

the lyric tragedies of Rameau oscillated between a kind of traditional perspective in which active heroes trumped passive heroines given to strong and conflicting emotions and a more nuanced musical portrayal of heroines in which women sang some of the most moving arias.¹⁰⁵

The replication and tenacity of polemical disputes about opera and instrumental music in the early eighteenth century show that much more was at stake in the axiology of music than analytical abstractions or details of performance practice. At play in these debates was the very status of music within French culture, a culture, to be sure, that had long prized language and literature over music and even over the plastic arts. As research by Marc Fumaroli has shown, after the second decade of the eighteenth century, Paris became what he has called *le laboratoire des charmes de la vie privée* or the laboratory of the charms of private life.¹⁰⁶ It remained the critical and creative home of the arts, where rococo fashion and taste crystallized in conversation, literature, and decor.¹⁰⁷ According to Fumaroli, only music escaped this Parisian hegemony. The French language in at this time was what he has called essentially a social charm, lending itself less well than Italian or German to musical performance; the arts with which it harmonized were instead the visual and social ones. What Fumaroli has called the *irritante bizarrerie* or irritating oddity of the prevalence of Italian repertoires on the continent in the eighteenth century became the object of ceaseless disputes in France, fanning out from the Parisian press to its satellites in Amsterdam and London, such that Parisian public opinion remained unrivaled as an ultimate judge of literature, the performing arts, and ideas.¹⁰⁸

Almost immediately my curiosity about the shifting ground of French musical discourse in these years led me to question the nature and scope of the criticism of the *filles de l'Opéra*. Are we to

¹⁰⁵ See Verba, *Dramatic Expression in Rameau's Tragédie en Musique: Between Tradition and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 9.

¹⁰⁶ See Marc Fumaroli, *Quand l'Europe parlait français* (Paris: Fallois, 2001), 15.

¹⁰⁷ See DeJean, *The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafés, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 10.

¹⁰⁸ See Fumaroli, *Quand l'Europe parlait français*, 16.

take the critique of actresses and dancers in early modern French theater as a commentary on women themselves or on broader social and political issues of the day? Does the literature that scorns the *filles de l'Opéra* stand to tell us something significant about how French writers in the early eighteenth century understood the mechanics and metaphysics of musical performance? And if these women were such successful, skilled performers, why were they so reviled in social circles, periodicals, and popular song? The longstanding disdain for performers in French theater ultimately did little to curb popular fascination with the *filles de l'Opéra*, who were compared to one another, linked to contemporary social and political phenomena from the spread of disease to the prevalence of corruption, and scrutinized for their license and bravado as performers. The great public outrage over the conduct of the *filles de l'Opéra* stemmed from fears about a kind of hybridity in that these women were regarded as flexible or fluid agents across social, sexual, and musical boundaries and thus as objects of great terror and suspicion. They moved between the ranks of the Opéra and the registers of names compiled for police surveillance.¹⁰⁹ They championed competing genres in their performances of solemn, edifying lyric tragedy and lighter, more frivolous, entertaining works of *opéra-ballet* and *ballet héroïque*. They performed as technicians on stage and they performed in the social and economic sphere as beneficiaries or outright thieves of the fortunes of male and female patrons.¹¹⁰ They were ultimately prey to what Laurence Senelick has described as the action of the theater in the art of generating cultural symbols. Anything put on stage automatically assumes an aura of extra significance; everything from a recited livret to a prop to the body of an actress is

¹⁰⁹ See Louis Petit de Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la republique des lettres en France, depuis MDCCLXII jusqu'à nos jours, ou Journal d'un observateur*, 36 vols. (London: John Adamsohn, 1777), VII, 265. See also the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de l'Académie royale de musique vulgairement l'Opéra depuis son établissement en l'année 1669 jusques et y compris l'année 1758*, Paris, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, Rés. 516, Graham Sadler, "Rameau's Singers and Players at the Paris Opéra: A Little-Known Inventory of 1738," *Early Music* 11/4 (1983), 454, and Lenard Berlanstein, *Daughters of Eve: A Cultural History of French Theater Women from the Old Regime to the Fin-de-Siècle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 42.

¹¹⁰ See Edmond-Jean-François Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763), ou Journal de Barbier, avocat au parlement de Paris*, 6 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1866), II, 141. See also the *Memoires anecdotes pour servir à l'histoire de M. Duliz, fameux juif portugais à la Haye, Et la suite de ses Avantures, après la catastrophe de celle de Mademoiselle Pelissier, Actrice de l'Opéra de Paris* (London: Samuel Harding, 1739).

apprehended in a manner that lends it greater meaning than when it is encountered outside the theater proper.¹¹¹ As Wendy Heller has pointed out, both the opera industry and the sex industry turned women into theater.¹¹² The *filles de l'Opéra* in every sense struggled to contend with this most basic tension between their amplified theatrical significance and their social and cultural insignificance, between their celebration as mesmerizing *femmes fortes* on stage and their castigation as thieves, whores, and monstrous outcasts off stage. They were not unlike the animals Dan Sperber has described as having taken on symbolic significance only when deemed particularly useful or harmful to humans; these aberrations fit into the established taxonomical order not according to the features they possessed but according to those they were entitled to possess.¹¹³

The following study confronts these aspersions on their own terms and examines the many metaphors and tropes surrounding the *filles de l'Opéra* from the late seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century. An initial chapter surveys the varied literature on the *filles de l'Opéra* in manuscript and printed sources. Assertions that these women were monstrous in appearance as well as in manners are driven by deeper suspicions that the innovations they developed in the theater would lead to a revolution in French theatrical taste and operatic genre, eventually supplanting the solemnity of lyric tragedy as it had developed from Lullian tradition. Commentators never held back in their examination of individual women in the theater, whether they lambasted them for the unplanned pregnancies that resulted from encounters with lovers, for questionable choice of lovers, or for sexually transmitted disease, thievery, bribery, or other malice. The discourse on the *filles de l'Opéra* is particularly forthright about the danger they posed to male patrons; women in the theater were regarded as a real and metaphorical contagion, capable of contracting and spreading disease as well as inspiring what one modern writer has referred to as the

¹¹¹ See Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag, and Theatre*, Gender and Performance, ed. Susan Bassnett and Tracy Davis (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 7.

¹¹² See Wendy Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence: Opera and Women's Voices in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 17.

¹¹³ See Dan Sperber, "Pourquoi les animaux parfaits, les hybrides et les monstres sont-ils bons à penser symboliquement?," *L'Homme* 15/2 (1975), 21.

disease of self-loss called sympathy, the dangerous combination of empathy and identification that drove men into the arms of the women they idolized on stage.¹¹⁴ Wherever the *filles de l'Opéra* went in Paris in the early eighteenth century, they inspired a curious mixture of suspicion and awe.

A second chapter examines the critical literature surrounding two prominent dancers, La Camargo and Sallé. As the musicologist Charles Cudworth has explained, La Camargo was associated with a level of physical vigor and technical ostentation that bordered on the masculine, while Sallé was considered more graceful and unaffected.¹¹⁵ The critical tropes surrounding La Camargo and Sallé suggest that French theatrical taste was in flux in the early part of the eighteenth century, particularly in the years preceding the operatic debut of Rameau in Paris. At this time reflections on the notion of the sublime, or the aesthetics of greatness or power, focused progressively less on the French language as they had in the meditations of Boileau; they shifted instead to the visibility and expressivity of the body, which was not without consequences for the *filles de l'Opéra* who danced. The striking physicality of La Camargo and the seductive simplicity of Sallé forced audiences into something of a critical bind, as a number of commentators remarked on the lure of the female body on display in operatic works in which poetry and rhyme were what ought to have been most esteemed. The attention these women received as specialists in ballet and pantomime, in which language and utterance played no part, ultimately shed light on underlying tensions in the reception of opera as genre at this time in the eighteenth century.

A third chapter focuses on two rival actresses, the sopranos Pélissier and Le Maure, who appear more often in the critical literature on the *filles de l'Opéra* than many of their colleagues. The noted correspondent Aïssé described these women as having divided the Parisian public in their search for approval in the early part of the century.¹¹⁶ The subject of madrigals by François-Marie

¹¹⁴ See David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 103.

¹¹⁵ See Charles Cudworth, "Handel and the French Style," *Music and Letters* 40/2 (1959), 126.

¹¹⁶ See Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, ed. Alexandre Piedagnel (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1878), 8. This collection was originally published in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. See the *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à*

Arouet de Voltaire (1694–1778) and epigrams and rhymed verse in the extensive Maurepas manuscript collection, they managed to avoid the fate Clément has described, that of the disappearing operatic soprano. Pélissier and Le Maure took an active role in securing renown from the public and in the process, they frequently found themselves enmeshed in a great deal of scrutiny. The distinctions writers elaborated between Pélissier and Le Maure bespeak an underlying fascination with the mechanics of performance, which writers did not describe outright but which carried a growing amount of critical weight in the popular reception of lyric tragedy and *opéra-ballet*. That Pélissier concealed the effort involved in acting and singing is one measure of her considerable public success; on the other hand, a number of critics saw in this concealment a dangerous ruse designed to deceive audiences who otherwise expected a straightforward, sincere performance from a modest actress. Le Maure, who was at times singled out for her unattractive physical appearance, ultimately garnered the better share of public approval, for her vocality and seeming naturalness overshadowed any pretense to artfulness, calculation, or coquetry. The mechanics of performance, which Pélissier concealed and Le Maure revealed, became as important to French writers as the general criticism and stocktaking of the *filles de l'Opéra* as social and sexual beings.

A final chapter addresses political intrigue and religious upheavals as they related to discourses on the *filles de l'Opéra*. A number of female performers were linked romantically with soldiers, treasurers, bailiffs, and priests. These women also confronted critiques that mingled the poetics of opera with meditations on religious upheavals, from disdain for ecclesiastical corruption to fascination with the doctrines and proponents of Jansenism. When a proclamation from Clement XI (1649–1721) dismissed Jansenism as heretical and French bishops worked to quell dissent among the faithful, satires of the *filles de l'Opéra* took on the moralizing tone of the papal bull *Unigenitus* (1713) and the numerous pamphlets that followed in its wake. The discourse on French theater also performed an ironic turn, adopting the longstanding Jansenist hostility toward the performing arts

Madame C..... : qui contiennent plusieurs anecdotes de l'histoire du tems, depuis l'année 1726 jusqu'en 1733: précédées d'un narré très-court de l'histoire de Mademoiselle Aïssé, pour servir à l'intelligence de ses lettres (Paris: La Grange, 1787).

in the very decades that Jansenism itself was most under fire. Commentators demanded integrity among women in the theater and yet found most performers wanting in the decade before the revolutionary premiere of *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733), the first lyric tragedy of Rameau. As *Hippolyte et Aricie* polarized the public, so too did the soprano Le Maure. Her bold assertion of blamelessness reinforced popular perceptions that the *filles de l'Opéra* were impudent and brassy. Her actions were also linked to the outburst of a prominent Jansenist bishop and thus to a more pervasive sense that the Opéra and its actresses needed to be catechized. The web of critical scrutiny and allusion that addressed the repertory of the Opéra and the performances of the *filles de l'Opéra* never strayed far from broader moral and religious concerns.

The variety of texts and authorial perspectives in the manuscript and printed sources that detail the reception of the *filles de l'Opéra* demands special consideration, largely because of what limited biographical information these sources provide about individual performers. Where multiple sources of certain satirical texts and epigrams are available, I have made every effort to account for differences among them. Throughout the dissertation I have included historical French texts with original orthography alongside modern translations, although I have not altered the capitalization or punctuation of these texts. The original French appears in the body of the text to allow access to a number of idioms and references to personalities from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and earlier. All translations are my own and are literal rather than literary. I refer to characters by the names assigned in the operas in order to reinforce their status as characters in French staged works above and beyond that of mythological beings. I have chosen not to translate the term *fille de l'Opéra*, in part because the rendering “daughter of the Opera” or “girl of the Opera” fails to capture the spirit of the original French, which in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could be used interchangeably with the terms *fille de joie* (“prostitute”), *fille publique* (“call girl”), and *fille d'affaire* (“business woman” or “sex worker”) to denote women of questionable repute within or beyond the

confines of the Opéra.¹¹⁷ The term *fille de l'Opéra* might also be understood as “young woman” or simply “woman” of the Opéra, since many of the *filles de l'Opéra* appearing in manuscript criticism were women in or in fact well past middle age.

* * *

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¹¹⁷ See *Les filles d'Opéra et les virtuoses de table d'hôte* (Paris: Labitte, 1846), 7, and Marguerite Blessington, *The Idler in France*, Collection of Ancient and Modern British Authors 323 (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1841), 83.

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Chapter One

Context

Nous n'avons dans la mémoire que des mots que nous croyons entendre, par l'usage fréquent et l'application même juste que nous en faisons; dans l'esprit, que des notions vagues. Quand je prononce le mot chant, je n'ai pas des notions plus nettes que vous, et la plupart de vos semblables, quand ils disent, réputation, blâme, honneur, vice, vertu, pudeur, décence, honte, ridicule.¹

In our memory we have only words we think we understand, based on our frequent use of them and even the correct way we apply them; in our minds, only vague notions. When I say the word melody, I have ideas no clearer than yours or those of the majority of people like you when they say reputation, blame, honor, vice, virtue, modesty, decency, shame, ridicule.

This comment from the last third of the eighteenth century, stemming as much from Denis Diderot (1713–1784) as from his fictional character in *Le neveu de Rameau* (1762), reflects an awareness of the ambiguous roots of discourse that has resonances decades earlier, when critics of women in French theater debated the blame, honor, vice, and virtue of actresses, singers, and dancers at the same time they struggled to define these very terms. The challenge involved in establishing these concepts as stable signifiers was as difficult as arriving at an unambiguous characterization of women during the ancien régime. As research by Élisabeth Roudinesco and Katherine Crawford has shown, writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries agreed on little other than the variable status of the feminine.² Its elusive nature in language meant that those who struggled to apprehend the essence of the feminine in actresses as well as those who attacked

¹ See Denis Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau / Le Rêve de d'Alembert*, ed. Roland Desné and Jean Varloot (Paris: Messidor, 1984), 150.

² See Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France*, Harvard Historical Studies 145 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), and Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Théroigne de Méricourt: une femme mélancolique sous la Révolution* (Paris: Seuil, 1989). See also Jolanta Pekacz, *Conservative Tradition in Prerevolutionary France: Parisian Salon Women* (New York: Lang, 1999). On femininity and vocality in the aesthetics of early lyric tragedy, see Sarah Nancy, "The 'Deaf Ear' of Classicism: Searching for the Female Voice in French *Tragédie Lyrique*," *Theatre Research International* 31/2 (2006), 117–128. On related perceptions of castrato sexuality and its association with the supernatural, see Roger Freitas, "The Eroticism of Emasculation: Confronting the Baroque Body of the Castrato," *The Journal of Musicology* 20/2 (2003), 249. On the cultural symbolism of castrati in Italian and French circles, see Julia Prest, *Theatre under Louis XIV: Cross-Casting and the Performance of Gender in Drama, Ballet and Opera* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 131.

femininity as dissolute had much to confront in the way of shifting signifiers.

The ambiguity of discourse notwithstanding, writers in the early eighteenth century made female presence in the theater a central topic of concern, expressing anxieties over lingering historical associations between music, femininity, and immorality and new suspicions about women in the audience as well as singers, dancers, and innovations in choreography and acting.³ These commentaries draw on a rich body of political and cultural metaphors embedded in satirical songs and vignettes in large manuscript collections compiled in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, comte de Maurepas (1701–1781), the noted satirist of Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, marquise de Pompadour (1721–1764) who was dismissed from his ministerial duties and exiled by Louis XV (1710–1774) in the middle of the century, and the abbé Jean Nicolas de Tralage, dit Tillemon (1620–1698), a cartographer, politician, and print collector.⁴ The satirical *Le portefeuille d'un talon rouge, contenant des anecdotes galantes et secrètes de la Cour de France*, dating from the last two decades of the eighteenth century, gives some idea of the method by which these subversive songs, vignettes, and epigrams circulated among the public in Paris.

Un lâche Courtisan les ourdit dans les ténèbres, un autre Courtisan les met en vers et en couplets, et par le ministère de la valetaille, les fait passer jusqu'aux halles et aux marchés aux herbes. Des halles elles sont portées chez l'artisan qui, à son tour, les rapporte chez les Seigneurs qui les ont forgées, et lesquels, sans perdre de temps, s'en vont à l'Oeil-de-Boeuf se demander à l'oreille les uns aux autres, et du ton de l'hypocrisie la plus consommée: Les avez-vous lues? les voilà. Elles courent dans le peuple de Paris. Telle est l'origine et tel est le voyage de ces mauvais petits vers qui, dans le même jour, sèment dans Paris et à la Cour des anecdotes abominables sur des personnes d'une vertu reconnue; la vérité desquelles anecdotes est presque toujours fondée sur de misérables on dit et jamais des on a vu.⁵

³ On the early modern association of women with the power of music to bring about spiritual transport or incur libidinous behavior, see Kate van Orden, "An Erotic Metaphysics of Hearing in Early Modern France," *The Musical Quarterly* 82/3–4 (1998), 679. On models of female perfection in French theater in the ancien régime, see Prest, *Theatre under Louis XIV*, 103–127.

⁴ On the origins and compilation of the Maurepas manuscript collection, including the possibility that the Parisian *lieutenant général de police* Claude-Henri Feydeau de Marville (1705–1787) played a significant role in its compilation, see Paul d'Estrée, "Les origines du Chansonnier de Maurepas," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 3/3 (1896), 340.

⁵ See *Le portefeuille d'un talon rouge, contenant des anecdotes galantes et secrètes de la Cour de France / La journée amoureuse; ou, Les derniers plaisirs de M...-Ant., Comédie en trois actes, en prose*, Le coffret du bibliophile (Paris: Bibliothèque des curieux, 1911), 22.

A fiendish Courtier weaves them together in the dark, another Courtier puts them into rhyming couplets and, by means of lowly servants, has them planted in market halls and street stands. From the markets they are passed on to artisans, who, in turn, relay them back to the Noblemen who had composed them and who, without losing a moment, take off for the Oeil-de-Boeuf and whisper to one another in a tone of consummate hypocrisy: Have you read them? here they are. They are circulating among the common people of Paris. Such is the origin and such is the voyage of these evil little verses that, in the same day, sow in Paris and at Court abominable anecdotes about people of recognized virtue; the truth upon which these stories are based is almost always founded on the miseries people utter and never say they saw.

These subversive verses, many of which originated not in the streets of Paris but at Versailles, circulated among courtiers, courtesans, lawyers, priests, and clerks before they were collected into ordered *chansonniers*. The reference in this passage to the Oeil-de-Boeuf, a salon in the *appartement du roi* at Versailles that served as a meeting place for members of the court, is an indication of the courtly origins of a number of these verses.

As research by Georgia Cowart has shown, the *querelle des femmes* in the seventeenth century sparked debates among commentators about the questionable moral and civic status of women, who were taken to task in epigrams and diatribes for their reckless indulgence in food, wine, nicotine, and sex.⁶ Attacks on corruption among women came from writers as diverse as the anonymous author of *Le tableau des piperies des femmes mondaines, où par plusieurs Histoires se voyent les ruses et artifices dont elles se servent* (1632) and the Franciscan priest Alexis Troussel, who published his *Alphabet de l'imperfection et malice des femmes* (1617), modeled on a compendium of female vices from the Florentine fifteenth century, under the pseudonym Jacques

⁶ See Georgia Cowart, "Of Women, Sex and Folly: Opera under the Old Regime," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 6/3 (1994), 205. On the *querelle des femmes*, see Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the *querelle des femmes*, 1400–1789," *Signs* 8/1 (1982), 4–28, Ekaterina Haskins, "A Woman's Inventive Response to the Seventeenth-Century *querelle des femmes*," in *Listening to their Voices: The Rhetorical Activities of Historical Women*, ed. Molly Meijer Wertheimer (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 288–304, Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature, 1610–1652* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), Elizabeth Grist, "The Salon and the Stage: Women and Theatre in Seventeenth-century France," Ph.D. diss., Queen Mary & Westfield College, University of London, 2001, and Merry Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, New Approaches to European History 20 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). On early manifestations of the *querelle des femmes* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Helen Swift, *Gender, Writing, and Performance: Men Defending Women in Late Medieval France (1440–1538)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Olivier.⁷ At the end of the seventeenth century Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711) presented his tenth satire as a critique of the association between women and the immoral nature of operatic entertainment.⁸ As Howard Bloch has written, the satire foregrounds a kind of misogyny grown out of the Latin tradition of *molestiae nuptiarum*, the topos of the pains of marriage to demanding, complaining, foolish wives, which would expand in medieval thought into forceful characterizations of women as fickle, voluble, and overdetermined, terms taken up again in the seventeenth century.⁹ Anne Duggan has also called attention to the associations Boileau makes between women, the cause of the French moderns, and bad literary taste.¹⁰ Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, seigneur de Saint-Évremond (1613–1703), writing on opera at the very same time as Boileau, took women to task as audience members who supported the fundamentally flawed, often boring spectacles on the operatic stage, productions whose music he called little more than confusing noise.¹¹ As research by Joan DeJean has shown, the Boileau satire in particular accused women of having become the principal agents of corruption in an ever more corrupt society in which they were responsible not only for the spread of bad literary taste but for the end of civilization as the French knew it; at every

⁷ See Paul Lacroix, *Le tableau des piperies des femmes mondaines, où par plusieurs Histoires se voyent les ruses et artifices dont elle se servent* (1632), *texte original avec une notice* (Paris: Léon Willem, 1879). See also Jacques Olivier, *Alphabet de l'imperfection et malice des femmes, reveu, corrigé & augmenté d'un friant Dessert, & de plusieurs Histoires en cette quatriesme Edition pour les Courtizans de la Femme Mondaine, dédié à la plus mauvaise du monde* (Lyon: Pierre Andre, 1646).

⁸ See Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *Oeuvres complètes de Boileau*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1867), I, 95. On the reception of the *précieuses* and the *querelle des anciens et modernes* in relation to this satire, see Dorothy Anne Liot Backer, *Precious Women* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 289.

⁹ See Anne Duggan, *Salonnières, Furies, and Fairies: The Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 130.

¹⁰ See R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 15.

¹¹ See Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, seigneur de Saint-Évremond, “Sur les opéra,” in *Oeuvres meslées*, 12 vols. (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1684), XI, 80.

turn the satire foregrounds the threat of feminization that was among the greatest personal obsessions of Boileau.¹²

The social and ideological critique of women at this time was also the result of a kind of culpable theatricality with which they were associated, based in part on beliefs about their artificiality and the fact that women treated their participation in the social sphere as an occasion to indulge in the ruses and artifices mocked in the title of the anonymous *Le tableau des piperies des femmes mondaines, où par plusieurs Histoires se voyent les ruses et artifices dont elles se servent* and mocked as well as in the moralizing criticism of the *Veritez sur les moeurs* (1694) of Teissier.¹³ A second dimension of this association between women and theatricality revolved around ostentation and exhibition, concepts at play in contemporary scenic practices in the theater, where women were chastised for presenting themselves and especially their bodies to the full view of the impressionable public. As research by Laurence Senelick has shown, displaying the body to the gaze of others in the theater automatically implies the availability of that body for sexual exploitation; indeed the act of coming on stage renders performers of both genders sites for erotic speculation and imagination and thus for the dangerous subversion of normative morality.¹⁴ These grievances about the theatricality of women culminated in the censure of their effects on the emotional sensibilities of polite society. Women on stage in the theater and on the world stage aroused passions regarded as the root of disorder and discord in society. They bore the brunt of criticism not only for their involvement with men but for the dangers their lives of excess and abandon presented for society at large. These associations came to bear on the criticism of actresses and dancers in Paris in the early decades of the eighteenth century. The *querelle des femmes* in these years also dovetailed with the *querelle des théâtres* in the last decade of the seventeenth century, in which writers bemoaned the state of public

¹² See Joan DeJean, *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 68.

¹³ See Teissier, *Veritez sur les moeurs* (Paris: Simon Benard, 1694), 40.

¹⁴ See Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre*, Gender and Performance, ed. Susan Bassnett and Tracy Davis (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 8.

theater and that of the actresses at the Opéra, who were chastised as immoral, corrupt, and scandalous.¹⁵

A survey of texts from satirical songs in the manuscript collections compiled by Maurepas and Tralage and contemporary published anecdotes and biographical accounts reveals several trends in the critical discourse about female performers at the Opéra in the early eighteenth century. The power of the *filles de l'Opéra* to command the attention of audiences and writers alike is notable as a register of the politics of reputation on the eve of the age of Diderot and as an index of sophisticated attitudes toward the mechanics and metaphysics of musical performance. Popular with patrons in the theater, the *filles de l'Opéra* were also innovative as interpreters and choreographers, attracting considerable attention for their reliance on artifice and their concealment of the effort involved in executing their performances, especially in writings by Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé (1694–1733) and François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694–1778).¹⁶ These women were held up against each other as critics instigated popularity contests based on the contrasting technical proficiencies and physical appearances of performers. A number of accounts went to great lengths to detail the eccentricities individual *filles de l'Opéra*, as in the case of one entry in the collections of the Maurepas manuscripts.

Les deux Moreau sont deux tigresses,
La Rochois n'eut jamais de foiblesses,
Barbereau n'est pas coquette,
Les deux Pezans
N'écoutent pas les amans,
Charpentier
Se fait beaucoup prier,
La Sueur
Est plus sage que sa soeur.
Mais la Desmatins
N'a pas encore enfilé le chemin,
Et la Bréard

Both Moreaus are tigresses,
Rochois has never had frailties,
Barbereau is not a coquette,
The two Pezans
Do not listen to lovers.
Charpentier
Prays a lot
Sueur
Is wiser than her sister.
But Desmatins
Has not yet paved the way,
And Bréard

¹⁵ See Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV & the Politics of Spectacle* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 176.

¹⁶ See Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, ed. Alexandre Piedagnel (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1878), 20, and Voltaire, *Oeuvres de M. de Voltaire*, nouv. éd., rev., corrigée et augmentée par l'auteur, 11 vols. (Dresden: George Conrad Walther, 1752), III, 118.

Faute d'emploi est resté à l'écart.¹⁷

Stayed away for lack of a job.

Critical opinion was not the only force behind comparisons of actresses. While there is little textual evidence to support it, these women were not above expressing opinions about their own talents in relation to those of other performers. The *Veritez sur les moeurs* of Teissier captures the critical eye of actresses themselves in an epigram on popularity and perception titled *Une femme n'en trouve jamais une autre jolie* ("A woman never finds another woman attractive").

On trouve difficilement
Une femme assés raisonnable
Pour convenir qu'une autre est tout a fait aimable.
Le merite excite l'envie;
Et moins une femme est jolie,
Et plus elle est injuste sur ce point.¹⁸

Only with difficulty does one encounter
A sufficiently reasonable woman
Who concurs that another woman is completely likeable.
Merit provokes envy;
And the less beautiful a woman is,
The more unjust she is in this respect.

As an extension of the attention the *filles de l'Opéra* received on moral and physiological levels, writers referenced tropes of monstrosity, characterizing actresses as malformed, hybrid, or disfigured by disease and underscoring the perceived threat these women posed to social, sovereign, and epistemological order. One epigram among the collections of the Maurepas manuscripts goes so far as to call an actress an ugly parakeet given to fits of irksome babble.

Un jour un Escadron d'Oiseaux mélodieux
Faisoit retentir le Parnasse
Par ses Concerts harmonieux,
Certaine Péruche eut l'audace
De joindre ses fredons à leurs chants gracieux:
Voix plate, chétive encolure,
Large bec, petits yeux, regards sombres, air commun,
Plumage sale, et babil importun;
Voilà les Dons que la nature
En la formant versa sur sa figure.

¹⁷ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses depuis 1686 jusqu'en 1690. Vol.^e VI*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12621, folio 21.

¹⁸ See Teissier, *Veritez sur les moeurs*, 76.

Ajoutés à ses traits, un Esprit de travers
Un coeur ouvert au vice avec pleine licence.¹⁹

One day a Squadron of melodious Birds
Tried their hand at Poetry
By harmonious Concerts,
A certain Parakeet had the audacity
To join her humming to the gracious songs of the other birds:
Flat voice, scrawny neck,
Large beak, small eyes, somber gaze, common air,
Dirty plumage, and irksome babble;
Here are the Gifts that nature
Bestowed on her countenance.
Added to these traits, a crooked Spirit
A heart susceptible to vice with full license.

Here the piercing eyes and famously forced voice of the soprano Marie Pélissier (1707–1749) are refashioned into an elaborate and vicious allegory. The singer becomes a monstrous collection of distorted features, filth, and gibberish, given over to pesky humming in the midst of more enchanting songbirds. This is a rare instance of graphic detail in the criticism of these women, in which it is difficult to pinpoint specific examples of the association of actresses with monstrous hybrids or animals. Moving beyond moral commentary and the trope of monstrosity, commentators also developed creative approaches to revoicing historical contempt for femininity, vocality, and sensuality as well as even older misgivings about the acting profession. The impulse to devalue the presence of women in French theater in the early eighteenth century seems to have stemmed less from beliefs that they failed as performers; instead it reveals anxieties that these women were all too successful.

As scorned as these women were in social circles, periodicals, and popular song, their cultural significance ultimately extended well beyond the theater. While the *filles de l'Opéra* were praised as sopranos and dancers on stage, a separate, satirical subculture celebrated their sexuality, their intrepid pursuit of the wealthiest men and women in Parisian society, their fondness for lavish jewelry and clothing, and their association with power, danger, and disease. Aware of the charms of

¹⁹ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.º XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 357.

these women as performers in the theater proper, commentators were also sensitive to their role in society at large, where they were mocked for the frivolity of their affairs with men and taken to task for pregnancies, rows and rivalries with other actresses, and the spread of disease. The *filles de l'Opéra* enjoyed a fraught celebrity both in and outside of the theater and their significance in satirical criticism forces us to confront these women as powerful musical and social performers in their own right, capable of astonishing audiences in the Palais-Royal and disquieting the public at court and in the streets of Paris.

Personalities

Biographical information on the *filles de l'Opéra* active in the early eighteenth century does not give itself up easily and is found for the most part in the published research of archivists and musicologists from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One notable study is the biographical compendium *Dieux et divas de l'Opéra* (1986) of Roger Blanchard and Roland de Candé, which lists information about the lives and operatic roles of singers from within and beyond the sphere of French opera.²⁰ Perhaps the most detailed biographical account of individual singers appears in the published research of the historian Émile Campardon (1837–1915), who served as archivist and head of the *section judiciaire* of the Archives nationales de France from 1857 to 1908.²¹ Additional information appears in the anecdotal accounts of the Opéra published by the critic and musicologist Adolphe Jullien (1845–1932) as *La comédie et la galanterie au XVIIIe siècle, au théâtre — dans le monde — en prison* (1879), *L'opéra secret au XVIIIe siècle: aventures et intrigues secrètes racontées d'après les papiers inédits conservés aux Archives de l'État et de l'Opéra* (1880), and *Amours d'Opéra au XVIIIe siècle* (1908), all of which include transcriptions of printed pamphlets and other materials from the eighteenth century.²² The detailed biography of the tenor Pierre Jélyotte

²⁰ See Roger Blanchard and Roland de Candé, *Dieux et divas de l'Opéra*, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1986).

²¹ See Émile Campardon, *L'académie royale de musique au XVIIIe siècle: Documents inédits découverts aux Archives nationales*, 2 vols. (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1884).

²² See Adolphe Jullien, *La comédie et la galanterie au XVIIIe siècle, au théâtre — dans le monde — en prison* (Paris: Édouard Rouveyre, 1879), idem, *L'opéra secret au XVIIIe siècle: aventures et intrigues secrètes racontées d'après les papiers inédits conservés aux Archives de l'État et de l'Opéra*

(1713–1797) by the musicologist Arthur Pougin (1834–1921) provides ample information about a number of contemporary *filles de l'Opéra*.²³

Among the limited number of sources from the eighteenth century, biographical and explanatory notes pervade the chronicles of the Parisian journalist and lawyer Edmond-Jean-François Barbier (1689–1771) and appear as well in the edition of historical manuscript sources published in ten volumes by the archivist Émile Raunié (1854–1911).²⁴ As research by Arlette Farge has shown, these diaries, chronicles, and memoirs are not documents that we can safely count on to tell the truth at all times.²⁵ As the historian and scholar Charles Aubertin (1825–1908) has suggested, they nevertheless belong to *cette partie intime et confidentielle de la littérature historique qui, sous le nom de Mémoires, traduit jour par jour, avec une sincérité négligée, la pensée du moment, et d'une plume libre, inégale, diffuse, mais assez fidèle, écrit l'histoire à mesure qu'elle se fait* (“that intimate and confidential side of historical writing that, under the name of Memoirs, conveys day by day, with casual honesty, the thoughts of the moment, and records freely, inconsistently, diffusely, but with sufficient fidelity, the very making of history”).²⁶ Their real subject was not the common people of Paris but the life of the court and the many scandals involving the monarch or the regent.

In the midst of its historical narrative and the reproduction of a number of ordinances directed at the Opéra in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the history of the Académie

(Paris: Édouard Rouveyre, 1880), and idem, *Amours d'Opéra au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Henri Daragon, 1908).

²³ See Arthur Pougin, *Un ténor de l'Opéra au XVIIIe siècle: Pierre Jélyotte et les chanteurs de son temps* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1905).

²⁴ See Edmond-Jean-François Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763), ou Journal de Barbier, avocat au parlement de Paris*, 6 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1866), and Émile Raunié, *Chansonnier historique du XVIIIe siècle*, 10 vols. (Paris: Quantin, 1879–1884).

²⁵ See Arlette Farge, *Dire et mal dire: L'opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle*, Librairie du XXe siècle (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 61.

²⁶ See Charles Aubertin, *L'esprit public au XVIIIe siècle: Étude sur les mémoires et les correspondances politiques des contemporains 1715 à 1789*, 3e éd. (Paris: Perrin, 1889), 2.

royale de musique by Jacques-Bernard Durey de Noinville (1683–1768) offers information on the private lives and morals of the *filles de l'Opéra*.²⁷ At roughly the same time as the appearance of this compendium, the abbé de Morambert, Antoine-Jacques Labbet (1721–1756), together with the journalist and historian Antoine de Lérès (1723–1795), produced the *Sentiment d'un harmoniphile sur différents ouvrages de musique*, a musical review that commented at times on the performers responsible for the execution of popular staged works.²⁸ In the realm of confessional autobiography, the soprano Marie Fel (1713–1794) makes several notable appearances in *Les Confessions* of the philosopher and amateur composer Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778).²⁹ She is described as the love interest of Friedrich Melchior, baron von Grimm (1723–1807), who apparently fell into a deep depression when she rejected his advances.³⁰ Together with sources from the later nineteenth century and periodicals from the eighteenth century like the *Mercure de France* and the theatrical *Almanach historique et chronologique de tous les spectacles, ou Calendrier historique des théâtres*, later known as *Les Spectacles de Paris*, these publications provide the crucial framework for more detailed biographical accounts of the female singers who animated the staged works of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687), André Campra (1660–1744), and others. These women were perhaps best known as heroines in the staged works of the polarizing theorist and composer Jean-Philippe Rameau

²⁷ See Jacques-Bernard Durey de Noinville, *Histoire du théâtre de l'Académie royale de musique en France, depuis son établissement jusqu'à présent*, 2de éd. (Paris: Duchesne, 1757).

²⁸ See Antoine-Jacques Labbet, abbé de Morambert and Antoine de Lérès, *Sentiment d'un harmoniphile sur différents ouvrages de musique* (Amsterdam and Paris: Jombert, 1756). On Antoine de Lérès as historian, see William Brooks, "Decrypting the chronology of early French opera," in *French 'Classical' Theatre Today: teaching, research, performance*, ed. Philip Tomlinson (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2001), 46, Philippe Vendrix, *Aux origines d'une discipline historique: la musique et son histoire en France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Geneva: Droz, 1993), 311, and Anne-Marie Chouillet, François Moureau, and Jean Balcou, *Dictionnaire des journalistes (1600–1789): supplément 1* (Grenoble: Centre de recherche sur les sensibilités, Université des langues et lettres de Grenoble, 1980), 134.

²⁹ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions I: Livres I à VI*, ed. Alain Grosrichard, 2de éd. (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), and idem, *Les Confessions II: Livres VII à XII*, ed. Alain Grosrichard, 2de éd. (Paris: Flammarion, 2004).

³⁰ See Daniel Heartz, *From Garrick to Gluck: Essays on Opera in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. John Rice, Opera Series 1 (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2004), 213.

(1683–1764), who worked with a number of the most popular *filles de l'Opéra* for over thirty years after his operatic debut in the fourth decade of the century.

Trained as a singer and actress by the noted Lullian soprano Marie Le Rochois (1658–1728), Marie Antier (1687–1747) debuted at the Opéra in the 1711 revival of the *comédie-ballet La vénitienne* (1705) by Michel de La Barre (1675–1745). She was a successor of sorts to the soprano Françoise Journet (1675–1722), the noted interpreter of Campra and Marin Marais (1656–1728) who had also been a student of Le Rochois. Antier sang major roles and particularly magicians for thirty years in up to five productions each season and she retired with an ample pension in 1741. After her debut she was given key roles in new productions beginning with the lyric tragedy *Idoménée* (1712) by Campra and the lyric tragedy *Médée et Jason* (1713) by Joseph-François Salomon (1649–1732); two decades later she sang the role of Médée in a revival of the Salomon opera and was praised by the *Mercure de France*.³¹ Antier appeared in almost two dozen revivals of works of Lully; at one performance of the 1713 revival of the lyric tragedy *Armide* (1686) she had the honor of presenting the victorious *maréchal* and military commander Claude Louis Hector de Villars (1653–1734) with a laurel crown. She was also highly successful in performances as Vénus and Silvanire in *Les âges* (1718), the *opéra-ballet* in a prologue and three acts by Campra. In 1720 she became *première actrice* of the Académie royale de musique and in the following year she was appointed a *musicienne de la chambre du roi*, a post that required her to sing at Versailles, Marly, and Fontainebleau.

In the third decade of the century Antier sang at the Château des Tuileries in private performances of *opéra-ballet* in which Louis XV himself participated and she appeared later in the *concerts chez la Reine*, small court gatherings where operas being produced in Paris were previewed or repeated. She became *maîtresse en titre* to Victor-Amédée de Savoie, prince de Carignan (1690–1741) and on the occasion of her marriage in 1726 to the Parisian *inspecteur du grenier à sel* Jean Duval, she received lavish gifts from the royal family. Her love affair one year later with the prodigiously wealthy *fermier général* and Rameau patron Alexandre Jean Joseph Le Riche de La

³¹ See the *Mercure de France, dédié au Roy. Novembre. 1736* (Paris: Guillaume Cavelier, 1736), 2542.

Pouplinière (1693–1762) led to his temporary banishment from Paris. Antier herself was installed for a time in the couvent de la Visitation Sainte-Marie de Chaillot, which had been established in the middle of the seventeenth century by Henriette Marie de France (1625–1649), the daughter of Henri IV (1553–1610) and the queen of England, Scotland, and Ireland and later the spouse of Charles I (1600–1649). The monastery dominated the hill of Chaillot in western central Paris and its gardens extended to the banks of the Seine. It was closed during the Revolution and razed shortly thereafter. Antier continued her career as a performer at the Opéra throughout this confinement at Chaillot. Beginning in 1725 she also served as a soloist in motets by André Cardinal Destouches (1672–1749) and Michel Richard de Lalande (1657–1726) at the Concert Spirituel. Antier performed as Junon and Émilie in both the premiere and the later Palais-Royal revival of *Les éléments* (1721) by Destouches and Lalande, an *opéra-ballet* in which the popular soprano Catherine Nicole Le Maure (1704–1786) also sang. By the late 1720s Antier saw her major roles at the Opéra increasingly given to younger performers, and Destouches wrote somewhat disparagingly about her desire for pay increases in a letter of April 1728.³² She nevertheless took roles in such important new productions as the lyric tragedy *Jephté* (1732) by Michel Pignolet de Montéclair (1667–1737), in which she played Almasie to the Iphise of Le Maure. In the Rameau repertory Antier created the roles of Phèdre in the lyric tragedy *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733), Phani in the *opéra-ballet* *Les Indes galantes* (1735), and Phébé in the lyric tragedy *Castor et Pollux* (1737). Her last appearances were in revivals of works in which she had sung earlier in her career. After having maintained an opulent residence on the rue d'Auteuil earlier in the century, she spent her last years living in an apartment attached to the magasin de l'Opéra not far from the Louvre. She was survived by her husband as well as her younger sister, who sang in the chorus of the Opéra from 1719 until 1743. She was also the mother of the soprano mademoiselle de Maiz.³³

³² See André Tessier, “Correspondance d’André Cardinal des Touches et du Prince Antoine 1er de Monaco (Suite),” *La revue musicale* 8 (1927), 110.

³³ See Jean-Benjamin de La Borde, *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne*, 4 vols. (Paris: Pierres, 1780), III, 492.

Marie Fel, the daughter of Marie Deracle and Henri Fel, the organist at the Église Sainte-Eulalie in Bordeaux, appeared at the Concert Spirituel in 1734 and made her Paris Opéra debut the same year in the role of Vénus in a revival of the lyric tragedy *Philomèle* (1705) by the orchestra leader and composer Louis de La Coste (1675–1750). She is known to have been a pupil of Anne-Marie Christine Somis (1704–1783), the daughter of the Italian violinist Giovanni Battista Somis (1686–1763) who had herself married the painter Carle van Loo (1705–1765) in Turin and arrived in Paris in 1734. Fel created a series of roles in works of Rameau, principally Amour in the first version of the lyric tragedy *Castor et Pollux*, Hébé in the *opéra-ballet* *Les fêtes d'Hébé, ou Les talents lyriques* (1739), a role she would resume in productions in 1747 and 1756, a Phrygian woman in the lyric tragedy *Dardanus* (1739), la Grande-Prêtresse de Diane in the 1742 revival and revision of *Hippolyte et Aricie*, Hébé in the May and November 1743 revivals of *Les Indes galantes*, and Thalie and La folie in the *comédie-ballet* *Platée* (1745), also variously called a *ballet buffon* and a *comédie lyrique*; these were roles she would resume in productions of *Platée* in 1749. She also appeared as Hébé and Argélie in the *opéra-ballet* *Les fêtes de Polymnie* (1745), Erigone and La gloire in the *opéra-ballet* *Le temple de la gloire* (1745), Orie in the *opéra-ballet* *Les fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour* (1747), La statue in the *acte de ballet* *Pigmalion* (1748), Zélidie in the *pastorale héroïque* *Zaïs* (1748), Amélite in the lyric tragedy *Zoroastre* (1749), a role she would reprise in 1756, the title character in the *pastorale héroïque* *Naïs* (1749), Céphise in the *pastorale héroïque* *Acante et Céphise, ou La sympathie* (1751), Zélide in the *acte de ballet* *La Guirlande, ou Les fleurs enchantées* (1751), Téléaire in the substantially revised version of the lyric tragedy *Castor et Pollux* (1754), Pamilie in the *acte de ballet* *La naissance d'Osiris, ou La fête Pamilie* (1754), and Parténope in the Palais-Royal premiere of the *opéra-ballet* *Les surprises de l'Amour* (1748) in 1757, a work that had first been performed at Versailles with the marquise de Pompadour in the soprano roles of Uranie and Vénus. In a letter to the abbé Guillaume Thomas Raynal (1713–1796), the baron von Grimm praised Fel for her mastery of the Italian style of vocal performance, all the while remarking on her singular and consistent vocal talent.³⁴ Her longstanding romantic relationship with the painter and pastellist

³⁴ See the *Mercure de France, dédié au roi. Mai. 1752* (Paris: Duchesne, 1752), 189.

Maurice Quentin de La Tour (1704–1788) resulted in the production of her portrait in 1757, a pastel on paper now in the collections of the Musée Antoine Lécuyer in Saint-Quentin, France, one produced when La Tour was portraitist to the king of France from 1750 to 1773. Fel retired from the stage in 1758 but continued to sing publically until at least 1770, including in performances at the Concert Spirituel. She is last recorded as a soloist in *Les Spectacles de Paris* in that year; as research by Jacques-Gabriel Prod’homme has shown, the reappearance of her name in subsequent listings of members of the Opéra chorus is in all likelihood a reference to her niece.³⁵

Marie-Jeanne Fesch, dite Chevalier (1722–1789), debuted at the Opéra to considerable acclaim in 1740 in a revival of the Lullian lyric tragedy *Atys* (1676). She was particularly noted for the great dramatic depth of her portrayals of the tragic heroines Médée and Armide. For over two decades she performed major roles with great success; as her entry in the biographical dictionary of Jean-Marie-Bernard Clément (1742–1812) and Joseph de La Porte (1714–1779) attests, she specialized in noble characters and furies.³⁶ Campardon has recounted the circulation of this popular verse by the abbé Gabriel-Charles de Lattaignant (1697–1779) in the wake of her debut. It was sung to the tune of the *air* *Le jeune Berger qui m’engage* (“The young Shepherd to whom I commit myself”).

Chevalier, quelles sûres armes
Pour mettre un amant sous vos lois!
Vous séduisez par votre voix
Les coeurs échappés à vos charmes.³⁷

Chevalier, what certain weapons you have
For placing a lover under your laws!
You entice by your voice
The hearts that escape your charms.

In the Rameau repertory she appeared as Diane in the 1742 revision and revival of *Hippolyte et Aricie* and in the subsequent year, she appeared as Phani in the 1743 revivals of *Les Indes galantes*. She created the roles of Mnémosine and Stratonice in the *opéra-ballet* *Les fêtes de Polymnie*,

³⁵ See Jacques-Gabriel Prod’homme, “Marie Fel (1713–1794),” *Sammelbände der internationalen Musikgesellschaft* 4 (1902–1903), 492.

³⁶ See Jean-Marie-Bernard Clément and Joseph de La Porte, *Bibliothèque des théâtres, dictionnaire dramatique*, 3 vols. (Paris: Duchesne, 1784), III, 108.

³⁷ See Campardon, *L’académie royale de musique au XVIIIe siècle*, 121.

Erigone and Plautine in *Le temple de la Gloire*, Junon in *Platée*, Orthésie in *Les fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour*, and Érinice in *Zoroastre*. She also appeared as Uranie in the 1757 Palais-Royal premiere of *Les surprises de l'Amour* and went on to appear as Phébé in the 1764 revival of the substantially revised *Castor et Pollux* (1754). Chevalier retired from the Opéra in 1766 with a generous pension of 1,500 *livres* and in 1780 this pension was increased to 2,000 *livres* as she was appointed *musicienne ordinaire de la chambre du roi*.

It remains difficult to arrive at a clear picture of the value of the sums cited in contemporary sources on the salaries and pensions of a number of the *filles de l'Opéra*, particularly because of the fluctuation of currencies and values in the eighteenth century and in recent decades. As research by Sarah Nelson has shown, at this time in the French eighteenth century the value of various coins was expressed in *livres*, with the *livre tournois* existing as a conventional measure of worth originally representing the value of one pound of silver.³⁸ The value of the *livre* was fixed by monetary edicts yet continued to vary according to the financial needs of the kingdom in the seventeenth century, before the gold coin known as the *louis d'or* was finally fixed in the early decades of the eighteenth century at a value of twenty-four *livres*, while the silver *écu* retained a value of six *livres* and the franc circulated as a gold coin worth a single *livre* or twenty *sous*.³⁹ These equivalencies are only rough approximations and it is even more difficult to estimate their value relative to modern currency. As research by Pierre Goubert has shown, one way of appraising levels of wealth in the seventeenth century is to examine the value of dowries. He estimates that a dowry of 1,000 *livres* would be roughly equivalent to 60,000 francs at their 1982 value.⁴⁰ The average value of the American dollar in 1982 was approximately six francs, meaning a dowry of 1,000 *livres* might be

³⁸ See Hortense Mancini and Marie Mancini, *Memoirs: Hortense Mancini and Marie Mancini*, ed. and trans. Sarah Nelson, Other voices in early modern Europe (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 36.

³⁹ See François Bluche, *Dictionnaire du grand siècle*, nouv. éd., Indispensables de l'histoire (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 1049.

⁴⁰ See Pierre Goubert, *Le siècle de Louis XIV: études* (Paris: Fallois, 1996), 98.

vaguely equivalent to a value of 10,000 dollars in the late twentieth century or between 20,000 and 30,000 dollars today.

Born Magdeleine Sophie Arnould, the eldest of five children of Jean Arnould and Rose Marguerite Laurent, Sophie Arnould (1740–1802) made her Paris Opéra debut in the December 1757 revival of the *ballet héroïque Les amours des dieux* (1727) by Jean-Joseph Mouret (1682–1738) and subsequently replaced her mentor Marie Fel at the Opéra in 1758. She was also a student of Claire-Josèphe-Hippolyte de Lérès de La Tude (1723–1803), dite La Clairon. The *Mercure de France* spoke positively of her debut in *Les amours des dieux*.

Mademoiselle Arnould continue son début dans les *Amours des Dieux*, avec le succès le plus grand & le plus mérité. Elle attire la foule au point, que le jeudi est devenu le jour brillant de l'Opéra, & qu'il efface le vendredi. Le second air qu'elle chante, a mieux développé l'étendue de son talent. Elle rassemble en elle les graces de la figure, la beauté de l'organe & la chaleur du sentiment. Sa voix est mieux que tendre, elle est passionnée. Ses sons animés portent la flamme dans le coeur le plus froid. En un mot, elle a reçu tous les dons de la nature, & pour les perfectionner, elle reçoit tous les secours de l'art. On dit que deux grandes maîtresses veulent bien partager la gloire de l'instruire; que Mlle Fel lui montre l'art du chant, & Mlle Clairon forme son jeu. S'il est vrai, rien ne leur fait plus d'honneur, & le public ne peut trop les en remercier. Comme elles trouveront dans Mlle Arnould une élève digne de leurs leçons, il y a tout lieu d'espérer que nous devons bientôt à leurs soins réunis une *Armide* accomplie, qui joindra au charme puissant de la voix, toute la magie de l'action.⁴¹

Mademoiselle Arnould continues her debut in the *Amours des Dieux* with the greatest & most deserved success. She draws a crowd to the point that Thursday has become the brightest day of the Opéra, & it eclipses Friday. The second *air* she sings has developed the best range of her talent. She summons the graces of her figure, the beauty of her voice & the warmth of sentiment. Her voice is better than tender, it is passionate. Her lively sounds ignite a flame in the coldest heart. In a word, she has received all the gifts of nature, & to perfect them, she has received all the assistance of art. People say that two great masters share the glory of instructing her; that Mademoiselle Fel showed her the art of singing, & Mademoiselle Clairon shaped her acting. If this is true, nothing brings them greater honor, & the public cannot thank them enough. As they found in Mademoiselle Arnould a pupil worthy of their lessons, there is every reason to hope that thanks to their united efforts we will soon have an accomplished *Armide*, who will join to the powerful charm of her voice all the magic of the action.

In the two decades that followed her debut she sang over thirty roles in revivals of works of Lully and Rameau, although she also appeared opposite Fel in the February 1758 revival of the lyric tragedy *Énée et Lavinie* (1690) by Pascal Collasse (1649–1709). Her other notable early appearances included the role of Psyché in the *ballet héroïque Les fêtes de Paphos* (1758) by Jean-Joseph

⁴¹ See the *Mercure de France, dédié au Roy, Janvier 1758* (Paris: Chaubert, 1758), 163.

Cassanée de Mondonville (1711–1772), and Aréthuse in the *opéra-ballet Les fêtes d'Euterpe* (1758) by Antoine Dauvergne (1713–1797) in which she also appeared opposite Fel. Arnould participated in the 1759 and 1767 revivals of *Le Devin du village* (1752) by Rousseau and in 1760 she sang Zirphée at Fontainebleau in the revival of the *opéra-ballet Zélindor, roi des silphes* (1745) by François Rebel (1701–1775) and François Francoeur (1698–1787), composers for whom she would also sing the role of Alie in the September 1760 Palais-Royal premiere of the *ballet héroïque Le Prince de Noisy* (1745). In the middle of her career Arnould appeared as Iole in the lyric tragedy *Hercule mourant* (1761) by Dauvergne and the title role in the lyric tragedy *Polixène* (1763) with Dauvergne conducting, before finally appearing as Liparis in his *ballet héroïque Le triomphe de flore, ou Le retour du printemps* (1765). She attracted particular attention in the *ballet héroïque Aline, reine de Golconde* (1766) by Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny (1729–1817). The year of her appearance in the title role of *Polixène*, the dramatist and eventual director of the Opéra-Comique Charles Simon Favart (1710–1792) praised her in the following madrigal.

Pourquoi, divine enchanteresse,
 Me troubles-tu par tes accens?
 Tu me fais sentir une ivresse
 Qui ne va pas jusqu'à tes sens.
 Peut-être que dans ma jeunesse
 Mon bonheur eût été le tien:
 Je t'aime, et le temps ne me laisse
 Que le désir... Désir n'est rien.
 Ah! tais-toi; mais non, chante encore;
 Qu'avec tes sons voluptueux
 Mon reste d'âme s'évapore,
 Et je me croirai trop heureux.⁴²

Why, divine enchantress,
 Do you trouble me with your accents?
 You make me feel an intoxication
 That does not extend to your senses.
 Perhaps in my youth
 My happiness would have been yours:
 I love you, and time leaves me with
 Only desire... Desire is nothing.
 Ah! be silent; but no, sing once more;
 That with your voluptuous sounds
 The rest of my soul evaporates
 And I believe myself to be too happy.

In the Rameau repertory Arnould sang Argie in the *comédie lyrique Les Paladins* (1760), Iphise in the 1764 production of *Les fêtes d'Hébé, ou Les talents lyriques*, a role Pélissier had premiered in 1739, and to much critical acclaim, Télémaque in a 1764 revival of *Castor et Pollux* (1754). She would resume this role in a subsequent revival of the same work in 1772. For Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787), she created the roles of Eurydice in the lyric tragedy *Orphée et*

⁴² See Albéric Deville, *Arnoldiana, ou Sophie Arnould et ses Contemporaines; Recueil choisi d'anecdotes piquantes, de Réparties et de bons mots de Mlle Arnould; précédé d'une Notice sur sa vie et sur l'Académie impériale de musique* (Paris: Gérard, 1813), 56.

Eurydice (1774) and the title role in the lyric tragedy *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774). Her romantic involvement with Louis-Léon-Félicité de Brancas (1733–1824), duc de Lauraguais, resulted in the birth of three children, Auguste-Camille, dit de Bénerville in 1761, Antoine-Constant de Diaville in 1764, and Alexandrine-Sophie in 1767. She avoided political censure during the Revolution by moving to rural Luzarches in 1791 and subsequently returned to Paris, where she lived in accommodations near the Louvre and received an annual pension from the government.

The varied stage careers of these women, many of whom began singing professionally elsewhere in France before moving to Paris, followed a common pattern in which they advanced from positions singing in the fair theaters of Paris or in the chorus of the Opéra, where each would have been known as an *actrice des chœurs*, to dedicated roles as an *actrice chantante* or *première actrice de l'Opéra*. The predominance of their Rameau roles, which were more prevalent even than their participation in revivals of the lyric tragedies of Lully, amplified the charged musical and cultural presence of these women beginning in the fourth decade of the eighteenth century. At this time the prevailing view of audiences at the Opéra was that Rameau was at times disturbingly progressive and revolutionary, mounting compositions that drew attention away from recitative as one of the most prized formal and poetic elements of Lullian lyric tragedy and that focused on purely musical situations, something that was popularly perceived as a consequence of his interests as a theorist of music.⁴³ As research by Charles Dill has shown, the public was so struck and perplexed by musical and generic innovations in the staged works of Rameau that it called the composer and his works monstrous, alluding to a fraught facet of epistemology at this time, when the figure of the monster became a model for discussing everything from the limits of knowledge to departures from normative generic practices.⁴⁴ The reception of Rameau and of the *filles de l'Opéra* not only inspired critical meditations on the relationship between recitative and more entertaining elements of the operatic

⁴³ See Charles Dill, “The Reception of Rameau’s *Castor et Pollux* in 1737 and 1754,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1989, iii.

⁴⁴ See Dill, “Rameau’s Imaginary Monsters: Knowledge, Theory, and Chromaticism in *Hippolyte et Aricie*,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55/3 (2002), 476, and idem, *Monstrous Opera: Rameau and the Tragic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 12.

genre, such as danced *divertissements* and orchestral accompaniments; it also delved into the axiology of staged works, their performers, and performances. Audiences debated the merits of the brash harmonies, contrapuntal complexities, and vocal virtuosity with which the music of Rameau was associated, lamenting the difficult and ultimately abandoned *trio des parques* from *Hippolyte et Aricie* as well as the problem of *exécution*, of performance and interpretation, in the *opéra-ballet* *Les Indes galantes*.⁴⁵ They turned as well to the musical and social significance of the *filles de l'Opéra* who executed these demanding roles, who often assumed something of the same innovative, revolutionary, and even monstrous aura as Rameau even as they were scrutinized for their association with elements from well beyond the scope of performance and technique, such as sexual promiscuity, character assassination, disease, and the generation of noise in polite society.

Morality

Critics in the first half of the eighteenth century were not insensitive to popular female theatrical performers whose quest to establish themselves in public life often came under fire for its perceived threat to social and sovereign order. Consider the text of the following satirical *air* *Il faut sans relâche* ("Without respite we must"), which Robert Darnton estimates circulated in the middle of the century.⁴⁶ The marquise de Pompadour bears the brunt of a common critical trope in this satire, association not with monstrosity but with the related characterizations of ugliness and displeasure. As mistress to Louis XV she was well known at court in Versailles from the fourth decade of the century, when she was the subject of numerous satires and epigrams and most notably those of the comte de Maurepas. Among the most popular of the Pompadour satires is the *chanson* *Qu'une bâtarde de catin* ("That a bastard strumpet"), appearing in numerous manuscript versions

⁴⁵ See Graham Sadler, "Rameau, Pellegrin and the Opéra: The Revisions of 'Hippolyte et Aricie' during its First Season," *The Musical Times* 124 (1983), 533, and Simon-Henri Dubuisson, *Mémoires secrets du XVIIIe siècle: lettres du commissaire Dubuisson au marquis de Caumont, 1735–1741*, ed. Albert Rouxel (Paris: Arnould, 1882), 120.

⁴⁶ See Robert Darnton, "An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *The American Historical Review* 105/1 (2000), 27, and idem, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2010), 185.

including several preserved in the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.⁴⁷ Her unpleasant physical appearance and lack of skill as a performer were apparently matched only by the audacity of her desire for public approval.

Il faut sans relâche
Faire des chansons.
Plus Poisson s'en fâche
Plus nous chanterons.
Chaque jour elle offre
Matériau à couplets
Et veut que l'on coffre
Ceux qui les ont faits.

Ils sont punissables
Peignant ses beautés
De traits remarquables
Qu'ils n'ont point chantés,
Sa gorge vilaine
Ses mains et ses bras,
Souvent une haleine
Qui n'embaume pas.

Le folle indécence
De son opéra
Ou par bienséance
Tout ministre va.
Il faut qu'on y vante
Son chant fredonné
Sa voix-chevrotante
Son jeu forcené.

Elle veut qu'on prône
Ses petits talents
Se croit sur le trône
Ferme pour longtemps.
Mais le pied lui glisse,
Le roi sort d'erreur
Et ce sacrifice
Lui rend notre cœur.⁴⁸

Without respite we must
Make up songs.
The more Poisson grows angry
The more we will sing.
Each day she offers
Material for stanzas
And wants to lock up
Those who have made them.

They are worthy of punishment,
By painting her beauties
Without having sung of
Such remarkable traits
As her nasty cleavage,
Her hands and her arms,
And her breath,
Which hardly smells sweet.

The crazed indecency
Of her opera
Where decorum requires
Every minister to attend.
One must vaunt
Her droning manner of singing,
Her goatish voice,
Her frenzied acting.

She wants people to applaud
Her meager talents,
Believes herself to be firmly
Enthroned for a long time.
But her foot is slipping away from her,
The king is mending his ways
And by this sacrifice of her,
He is winning back our hearts.

⁴⁷ See Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12717, 12718, and 12719. These and other transmissions are discussed in Darnton, "An Early Information Society," 27. On the related case of satires of Jeanne Bécu, comtesse du Barry (1743–1793), see Émile Cantrel, *Nouvelles à la main sur la comtesse Du Barry trouvées dans les papiers du Comte de **** (Paris: Henri Plon, 1861), as well as Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *La Du Barry*, nouv. éd. (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1902). On the musical taste of the marquise de Pompadour and her association with the Opéra and its critics, see Robert Isherwood, "The Conciliatory Partisan of Musical Liberty: Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, 1717–1783," in *French Musical Thought, 1600–1800*, ed. Georgia Cowart, Studies in Music 105 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 95–120, and Thomas Kaiser, "Madame de Pompadour and the Theaters of Power," *French Historical Studies* 19/4 (1996), 1025–1044.

Here the description of the marquise de Pompadour as a droning nag, nasty and foul smelling, forceful and frenzied in her acting, flies in the face of popular characterizations of the marquise as beautiful, intelligent, and refined, and has much in common with more insulting vignettes that circulated in libels called *poissonades*, so named because their lyrics contained puns on her maiden name, Poisson (“fish”).⁴⁹ The same manuscript in which this verse appears includes remarks on the demanding nature of actresses and of opera as genre, suggesting that patience with traditional dramaturgical and ideological concerns had worn thin among audiences both simple and sovereign. The following *chanson* on the *noël Où est-il, ce petit nouveau né?* (“Where is this little newborn?”) predicts that the king himself will soon grow weary of the operas produced by the marquise de Pompadour at Versailles.⁵⁰

Le roi sera bientôt las	The king will soon tire
De sa sottise pécore.	Of his silly goose.
L'ennui jusques dans ses bras	Boredom, even in her arms,
Le suit et le dévore	Pursues and devours him.
Quoi dit-il toujours des opéras	What? he says. Still more operas,
En verrons-nous encore? ⁵¹	Will we still see more of them?

The idea that the royal sacrifice of an unseemly actress would benefit public taste was no new idea by the middle of the century, nor was the practice of couching such critiques in gendered terms. The association of operatic entertainment with feminine immorality had always been part of the history of the genre in France.⁵² As a result of the gendered understanding of the opera and its

⁴⁸ See Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 13709, folio 41.

⁴⁹ See Darnton, *Poetry and the Police*, 175.

⁵⁰ Although they were primarily Christmas carols, *noëls*, as Darnton has pointed out, were traditionally produced at the end of the year to satirize ministers and other notable men and women associated with the court at Versailles. See Darnton, *Poetry and the Police*, 186. Among the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas*, one volume from the very end of the seventeenth century contains over two hundred *noëls sur les dames de la cour*. See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1696 jusques & compris 1699. Vol. e IX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12624, folio 110.

⁵¹ See Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 13709, folio 42.

⁵² See Cowart, “Of Women, Sex and Folly,” 206.

performers, critical fascination with the feminine body surged and attention focused progressively more on the materiality of the representative medium than on the meaning of what performers uttered or the morality or social rank of the characters they represented on stage. Boileau had presented his infamous critique of opera, which he called a hotbed of salacious morality, in his tenth satire, touted in his lifetime perhaps less as a rejection of the operatic genre than as an indictment of immoral women. The satire was filled with warnings about the infidelity of wives as well as the mindless women transfixed by dance and *divertissements* as members of the audience in the theater, where lewd topics and lustful immorality were dressed up to appear as divinity, prone to turning women from soft, agreeable, and witty individuals into nothing but shrews.⁵³ Contempt for feminine charms and deceptions as well as suspicion of the operatic genre spread effortlessly from Boileau to other writers. When the magistrate Jean-Laurent Le Cerf de La Viéville (1674–1707) compared and contrasted French and Italian opera in the *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise* (1704), he used gendered terms, describing Italian music as an old, cunning seductress decked out with cosmetics and finery the better to overpower the men around her.

Representés-vous une vieille coquette raffinée, chargée de rouge, de blanc & de mouches, tout cela véritablement appliqué avec tout le soin & toute l'adresse possibles: cachant les rides de son visage & les défauts de sa taille par une parure également magnifique & bien entenduë: souriant & grimaçant de la maniere la plus fine & la plus étudiée; mais souriant à droit & à gauche, grimaçant sans cesse: toûjours du brillant & de la vivacité, ni justesse, ni prudence: des airs engageans, une envie perpetuelle de plaire à tout le monde: ayant au suprême degré l'art de badiner, d'agacer les gens: avec cela sans coeur, sans ame, sans sincerité: inégale, ne demandant qu'à changer à tout moment de lieux, de plaisirs.⁵⁴

You represent an old affected seducer, laden with rouge, powder & beauty marks, all of this applied with utmost care & all possible dexterity: hiding the wrinkles of her face & the faults of her figure by finery equally magnificent & skillful: smiling & grimacing in the most cunning & calculated manner; but smiling to the right & the left, grimacing ceaselessly: always brilliant & vivacious, without justice or prudence: having engaging airs, a perpetual desire to please all the world, and to a supreme degree the art of flirting, of enticing men; without heart, without soul, without sincerity: inconsistent, demanding at every moment only changes of place, of pleasures.

⁵³ See Boileau, *Oeuvres complètes de Boileau*, I, 97.

⁵⁴ See Jean-Laurent Le Cerf de La Viéville de Freneuse, *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise, où, en examinant en detail les avantages des Spectacles, & le mérite des Compositeurs des deux nations* (Brussels: François Foppens, 1704), 147.

Above and beyond its indictment of Italian musical style, this elaborate portrait by Le Cerf shows that suspicion of women in the theater as actresses or members of the audience was powerfully strong even before the turn of the eighteenth century.⁵⁵ Old women and especially those made up to look young were objects of great terror and suspicion. This was never more clear than in depictions of elderly women on stage, for instance in the comedy of manners *Le Misanthrope, ou l'Atrabilaire amoureux* (1666) of Molière, a work in which the young Célimène, ultimately incapable of choosing the protagonist Alceste as the love of her life, remains rejected and alone rather like the aged coquette Arsinoé, whose outdated perspective on life and love hinders her social influence. As research by Devoney Looser has shown, elderly women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were as different from each other in old age as in youth and middle age. Women were unable to avoid the stigmas associated with age or gender as they moved into old age; the two categories combined to bring about what we now refer to as sexist and ageist comments on their bodies of written work. Whereas men in the eighteenth century were considered to gain wisdom with age, women were not.⁵⁶ The themes elaborated by Le Cerf and the dangers of female cunning and artifice would continue to underscore unease about actresses at the Opéra well into the eighteenth century. These themes were tied in part to the tumultuous history of the reception of Italian repertoires in early modern France, where the increasing prominence of genres like the sonata and cantata was regarded with suspicion and perceptions of Italian compositional style as needlessly learned and virtuosic clashed with what Don Fader has decribed as the basic tenets of *politesse* or noble etiquette, which emphasized the concealment of knowledge, effort, and artifice behind a pleasant and seemingly natural courtly façade.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See Elizabeth Hehr, "How the French viewed the differences between French and Italian singing styles of the 18th century," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 16/1 (1985), 73–85.

⁵⁶ See Devoney Looser, *Women Writers and Old Age in Britain, 1750–1850* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 15.

⁵⁷ See Don Fader, "The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic: Taste, Rhetoric, and *Politesse* in the 17th-Century French Reception of Italian Music," *The Journal of Musicology* 20/1 (2003), 8.

In addition to the critical focus on the gendered, bodily medium of performance, commentators also elaborated on the moral status of performing bodies in society. As research by Jérôme de La Gorce has shown, the *filles de l'Opéra* were a source of constant anxiety in the early eighteenth century, when the Parisian public reacted to them with *violentes passions* or violent passions.⁵⁸ Dismay over the morality or monstrosity of women in the theater located its roots in historical contempt for the acting profession; even late in the eighteenth century, the questionable moral and civic status of actors persisted. In December 1789, when the lawyer and politician Maximilien Robespierre (1758–1794) addressed the Assemblée nationale constituante, which had gathered to debate the critique of the acting profession by the abbé Jean-Sifrein Maury (1746–1817) and questions of voting rights for actors and Jews, his address was ripe with misgivings about the social status of actors that had persisted for over a century.⁵⁹ The ban on female actors in many cultures has been traced to what Senelick has called the peculiar strain of feminine embodiment that ultimately functions as resistant to representation and above all to theatrical representation.⁶⁰ As research by Michèle Montrelay has shown, a woman is the ruin of representation, unable to shed or repress her sexualized body and thus unable to portray a separate character or play at another; she can only exist as herself.⁶¹ Disdain for the acting profession was such that families rarely celebrated the decision of a son or daughter to become an actor or actress. The musicologist and composer Norman Demuth has recorded an occasion when a family went so far as to obtain a *lettre de cachet* to prevent a son from taking up a career in the theater.⁶² As ordinances directed at the Opéra in the

⁵⁸ See Jérôme de La Gorce, “Vie et mœurs des chanteuses de l’Opéra à Paris sous le règne de Louis XIV,” *Littératures classiques* 12 (1990), 323.

⁵⁹ See Maximilien Robespierre, *Virtue and Terror*, trans. John Howe, ed. Jean Ducange, with an introduction by Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 3.

⁶⁰ See Senelick, *The Changing Room*, 5.

⁶¹ See Michèle Montrelay, “Inquiry into Femininity,” *m/f* 1 (1978), 89.

⁶² See Norman Demuth, *French Opera: Its Development to the Revolution* (Sussex: Artemis Press, 1963), 292.

early eighteenth century reveal, actors and actresses could be notoriously temperamental and unaccommodating.⁶³ Many arrived late to performances or drunk, dictating what costumes they would wear or refusing to perform at all. As research by La Gorce has shown, it was not uncommon for a number of women in particular to trump up infirmities or rheumatisms in an attempt to get out of rehearsals and performances.⁶⁴

A number of vignettes in the Maurepas manuscripts recount the fact that such refusals were often the result of interactions between female performers and male patrons. The Aïssé letters also speak to relationships between the *filles de l'Opéra* and their patrons and lovers, on several occasions discussing the many mistresses of Charles de Bourbon, comte de Charolais (1700–1760), one of whom, tormented by the secrecy of their relationship, finally committed herself to the convent.⁶⁵ It was fitting in a sense for Aïssé to have been such an outspoken commentator on women in the theater, since her own life was fraught with social and emotional turmoil. She was meant to have been a Circassian princess but was sold into slavery and purchased by the ambassador Charles de Ferriol (1652–1722), whose attempts to gain sexual favors from her became the subject of numerous pamphlets and satirical accounts, notably the *Histoire d'une Grecque moderne* (1740) of the abbé Antoine François Prévost (1697–1763).⁶⁶ She never married even after she was brought to France to be raised by Marie-Angélique Guérin de Tencin (1674–1736). We also know from accounts in the Tralage manuscripts that the relationship between actresses and their patrons was not infrequently strained by jealousy, greed, and rivalries between patrons as well as infighting in the ranks of performers.

Mariane, qui estoit absente de l'Opéra depuis longtemps, parce que son patron ne vouloit pas qu'elle y fût, y est revenue au mois de septembre 1695. On dit qu'elle n'est plus à personne. Elle n'a point changé, ni pour la voix, ni pour l'embonpoint. Elle demouroit autrefois chez

⁶³ See Durey de Noinville, *Histoire du théâtre de l'Académie royale de musique en France*, 105–146.

⁶⁴ See La Gorce, “Vie et moeurs des chanteuses de l'Opéra,” 329.

⁶⁵ See Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, 47.

⁶⁶ See Goncourt and Goncourt, *La femme au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1887), 177, and Antoine François Prévost, *Histoire d'une Grecque moderne* (Amsterdam: François Desbordes, 1740).

Fanchon Moreau, qui est sa parente. La belle Mlle Morel ne danse plus à l'Opéra, en aoust et septembre 1695. Son patron, qui est jaloux et qui craint que M. le duc de C... ne devienne son rival, ne veut pas qu'elle y paroisse.⁶⁷

Mariane, who was absent from the Opéra for a long time, because her patron did not want her to appear there, has returned for the month of September 1695. People say she is no longer involved with anyone. She has not changed, neither vocally nor in terms of portliness. In the past she stayed with Fanchon Moreau, who is her relative. The beautiful Mademoiselle Morel is no longer dancing at the Opéra as of August and September 1695. Her patron, who is jealous and believes that the duke of C... will become his rival, does not want her to appear there.

An anonymous manuscript described by La Gorce, dating to the last decade of the seventeenth century and authored quite possibly by the abbé de Vassetz, the curé of Saint-Lambert who wrote the *Traité contre le luxe des coëffures* (1694) and the *Traité du mérite* (1703), is quick to point out the patronage of the *filles de l'Opéra* by wealthy men and women alike.⁶⁸

Nulle fille n'y est jamais entrée que par la faveur extreme d'un grand seigneur ou d'une grande dame. Mais très souvent, ces patrons sont notes de la dernière infamie et par consequent celle qui y entre par cette voie, on la montre au doigt sans rien dire, et c'est assez pour reconnaître cette fille sans honneur et l'avoir entièrement perdue.⁶⁹

No girl has ever entered the Opéra but for the extreme favor of a great gentleman or lady. But very often, these patrons are noted for the latest infamy and consequently, as for the one who enters this way, people show her the finger without saying a word, and it is enough to acknowledge this girl without honor and to have entirely lost her.

As this document claims, no *filles de l'Opéra* could maintain a position as an actress or dancer without the support of a significant patron, an arrangement that often led patrons down some of the same questionable moral paths the *filles de l'Opéra* reputedly traveled. As much as these women tried to exercise a degree of independence and autonomy as popular performers in the theater, their status and their cultural significance remained tied to their relationships with patrons.

⁶⁷ See Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Recueil de Tralage 6544 (IV), folio 213. The text is reprinted in Lacroix, *Notes et documents sur l'histoire des théâtres de Paris au XVIIe siècle par Jean Nicolas du Tralage, extraits mis en ordre et publiés d'après le manuscrit original par le bibliophile Jacob*, Nouvelle Collection Moliéresque V (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1880), 84.

⁶⁸ See the *Traité contre le luxe des coëffures* (Paris: Couterot, 1694), and the *Traité du mérite*, par M. l'abbé de Vassetz (Paris: Vandéve, 1703). See also La Gorce, "Vie et moeurs des chanteuses de l'Opéra," 324.

⁶⁹ See Louis Ladvoat, *Lettres sur l'Opéra à l'abbé Dubos, suivies de Description de la Vie et Moeurs, de l'Exercice et l'État des Filles de l'Opéra*, ed. Jérôme de La Gorce (Paris: Cicero, 1993), 78. See also La Gorce, "Vie et moeurs des chanteuses de l'Opéra," 327.

One notable scandal involving allegations of intimacy between a *fille de l'Opéra* and a patron consisted of little more than a saucy conversation, proof that among the ranks of *filles de l'Opéra*, some would stop at nothing to undermine the reputation of a colleague. In November 1740 the marquis de Bonnac, François-Armand d'Usson, dit Jambe de bois (1716–1778), the diplomat and correspondent of the marquise de Pompadour who served as *particulier ambassadeur du Roi* to The Hague in the middle of the century, was surprised in the midst of an exchange with the dancer Marie-Antoinette Petit in her dressing room, an incident that led to a protracted series of ghostwritten pamphlets. What little information we have for Petit comes from the so-called Amelot manuscript in the collections of the Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, where we read that she entered the Opéra in 1733 with a salary of 400 *livres*, was dismissed for inappropriate behavior in 1740, returned in April 1746, and retired a year later. As research by Graham Sadler has shown, an additional inventory in manuscript describes Petit as large in stature, pale, born with the surname Aquilain, and well known as mistress to the president of the *deuxième chambre des Enquêtes* in the parliament of Paris, Gabriel Bernard de Rieux (1687–1745), with whom she had several children.⁷⁰ The same manuscript claims that she was discharged from the Opéra in October 1736 for having come to blows with a certain mademoiselle St. Germain. She returned shortly thereafter. Her crime on this particular evening at the Opéra involved having left her door wide open and having chosen the barest possible garments to wear. Once the matter was publicized by her younger rival Louise Jacquet (1722–1784), Petit was unable to appear on stage without the chorus and audience of the

⁷⁰ See the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de l'Académie royale de musique vulgairement l'Opéra depuis son établissement en l'année 1669 jusques et y compris l'année 1758*, Paris, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, Rés. 516. Named for Abraham Nicolas Amelot de la Houssaye (1634–1706), the minister who had it drawn up, the Amelot manuscript is described briefly in the *Catalogue de la bibliothèque de F. J. Fétis acquise par l'état belge* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1877), 461. See also the *Détail de la régie actuel de L'Académie Royale de Musique avec un Denombrement de tout ce qui fait la Recette et la Depense de ce Spectacle en 1738*, in Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1^{er}, II.4119, folio 162. These documents are described in detail in Sadler, "Rameau's Singers and Players at the Paris Opéra: A Little-Known Inventory of 1738," *Early Music* 11/4 (1983), 453–467, and idem, "The Paris Opéra dancers in Rameau's Day: A Little-known inventory of 1738," in *Jean-Philippe Rameau: colloque international organisé par la Société Rameau, Dijon 21–24 septembre 1983*, ed. Jérôme de La Gorce (Paris: Champion, 1987), 519–531.

Opéra bursting into laughter. She was banished from the Opéra for five years; the official records from 1740 show that she was *remerciée pour avoir manqué de respect au directeur* or fired for having lacked sufficient respect for the director, in this case Louis-Armand-Eugène de Thuret, who had been captain of the *régiment de Picardie*.⁷¹ Jacquet continued to appear in soprano roles at the Opéra until 1758 and had the distinction of having her portrait by the Swiss artist Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702–1789) exhibited at the Salon de Saint-Luc in 1752. As for the marquis de Bonnac, he was the author of a *roman à clef*, *Le mandarin Kinchifuu, histoire chinoise par M. de ****, *gentilhomme de la chambre du Preste-Jean*; he was quite possibly assisted in the development of the story by his secretary Charles-Louis de La Fontaine (1718–1754), the grandson of the noted fabulist Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695).⁷² The work is cast as a fairy tale in which the mandarin is reduced to the size of a figurine and ends up on the mantelpiece of a Parisian woman; its composition and dedication to the niece of the army officer Claude Alexandre, comte de Bonneval (1675–1747), Marie-Pétronille-Louise Bidé de La Grandville (1721–1794), whom the marquis had married the very year of the affair with Petit, are by way of apology to her.

Petit was quick to call attention to her situation in a series of pamphlets that outlined the circumstances of her break with the Opéra. She was at pains to underscore her need for pardon and she described her good looks and breeding in an attempt to regain public approval.

Il est d'usage parmi nous de s'accorder une indulgence reciproque en matiere de galanterie. Cette discretion politique est absolument necessaire à l'interêt commun. Sans cela nous serions tour à tour les dupes de nos vengeances, & les hommes cesseroient d'être les nôtres. J'avouray que je ne voulois entrer à l'Opera que dans la vûë d'imiter mes Compagnes & d'arriver comme elles au Bonheur par la route du plaisir. Je suis jeune, bien faite & d'une assez jolie figure, j'ay les yeux petits, mais vifs, & ma mere qui s'y connoît dit qu'ils en valent bien de plus grands.⁷³

⁷¹ See Jullien, *Amours d'Opéra*, 91.

⁷² See François-Armand d'Usson de Bonnac, *Le mandarin Kinchifuu, histoire chinoise par M. de ****, *gentilhomme de la chambre du Preste-Jean* (Dieppe: Lormois, n.d.).

⁷³ See the *Factum pour Mademoiselle Petit, Danseuse de l'Opera, Revoquée, Complainante au Public*, in the *Recueil des pieces pour et contre concernant l'affaire de Mlle Petit, Actrice de l'Opera de Paris* (Cythere: Imprimerie de Venus, 1741), 1.

It is common among us to agree to a reciprocal forgiveness in matters of galantry. This political discretion is absolutely necessary to the common interest. Without it we would be in turn the dupes of our revenge, & men would cease to be ours. I suppose I only wanted to enter the Opéra with a view to imitating my Companions & arriving, like them, at Happiness by way of the road of pleasure. I am young, well proportioned & of a rather pretty figure, I have small but lively eyes, & my mother, who is an expert, says that they are well worth bigger ones.

Here the efforts of Petit to beg pardon for her indiscretion in her dressing room are matched only by her insistence on the merits of her proportionate body and appealing eyes. In an era when the critique of actresses readily traded in tropes of their monstrous physical appearance, the litany Petit constructs of her positive physical attributes cries out for attention above and beyond critical condemnation. Her plea for political discretion is also evidence that she recognized the public import of her private conversation with the marquis de Bonnac and took steps to ensure that her legacy as a *filles de l'Opéra* would not be mired in the trivialities of hearsay and gossip.

A reply from Jacquet promptly appeared, although it is worth pointing out that the original brief from Petit and the subsequent response from Jacquet were penned not by the actresses themselves but by the abbé de La Mare (1708–1742) and the lawyer and editor Anne-Gabriel Meusnier de Querlon (1702–1780). As for the response from Jacquet, the short pamphlet is at pains to negate the label of calumny that Petit had allegedly leveled against the actions of her rival and accuser. Its introduction outlines the long silence with which Jacquet apparently confronted her accusations from Petit as well as the injustice of the allegations brought against her by the public.

J'avois voué un généreux silence aux imputations injurieuses et aux éloquents invectives de la demoiselle Petit: j'avois résolu de ne leur opposer que le mépris dû à sa personne; mais le nom de calomniatrice, si nouveau pour moi, m'a paru encore intéresser tellement l'honneur de la profession que mon innocence se trouve forcée d'élever aujourd'hui sa voix pour vous demander justice à mon tour. Le procès qu'on m'intente injustement est, Messieurs, actuellement par devant vous: vous êtes saisis de la contestation par le fait de ma partie même, et les pièces sont sur le bureau. Il est question d'examiner les prétendus griefs de mon adversaire, la discussion n'en sera pas longue et j'y répondrai sommairement.⁷⁴

I had dedicated a generous silence to insulting imputations and to the eloquent invectives of the demoiselle Petit: I had resolved to compare them only to the contempt due to her; but the name of slanderer, so new for me, still appeared to me to interest the honor of the occupation

⁷⁴ See the *Réponse au factum, publié sous le nom de la demoiselle Petit, cy-devant actrice de l'Opéra, pour Mademoiselle Jacquet, accusée d'imposture et de calomnie*, reprinted in Jullien, *Amours d'Opéra*, 101.

such that my innocence finds itself forced to raise its voice today to ask you for justice in turn. The case that people unfairly raise against me is, Gentlemen, now in front of you: you are overtaken with protest by the fact of my own role, and the pieces are all laid out on the desk. It is a matter of examining the alleged grievances of my adversary, the discussion will not be long and I shall answer it summarily.

While Jacquet continues with her account for more than the length of a brief summary, her response includes quotations directly from the original pamphlet of Petit as well as a curious deference to metaphors that swirled around the *filles de l'Opéra* in the early eighteenth century, particularly about their fickleness, their recourse to ruses and artifice in and outside of the theater, and the ways in which their lovers regularly left them and took them back in seemingly unending games of cat and mouse. The result is a diffident tract that rivals anonymous epigrams about the *filles de l'Opéra* in its candor and condemnatory tone.

Les moyens de récusation articulés contre ma personne sous cette prétendue qualité de dénonciatrice ou de témoin, ne sont pas mieux fondés que le reste. L'histoire de ma vie qu'on n'ose détailler est le premier de ces moyens. Or vous jugez aisément, Messieurs, que mon histoire est à peu près la sienne. Intrigues, galanteries, manèges et quelques infidélités peut-être (car pourquoi ne l'avouerais-je pas?) voilà le tissu de notre vie; nous sommes toutes faites de même; il n'y a que les mœurs qui nous distinguent, et je ne crois pas qu'elle gagnât beaucoup au parallèle de nos mœurs. Le second moyen est que mon amant m'a quittée depuis un an pour une raison sçue de M. Pilbrac. Aurois-je bonne grâce de donner ici la liste des amans qui ont quitté et repris tour à tour Mademoiselle Petit? Comment donc peut-elle me faire un crime de ces vicissitudes attachées nécessairement à notre profession? Quand il seroit vrai qu'un accident comme celui qu'elle fait soupçonner m'auroit fait perdre mon amant, n'est-elle pas elle-même exposée tous les jours au même inconvenient, et sans interpellier son chirurgien je vous laisse imaginer, Messieurs, s'il y a toute la sûreté possible avec de petits yeux vifs tournés comme les siens!⁷⁵

The objections articulated against my person under this alleged guise of informer or witness are no better founded than the rest. The story of my life, which people do not dare to explain in detail, is the first of these grievances. And you can easily judge, Gentlemen, that my story is almost the same as hers. Intrigues, attentiveness, ploys and perhaps some disloyalty (for why would not I admit it?) such is the fabric of our life; we are also made of the very same material; there are only morals distinguishing us, and I do not think that she would gain a great deal from the comparison of our morals. The second of these complaints is that my lover has left me for a year for a reason known only to M. Pilbrac. Would I have the good grace to give a list here of the lovers who left and returned to Mademoiselle Petit in turn? Therefore how can she make a criminal out of me for the vicissitudes necessarily tied up with our profession? While it is true that an accident like the one she casts in suspicion would have cost me my lover, she herself is not exposed every day in the same inconvenient manner, and without interrogating her surgeon I leave you to imagine, Gentlemen, whether there is any security possible with small lively eyes turned as hers are!

⁷⁵ Ibid., 105.

Mentioned here in passing is Gilles de Bertrand Pibrac (1693–1771), *chirurgien-major de l'École militaire* and *premier chirurgien* of Marie Leszczyńska (1703–1768), the queen consort of France, and member of the Académie royale de chirurgie, of which he was the director from 1762 to 1764. Privy to private health information about the royal mistresses and other women upon whom he called in his line of work, Pibrac was a specialist in the treatment of venereal disease, hinted at here as reason for the desertion of Jacquet by her lover. Above and beyond its mockery of the *petits yeux vifs* of Petit, the response of Jacquet plays up the intrigues, ploys, and disloyalties of the lives and loves of the *filles de l'Opéra*, going so far as to call these ruses the fabric of their daily lives and even the fiber of their very existence. That Jacquet and her ghostwriter Meusnier de Querlon so deftly singled out the artful and deceptive qualities of actresses would seem to suggest that writers in these years did not regard the *filles de l'Opéra* as unintelligent waifs unaware of their charms. Instead these women attracted attention and suspicion for knowing just how powerful their intrigues were and just how cleverly they were able to balance discretion in pamphlet literature with accounts of their indiscretions in and outside of the theater.

Publicity

The status of women in the theater was not only the subject of gossip in the early part of the eighteenth century; it was also a matter of public record. Decades after the sopranos Pélissier and Catherine Nicole Le Maure (1704–1786) had reached the height of their popularity, the art critic and salonist Louis Petit de Bachaumont (1690–1771) described a list of *filles de l'Opéra* that one could consult in cases where the morals of a particular woman were in question.

Par un abus né de la corruption des mœurs de la capitale, lorsqu'une femme vouloit se soustraire à l'empire de son mari, une fille à l'autorité de son pere ou de sa mere, elle se faisoit inscrire sur la liste des filles de l'Opéra, & sans avoir aucun talent ni disposition pour le théâtre, elle devenoit libre de vivre dans le désordre, sans que la police pût avoir inspection chez elle à cet égard.⁷⁶

By an abuse born of moral corruption in the capital, when a woman wanted to shake off the shackles of her husband, or a girl wanted to resist the authority of her father or mother, she

⁷⁶ See Louis Petit de Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la republique des lettres en France, depuis MDCCLXII jusqu'à nos jours, ou Journal d'un observateur*, 36 vols. (London: John Adamsohn, 1777), VII, 265.

inscribed her name on the list of the filles de l'Opéra, & without possessing any talent or disposition for the theater, she became free to live in disarray, without the police examining her in this respect.

A separate volume from the early decades of the nineteenth century would similarly describe the *filles de l'Opéra* as *soustraites à l'autorité de leurs parents, et par ordre de Louis XIV, peuvent être impunément libertines* ("exempt from the authority of their parents, and by order of Louis XIV, they have the power to be libertines with impunity").⁷⁷ One verse went so far as to describe the practice of actually marking on garments as a sign that a particular woman belonged to the ranks of the *filles de l'Opéra*. It was sung to the tune of the popular *air de la béquille du père Barnaba* ("air of the crutch of father Barnaba") about a Capuchin friar who suffered at length after his crutch was stolen, an *air* that also served as the basis for a *concerto comique* by the organist and composer Michel Corrette (1707–1795). Tracing its origins to the satirical tradition of the late seventeenth century, the *air* became popular in late 1737 when it was swept up in parodies of the lyric tragedy *Castor et Pollux* by Rameau.⁷⁸

Il faudroit à Paris,
Ville en peuple féconde,
Marquer sur les habits
Les qualités du monde,
Et que, sur les mantilles
Des Filles d'Opéra,
On brodât la Béquille
Du père Barnaba.

Quittez, belle Vénus,
Le séjour de Cithère;
Paris est au-dessus
Pour l'amoureux mystère;
Le tendre amour y brille,
Et l'on sait bien mieux là
User de la Béquille

It was necessary in Paris,
A city brimming with inhabitants,
To mark on garments
The qualities of people,
And that, on the mantillas
Of the Filles d'Opéra,
People embroidered the Crutch
Of father Barnaba.

Beautiful Venus, suspend
Your stay in Cythera;
Paris is above all
For the mysterious lover;
Tender love shines here,
And people here know better
How to exploit the Crutch

⁷⁷ See Jacques-Antoine Dulaure, *Histoire physique, civile et morale de Paris*, 7th ed., 4 vols. (Paris: Au bureau des publications illustrées, 1842), IV, 470.

⁷⁸ For the text of one such parody, see the *Mémoires de Mademoiselle de Bonneval écrits par M**** (Paris: Ganneur, 1738), 144. The monograph is attributed to the lawyer and author Jean-Charles Gervaise de Latouche (1715–1782) although it was originally published anonymously. For another parody, see the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 265.

Du père Barnaba.⁷⁹

Of father Barnaba.

Aïssé had gone further than this decades earlier, suggesting that the *filles de l'Opéra* were not simply actresses of ill repute or women outside the theater who lived in disarray but were the lowest of the low, indistinguishable from whores. She equated the *filles de l'Opéra* with common prostitutes when she complained in October 1728 that *Les filles de l'Opéra et les filles de joie inondent Paris: on ne sauroit faire un pas qu'on n'en soit entouré* ("Les filles de l'Opéra and les filles de joie inundate Paris; one cannot take a step without being surrounded by them").⁸⁰

As Linzy Dickinson has written, there was little distinction in polite society at the time between actresses, courtesans, and prostitutes.⁸¹ Janell Watson has made the same argument in her description of the sexualized interior spaces of courtesans and actresses.⁸² The tradition of suspicion surrounding the theater, prostitution, and the moral character of its performers extended back to the theologians of the early Christian church and to arguments in the seventeenth century about modern theater and its lack of a religious dimension.⁸³ The anonymous manuscript La Gorce has described equates actresses with prostitutes, claiming they appeared in the theater as affected courtesans, decked out with jewelry and finery so as to capture the attention of the audiences they sought to

⁷⁹ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol. e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 308.

⁸⁰ See Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, 48.

⁸¹ See Linzy Dickinson, *Theatre in Balzac's La comédie humaine* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), 159.

⁸² See Janell Watson, *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust: The Collection and Consumption of Curiosities*, Cambridge Studies in French (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 72. See also Mary Lindemann, *Liaisons dangereuses: Sex, Law, and Diplomacy in the Age of Frederick the Great* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 221, Katie Hickman, *Courtesans: Money, Sex, and Fame in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 2003), 39, and Pamela Cheek, *Sexual Antipodes: Enlightenment, Globalization, and the Placing of Sex* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 47.

⁸³ See Laurent Thirouin, *L'aveuglement salutaire: le réquisitoire contre le théâtre dans la France classique*, *Lumière classique* 17 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997), 46, and John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, 2 vols., *The Oxford History of the Christian Church*, ed. Henry and Owen Chadwick (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), II, 312.

seduce.

Paraissant sur le théâtre comme une courtisane affectée, fardée, plâtrée, ajustée, ornée de toutes sortes d'agréments pour donner dans la vue, gagner et charmer les coeurs les plus insensibles, et y allumer le feu de la concupiscence le plus violent et le plus criminel.⁸⁴

Appearing in the theater as an affected courtesan, made up, plastered, adjusted, adorned with all sorts of amenities to make her stand out in a crowd, to win over and charm the most insensitive hearts, and to ignite in them the most violent and the most criminal fire of concupiscence.

Well after the eighteenth century the character Louise outlines the parallels between actresses and prostitutes in conversation with Renée in the *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées* (1842) of Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), claiming *Je roulais dans la fange sociale au-dessous de la grisette, de la fille mal élevée, côte à côte avec les courtisanes, les actrices, les créatures sans éducation* (“I proceeded among the social underbelly beneath the level of the coquette, the poorly bred girl, neck and neck with courtesans, actresses, and creatures without education”).⁸⁵ When commentators in the eighteenth century sought terms to describe moral depravity, men and women alike turned to the *filles de l’Opéra*.⁸⁶ The persistence of these associations is borne out in *Une double famille* (1830), in which we read about *L’amour des filles de l’Opéra, dit la comtesse avec horreur* (“the love of the *filles de l’Opéra*, the countess proclaimed with horror”) and in the *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*, in which one dejected character exclaims *Oh! chère, je suis pire qu’une fille d’Opéra* (“Oh! dear, I am worse than a *fille d’Opéra*”).⁸⁷

The negative associations between the *filles de l’Opéra* and prostitutes that so fascinated Aïssé, Balzac, and numerous others are not to be taken lightly. Ambiguity surrounding acting and prostitution was noteworthy in the case of the Opéra, because at the Palais-Royal royal immunity

⁸⁴ See Ladvoat, *Lettres sur l’Opera a l’abbé Dubos*, 78.

⁸⁵ See Honoré de Balzac, *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hippolyte Souverain, 1842), I, 392.

⁸⁶ See James Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 24.

⁸⁷ See Balzac, *La maison du chat-qui-pelote, Le bal de Sceaux, La bourse, La vendetta, Madame Firmiani, Une double famille* (Paris: Lévy, 1868), 75, and idem, *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*, I, 344.

protected lawbreakers from prosecution for immoral conduct. This is aptly expressed in one parody of the Opéra in which we read that *L'Opéra est un sérail privilégié, qui n'est point sujet à la Police* ("The Opéra is a privileged seraglio that is not subject to the Police").⁸⁸ As research by Senelick has shown, the nexus between theater and prostitution has been a commonplace of moralistic attacks that claim the appearance of the performer on stage amounts to the display of the performing body to strangers and that this body runs the risk of becoming vendible in its entirety.⁸⁹ Chronicles and epigrams in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries documented the money and women exchanged in the theater. One short verse among the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* sung to the air *Les plaisirs ont choisi pour azile* ("Pleasures have chosen for asylum") makes much of the hedonistic qualities of members of the audience at the Opéra.

L'Opera nous fournit des Maîtresses,
On ne trouve point là de tigresses,
Chacun revient content
D'un séjour si charmant.

On y fait ce qu'on veut sans allarmes,
Au gré de ses desirs on peut être inconstant,
Et l'amour ne fait verser des larmes
Qu'à ceux qui sont brouillés avec l'argent comptant.

Barbureau tout vous est favorable,
Profitez d'un bonheur peu durable,
Prenez à toutes mains, donnez à tous venans,
L'amour du Mareschal ne dure pas longtemps.⁹⁰

The Opéra supplies us with Mistresses,
No tigresses are found there;
Everyone comes away happy
From such a delightful journey.

⁸⁸ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.^e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 56. See also Henri Lagrave, *Le théâtre et le public à Paris de 1715 à 1750* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972), 499–512.

⁸⁹ See Senelick, *The Changing Room*, 10.

⁹⁰ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses depuis 1686 jusqu'en 1690. Vol.^e VI*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12621, folio 19.

One can do whatever one wishes without disturbance,
One can be unfaithful in pursuit of desires,
And love only sheds tears there
Over those who get into a muddle counting all the money.

Barbureau, you are favorable to everyone,
Profit from a fleeting good fortune,
Take from every hand, give to all who show up,
The love of the Maréchal does not last long.

Here the *maréchal de France, grand maître de l'Artillerie* and *gouverneur de Flandres*, Louis de Crevant, duc d'Humières (1628–1694) is implicated in a brief and fickle affair with the singer Barbureau, who like other *filles de l'Opéra* suffered the unhappy fate of fleeting good fortune; her affair with the *maréchal* was cut short because of his advanced age, but not before she was able to secure a considerable sum of money from him. Such could only be the case in an environment in which patrons measured their love for actresses and singers in monetary units. Elsewhere writers spoke to the vicissitudes of exchanging money for sexual favors from the *filles de l'Opéra*. An entry in the chronicles of Barbier details the salacious exchanges that took place between the *filles de l'Opéra* and the patrons who paid to engage in liaisons with them in and outside of the Palais-Royal.

Un étranger fait marché d'une somme pour le p... d'une fille d'Opéra, ce qui est un peu équivoque. Il a payé et couché avec elle, mais il n'a pas trouvé à cette jeune fille ce qu'on lui avoit promis; il a compté, sur la bonne foi des conventions, que cela changeoit le marché et qu'il lui falloit rendre une bonne partie de sa somme. Sur cette contestation, les parties s'en sont rapportées à la décision de mademoiselle Carton, ancienne actrice, chanteuse de l'Opéra. Après avoir entendu les faits, elle a décidé que l'homme ne savoit pas lire apparemment, et qu'il devoit savoir que quand la toile est levée, on ne rend plus l'argent.⁹¹

A foreigner struck a bargain for sex with a *fille d'Opéra* of somewhat questionable character. He paid and slept with her, but finding that the young woman was not what he had been promised, he assumed that this altered the bargain, and that the convention of a refund of a good portion of the sum involved would be observed. The parties in the dispute turned for a decision to mademoiselle Carton, a former actress and singer at the Opéra. Having listened to the facts of the case, she decided that the man apparently did not know how to read, and that he should have known that there was no refund given once the curtain had been raised.

Concerned that there should be some measure of integrity even in illicit transactions with the *filles de l'Opéra*, many patrons documented the struggle to acknowledge their hedonism as a true industry in the economic sense. We do not know whether the *filles de l'Opéra* who actually frequented the

⁹¹ See Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763)*, III, 242. On Carton, elsewhere known as Cartou, see Raunié, *Chansonnier historique du XVIIIe siècle*, VI, 195.

Opéra, as opposed to the young women who simply put their names on existing lists of performers, were all singers or actresses or whether there was a whole other class of women who entered the Opéra solely for the purpose of selling their bodies.⁹²

Terminology in use in the eighteenth century is somewhat telling, as writers who referred to prostitutes used the terms *fille de joie*, *fille publique*, or *fille d'affaire* instead of *fille de l'Opéra*.⁹³ As Philip Stewart has explained, *fille d'affaire* is a pun by Voltaire on the Latin root of the word *opéra*, with additional connotations of the words *affair* and *liaison* in English.⁹⁴ The sexual exploits detailed by Barbier pale in comparison to the reminiscences of the marquis Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d'Argens (1704–1771), who dared to single out political figures for their romances with the *filles de l'Opéra*. One among his *Lettres juives* (1736), the epistolary novel modeled on the *Lettres persanes* (1721) of Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689–1755) and purported to be translations directly from the correspondence of five distinguished rabbis from different parts of Europe, details the relationship between the dancer Françoise Prévost (1680–1741) or La Prévôt and a distinguished bailiff whose identity had to remain hidden; the same letter describes the lengths to which one Parisian provincial went to solicit sexual favors from La Prévôt.⁹⁵ As the marquis claimed, the fact that such noted political officials became entangled with the *filles de l'Opéra* was proof that these women were hundreds of times more dangerous than the infamous courtesans of ancient

⁹² On the interior and exterior structure of the Palais-Royal, see James Anthony, *French Baroque Music from Beaujoyeulx to Rameau*, rev. ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 21, and Barbara Coeyman, “Walking through Lully’s opera theatre in the Palais Royal,” in *Lully Studies*, ed. John Hajdu Heyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 216–242.

⁹³ See Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, 48. See also *Les filles de l'Opéra et les virtuoses de table d'hôte* (Paris: Labitte, 1846), 7. On the use of the term *fille d'affaire* by Voltaire, see the *Romans de Voltaire: La princesse de Babylone*, ed. Arsène Houssaye and Frederic Laguillermie (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1878), 104.

⁹⁴ See Philip Stewart, *Engraven Desire: Eros, Image, and Text in the French Eighteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 357.

⁹⁵ See Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d'Argens, *Lettres juives, ou correspondance philosophique, historique & critique, entre un Juif Voyageur en differens Etats de l'Europe, & ses Correspondans en divers endroits*, nouv. éd., 7 vols. (The Hague: Pierre Paupie, 1742), I, 228. See also Arsène Houssaye, *Les femmes du diable*, nouv. éd. (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1867), 47.

Rome.

Deux Danseuses ou deux Chanteuses dans les Choeurs, causent plus de trouble & de scandale, de dettes aux Seigneurs & de filouteries aux Enfants de familles, que les trois cens Courtisanes dont tu te plains. Tu vois, mon cher Brito, que les courtisannes de Rome ne remuent pas de pareils ressorts. Le mal qu'elles font toutes ensemble, ne sauroit être égalé aux éclats & aux voleries d'une seule fille de l'Opéra de ce païs. Heureux ceux qui fuient avec soin la connoissance de ces pernicieuses enchanteresses, & dont les moeurs pures ne sont pas souillées par leur commerce!⁹⁶

Two Dancers or two Singers in the Choruses incite more trouble & scandal, debt among Gentlemen & betrayal among the Sons of the nation than the three hundred Courtesans you bemoan. You see, my dear Brito, that the courtesans of Rome do not encourage the same spirit. The ruin they collectively cause is no match for the dazzle & thievery of a single fille de l'Opéra in this country. Happy are those who carefully avoid acquaintance with these pernicious enchantresses & whose pure morals are not sullied by their company!

The craze for the *filles de l'Opéra* was also the subject of writings on unwanted pregnancies that forced some women to leave their positions at the Opéra. While there is little evidence to support the use of voluntary birth control among actresses early in the eighteenth century, there were likely women who took advantage of contraception as the century progressed. Methods of birth control included *coitus interruptus*, advocated early in France by the abbé de Brantôme, Pierre de Bourdeille (1540–1614), the use of condoms, the use of sponges and astringents, and abortion. Condom use at this time was limited to the upper class owing to cost.⁹⁷ Among those unmarried women at the Opéra known to have had children were the sopranos Louison Moreau, Petitpas (1706–1739), and Sophie Arnould later in the century. As research by Jan Clarke has shown, these women shared in the troubled legacy of actresses from the French seventeenth century, who faced the physical demands of working during pregnancy and who drew the ire of conservative commentators

⁹⁶ See Argens, *Lettres juives*, I, 221.

⁹⁷ On the increasing popularity of voluntary birth control in early modern France, in which the birthrate dropped steadily between 1740 and 1770 and then precipitously at the end of the century, see Christine Théré, "Women and Birth Control in Eighteenth-Century France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32/4 (1999), 552–564, and Etienne van de Walle and Helmut Muhsam, "Fatal Secrets and the French Fertility Transition," *Population and Development Review* 21/2 (1995), 261–279. See also Pierre de Bourdeille de Brantôme, *Vies des dames galantes par le seigneur de Brantôme*, nouv. éd. (Paris: Garnier, 1841). An early description of abortion, not customarily practiced except to eliminate the traces of illegitimate liaisons, appears in *Les pensées errantes, avec quelques Lettres d'un Indien* (London and Paris: Hardy, 1758), 104. On the authorship of this monograph and its diffuse subjectivity, see Antoinette Sol, "Se répandre en paroles": Notions of Identity in Mme de Bénouville's *Pensées errantes*," *Intertexts* 4/2 (2000), 129.

who decried the abomination that was the expectant *comédienne* or *cantatrice*, the double insult to whatever virtue and decency the public thought it might locate in the theater. When the historiographer, Boileau antagonist, and abbé Michel de Pure (1620–1680) declared in last decade of his life that a number of actresses were too frequently pregnant for his taste, he indulged in what Clarke has described as something of an unrealistic fantasy of a chaste theater.⁹⁸ He gave in to popular perceptions that pregnancy was something any female performer could pass off as a consequence of marriage if in fact she had a husband, and yet the temptation for a married woman to indulge in adultery as part of her work on stage was so great as to prompt the abbé to dream of a virginal theater free of all vices.

Mais un bon Acteur fait tousiours honneur au Poëte, & plaisir au Spectateur. Il seroit aussi à souhaiter que toutes les Comediennes fussent & jeunes & belles, & s'il se pouvoit, toûjours filles, ou du moins jamais grosses. Car outre ce que la fecondité de leur ventre couste à la beauté de leur visage ou de leur taille; c'est un mal qui dure plus depuis qu'il a commencé qu'il ne tarde à revenir depuis qu'il a finy. Cependant la beauté & la jeunesse sont les deux sources d'agrément qui ne tarissent point; & par où les choses les plus inutiles, & les moijs spirituelles ne laissent pas d'être agreables.⁹⁹

But a good Actor always renders honor to the Poet, & pleasure to the Spectator. It is to be wished as well that all Actresses be young & beautiful, & if at all possible still unmarried, or at least never pregnant. For apart from the fact that the fertility of the belly comes at the cost of the beauty of the face or the figure, it is an evil that lasts longer once it has begun than it takes to reappear once it is over. Beauty & youthfulness are nevertheless the two sources of pleasure that do not deteriorate & by which the most pointless & least spiritual things never fail to be enjoyable.

The reality was that the noted Molièrian *comédienne* Jeanne-Olivier Bourguignon, dite Beauval (1647–1720) was reputed to have had as many as twenty-eight children, an exceptional although not altogether unheard of case.¹⁰⁰ The peculiar formulation at the conclusion of this passage, on matters that were pleasurable in spite of other circumstances, is Cartesian. More than two decades before the

⁹⁸ See Jan Clarke, “Women Theatre Professionals in 17th-century France,” in *Women in European Theatre*, ed. Elizabeth Woodrugh, Intellect European Studies Series (Oxford: Intellect Books, 1995), 30.

⁹⁹ See Michel de Pure, *Idée des spectacles anciens et nouveaux* (Paris: Michel Brunet, 1668), 170.

¹⁰⁰ See Georges Mongrédien and Jean Robert, *Les Comédiens français du XVIIe siècle: dictionnaire biographique, suivi d'un inventaire des troupes (1590–1710) d'après des documents inédits*, 3e éd. (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1981), 32. See also See Virginia Scott, *Women on Stage in Early Modern France: 1540–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207.

abbé published these thoughts, the philosopher had spoken of the aesthetic function of the theater using an analogy to physical activity, claiming strenuous exercises *ne laissent pas d'être agréables, encore qu'ils soient fort pénibles* ("never fail to be enjoyable, even though they can be painful").¹⁰¹

One recollection in the manuscript collection compiled by Tralage names several actresses at the Opéra who had married as well as others who were unmarried yet remained in the service of wealthy patrons.

Les maladies que l'infirmité humaine cause quelquefois aux filles de l'Opéra demandent une absence de six mois de suite pour les guérir. Autrefois, on ne vouloit point de femmes mariées à l'Opéra; maintenant il y en a trois avec leur maris, savoir: M. Renaud, M. Thevenart, M. Deschars. La plupart des autres filles ont des patrons qui les entretiennent à grand frais: ce sont des femmes non mariées. Il y en a ordinairement quelqu'une incommodée du mal de ceinture, et dont il faut élargir le corps. Il n'y a guere d'année où cet accident n'arrive. Autrefois M. Lully n'entendoit pas raillerie là-dessus, et personne n'alloit dans l'orquestre ni sur le théâtre; il n'y avoit que les acteurs et les musiciens.¹⁰²

The maladies that human infirmity sometimes causes among the filles de l'Opéra require a leave of absence of six months or more to resolve. In the past, married women were not at all desirable at the Opéra. Today there are three with their husbands, Monsieur Renaud, Monsieur Thévenard, and Monsieur Deschars. Most of the other girls have patrons who maintain them at great expense. These are unmarried women. Some of them are usually inconvenienced by a pain in the belt, which prompts the body to swell. There is hardly a year when this accident does not occur. In the past Monsieur Lully could not take a joke on the subject and nobody was allowed in the orchestra pit or on the stage, where there were only actors and musicians.

A satire attributed to the abbé Simon-Joseph Pellegrin (1663–1745) in the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* even more explicitly calls into question singers and dancers who dealt with pregnancies.

50. Rien ne fait plus de tort aux Actrices que les Enfants. 51. Ce ne sont point les Actrices novices, qui en font le plus. 52. Les nièces et les soeurs de celles qui ne sont point mariées, sont d'ordinaire leurs filles. 53. Les Filles d'Opéra qui deviennent grosses ne sont pas toujours les moins sages. 54. Ce n'est pas toujours leur bonne conduite qui retient leurs amans; c'est le plus souvent leur avarice. 55. Quand une fille d'Opéra n'a que trois amans à la fois, il n'y a rien à dire. 56. Il luy en faut pour le plaisir, pour l'honneur, et pour l'intérêt. 57. Les premières faveurs d'Opéra, sont celles qui coûtent le moins, et qui sont les moins dangereuses. 58. Le plus grand danger avec les filles de l'Opéra n'est pas de se ruiner. 59. Il

¹⁰¹ See René Descartes, *Correspondance avec Élisabeth: et autres lettres*, ed. Jean-Marie Beyssade and Michelle Beyssade, GF Texte intégral 513 (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 141.

¹⁰² See Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, fonds français 6544, IV, folio 212. The passage, dating from 1696, is discussed in *French Theatre in the Neo-Classical Era, 1550–1789*, ed. William Howarth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 326.

n'y a pas avec Elles de meilleurs préservatif, que la crainte. 61. L'Opéra est un sérail privilégié, qui n'est point sujet à la Police. 62. Le privilège des Filles de l'Opéra, s'étend jusqu'aux meres, et aux Tantes.¹⁰³

50. There is no greater error for Actresses than having Children. 51. It is not always the novice Actresses who do this the most. 52. The nieces and sisters of those who are not married are usually their daughters. 53. The Filles de l'Opéra who get pregnant are not always the least genteel. 54. It is not always their good conduct that retains lovers; more often it is their avarice. 55. When a girl has only three lovers at one time, this is nothing at all. 56. It is essential to her for pleasure, honor, and interest. 57. The first favors of the Opéra are those that cost the least and are the least dangerous. 58. The greatest danger with respect to the filles de l'Opéra is not going broke. 59. There is, against Them, no better vaccine than fear. 61. The Opéra is a privileged seraglio that is not subject to the Police. 62. The privilege of the Filles de l'Opéra extends to their mothers and Aunts.

Suspect for their pursuit of lovers and for the deceptive manner in which they allegedly passed off illegitimate daughters as nieces or sisters, the *filles de l'Opéra* were nevertheless considered a species worth preserving. The privileged seraglio of the Opéra, the metaphorical and actual theater of their misadventures, was home to a body of patrons whose taste for sexual and musical gratification demanded that these women not become extinct as a social and theatrical species. One account of the romantic exploits of the soprano Pélissier clarifies just how complex the interactions could be between the *filles de l'Opéra* and their male patrons.

Dulis, juif, originaire de Paris, né à Amsterdam, et prodigieusement riche, fit en 1729 un voyage à Paris. Il s'y amouracha de la Pélissier, actrice de l'Opéra, peu jolie et sans esprit; il fallut bien des négociations pour en venir à bout: elle voulait se vendre. Madame du Tort, soeur du comte de Nocé, se mêla de cette intrigue. Dulis promit d'abord vingt mille francs. La dame lui dit que la demoiselle avait quelques scrupules d'avoir affaire avec un juif, et qu'ainsi il fallait encore dix mille francs: c'était le pot de vin promis à la dame, dont le sieur Tiriot, son agent, devait avoir sa part. Le juif répondit qu'il n'avait pas cru qu'il s'agît d'une affaire de religion, et se retira brusquement. La négociation se renoua par d'autres personnes, et alla au point que le mari de la Pélissier écrivit à Dulis que sa femme était à son service, s'il voulait donner 15.000 livres pour elle et 10.000 pour lui. Le marché fut conclu, et la Pélissier employa tout son art pour tirer de lui une grande quantité de pierreries. Lorsqu'elle vit qu'il ne voulait plus en donner, elle le congédia parce qu'il la gênait trop. Le juif voulut avoir ses pierreries qu'il prétendait ne lui avoir que prêtées, elle les refusa. Il les a réclamées comme appartenant à sa femme, et a fait donner une assignation à la Pélissier: ce qui a formé un procès qui n'a pas eu de suite. On prétendit que Dulis avait abandonné ces pierreries au curé de Saint-Sulpice, à condition qu'il poursuivrait le procès.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 55.

¹⁰⁴ See Jacques Séraphin Claude de Boisjournain, *Mélanges historiques, satiriques et anecdotiques de M. de B... Jourdain, écuyer de la grande écurie du roi (Louis XV); contenant des détails ignorés ou peu connus sur les événements et les personnes marquantes de la fin du règne de Louis XIV, des*

Dulis, a Jew of Parisian origin, born in Amsterdam and prodigiously rich, embarked on a voyage to Paris in 1729. There he became enamored of La Pélissier, an actress at the Opéra, scarcely beautiful and lacking soul; it took countless negotiations to win her over: she wanted to be purchased at a price. Madame du Tort, the sister of the comte de Nocé, thrust herself into the midst of this intrigue. Dulis initially offered twenty thousand francs. The woman told him that the demoiselle Pélissier had several qualms about having an affair with a Jew, and thus Dulis offered ten thousand francs more: such was the grease payment this woman was promised, whose agent, the gentleman Tiriot, had to have his share. The Jew responded that he did not believe this was an affair of religion, and brusquely took his leave. The negotiation played out once more among other parties, and progressed to the point that the husband of Pélissier wrote to Dulis claiming his wife was at his service, if Dulis would offer 15,000 *livres* to her and 10,000 to him. The sale was completed, and La Pélissier employed all of her artfulness in securing from Dulis a large quantity of jewels. When she saw that he did not want to relinquish them, she demanded he leave because he troubled her too much. The Jew wanted his jewels back, which he pretended not to have lent out; Pélissier refused. He claimed they belonged to his wife, and arranged to serve a summons to La Pélissier, as part of a trial that never came to fruition. People claim Dulis had relinquished these jewels to the curé of Saint-Sulpice on the condition that he continue to pursue the matter.

The picture Jacques Séraphin Claude de Boisjournain (1680–1757) paints is of a calculated game of cat and mouse in which Pélissier and Dulis were locked into pursuit of each other out of desire for sexual gratification as well as financial and political gain. The smaller of the two bribes mentioned here in the amount of 10,000 *livres* translates to the value of 100,000 American dollars in 1982, a sum worth as much as 225,000 dollars today.¹⁰⁵ Their involvement also fanned out into administrative and religious domains, as madame du Tort, Victor Pélissier, Nicolas-Claude Thieriot (1696–1772), and Jean-Baptiste Languet de Gergy (1674–1750), the curé of Saint-Sulpice, became entangled in what had been intended only as a private affair.¹⁰⁶

The scenario is not unlike one from an operatic livret. And indeed the connection between the illicit affairs of Pélissier and the language of dramatic works was not lost on commentators at the

premières années de celui de Louis XV, et de la Régence, 3 vols. (Paris: Chevre et Chanson, and Arthus-Bertrand, 1807), II, 376.

¹⁰⁵ See Goubert, *Le siècle de Louis XIV*, 98.

¹⁰⁶ Jean-Baptiste Languet de Gergy, whom Jullien, after Barbier, describes as brother to Jean-Joseph Languet de Gergy (1677–1753), the bishop of Soissons, is listed in the published research of Raunié as the brother of the archbishop of Sens. The attributions are at first confusing, but Jean-Joseph was initially bishop of Soissons in 1715 before becoming a member of the Académie française in 1721 and finally archbishop of Sens in 1730. See Jullien, *Amours d'Opéra*, 63. On the various satirical epigrams about the bishop of Soissons, see Raunié, *Chansonnier historique du XVIIIe siècle*, V, 209.

time. As Barbier and Raunié have explained, a number of satirical songs circulating in the first third of the eighteenth century addressed the misadventures of Pélissier in theatrical terms.¹⁰⁷ This was notable not only as an acknowledgment of the fact that the *filles de l'Opéra* undermined the distinction between real life and its dramatization on stage, but as an instance in which descriptions of these women drew on elements native to the rhetoric of monstrosity into which they were swept up. The *filles de l'Opéra* were monstrous precisely because they blurred boundaries, between the performing body on stage and the beholder in the audience, between fiction and real life, and between the lofty morality they portrayed in the theater and the base morals with which these women were associated in daily life. A *trio comique* in the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* and the chronicles of Barbier from winter 1730 recounts the affair of Pélissier and Dulis with melodramatic flair.

Un riche Juif et un dévôt Curé
 Voulant dévaliser une Coquette fine
 Les noms ne font rien au marché,
 Puisqu'aisément on les devine,
 Chacun de ces acteurs paraît occupé
 À remplir son Rolle Comique.
 Le Juif y joue l'Amant dupé,
 Le Curé comme un bon Pasteur,
 Destinant tout à son saint Edifice,
 Entreprend de venger l'Acteur
 Par la dépouille de l'Actrice.
 Oh! le plaisant événement
 Qu'il sera digne de mémoire,
 Si le Curé remporte la victoire.
 Il gagne d'un seul coup le prix
 De plus de cent.¹⁰⁸

A rich Jew and a devoted Curé
 Wanted to burgle a fine Coquette
 Names mean nothing in the marketplace,
 Since they are easily guessed,
 Each of these actors was occupied
 With fulfilling his Comic Role.
 The Jew plays the duped Lover,
 The Curé, like a good Shepherd,
 Leading everyone to his holy Edifice,
 Sets out to avenge the Actor
 By flaying the Actress.
 Oh! the satisfying affair!
 It will be one for the books!
 If the Curé comes away with a victory,
 He wins in a single strike the price
 Of more than a hundred.

¹⁰⁷ See Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763)*, II, 141, and Raunié, *Chansonnier historique du XVIIIe siècle*, V, 230.

¹⁰⁸ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.° XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 162. The satire is reprinted in excerpts in Jullien, *Amours d'Opéra*, 63, and in the *Mélanges historiques, satiriques et anecdotiques de M. de B... Jourdain*, II, 377. There are also transcriptions in Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763)*, II, 141, and in Raunié, *Chansonnier historique du XVIIIe siècle*, V, 230.

As a product of the theater Pélissier became a figure whose exploits were understood as a kind of nonfiction livret realized on the stage of public life in the midst of a stunned audience of patrons and writers. To use a term Dill has described elsewhere, she was staged by the Parisian public, an object of their collective censure representing not only the acting profession but the Opéra as an institution and cultural symbol.¹⁰⁹ As for those in supporting roles, the Jew as hoodwinked Casanova and the high priest as hooligan, this satirical trio is clear about one thing. Their antics are *dignes de mémoire*, notorious enough to figure in contemporary gossip and in the annals of history. Even Languet de Gergy was not immune from characterization in theatrical terms, as an epigram in the collections of the Maurepas manuscripts described him as a crook, a swindler, and a *comédien*. He thus became a figure who took on one of the characteristics of monstrosity denounced in writings of the early Christian church, namely the sacrilegious disfigurement of the image of the divine in man.

Je suis un animal d'équivoque nature,
Comédien, escroc, plein de ferveur,
J'éleve un temple au Créateur,
En filoutant la créature.¹¹⁰

I am an animal of an equivocal nature,
An Actor, a crook, full of fervor,
I construct a shrine to the Creator,
By swindling the creature.

The misadventures of the *filles de l'Opéra* beyond the confines of the theater were regarded as a discrete category of social and sexual performance in which they excelled. In June 1731, Pélissier, along with the soprano Petitpas and the dancers Duval du Tillet (1718–1775), known as La Constitution, her younger sister, and Marie Anne de Cupis de Camargo (1710–1770) or La Camargo, found themselves in the company of the aging Campra and the director of the Opéra, Maximilien-Claude Gruër, at the magasin de l'Opéra, a warehouse and office built in 1712 on the rue Saint-Nicaise to house costumes, sets, and rehearsals.¹¹¹ Barbier reports what took place with more

¹⁰⁹ See Dill, *Monstrous Opera*, 108.

¹¹⁰ See Raunié, *Chansonnier historique du XVIIIe siècle*, VI, 236.

¹¹¹ The rue Saint-Nicaise, which disappeared with the construction of the rue de Rivoli in the early years of the nineteenth century, was opened in the sixteenth century on the site of the ancient city walls, extending past the galerie du Louvre to the eastern side of what is now the place du Carrousel. Historical maps show that the rue Saint-Nicaise extended from the quai des galeries du Louvre at its southernmost point, not far from the pont Royal, north to the rue Saint-Honoré. It ran parallel to the rue Saint-Thomas du Louvre, which separated the place du Louvre from the neighboring rue Saint-Nicaise and the place de Tuileries. The southern portion of the rue Saint-

decorum than his contemporaries, rehearsing the same theatricalized narrative that appeared in the *trio comique* on Pélissier and Dulis, a narrative that transposed the drama of the stage into the drama and exhibitionism of the social sphere.

Après le dîner, ces folles, qui avoient un peu bu et s'étoient échauffées à chanter et à sauter, avoient besoin de changer de chemise. Il n'y en avoit point de femme; elles prirent des chemises, et ne jugèrent pas à propos, pour prendre le frais, de remettre de jupons; elles rentrèrent ainsi dans la chambre de gaie humeur. Il fut ensuite question de montrer ses c.... Le bonhomme Campra mit ses lunettes; on visita chaque c... avec grande attention, et même cérémonie. Les fenêtres de la chambre où cette scène se passoit étoient ouvertes, et tous les gens qui sont dans ce magasin ont été témoins.¹¹²

After the meal, these crazy women, who had a little to drink and were eager to sing and dance, needed to change their blouses. There was no chambermaid present. They took some blouses and, not thinking it suitable to go about naked, put their petticoats back on. They returned thus to the room in high humor. It was then a matter of showing their bottoms. The good old fellow Campra put on his glasses. Each bottom was visited with great attention and even ceremony. The windows of the room where this scene unfolded were open, and all the people who were in this magasin were witnesses.

Critics subsequently took these women to task in lengthy ballads beginning with the formulaic expression *Or écoutez, grands et petits* ("Now listen, large and small").¹¹³ Accounts that singled out Pélissier were replete with anti-Semitic references to her fondness for Dulis as well as scorn for the fickle way in which she regularly left and returned to her position at the Opéra. In February 1734 she was dismissed from the Opéra for the considerable public scandal the Dulis affair had generated. She fled to London but returned to sing at the Opéra in April 1735, remaining there until her retirement in October 1741.¹¹⁴ The most lengthy of these subversive ballads presented an itemized list of the unfortunate cast of characters on that evening and spared nothing in its graphic account of

Nicaise was demolished to enlarge the place du Carrousel. The street was home to the Hôtel de Beringhen and the Hôtel de Longueville, subsequently destroyed after the Revolution. It was also the site of the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts, located until 1779 on the rue Saint-Honoré at the corner of the rue Saint-Nicaise. See Théophile Lavallée, *Histoire de Paris depuis le temps des gaulois jusqu'à nos jours*, 2de éd., 2 vols. (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1857), II, 252. See also Jacques-Antoine Dulaure, *Histoire de Paris et de ses monuments*, nouv. éd., ed. Louis Batissier (Paris: Furne, 1846), 176.

¹¹² See Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763)*, II, 165.

¹¹³ See Raunié, *Chansonnier historique du XVIIIe siècle*, V, 228.

¹¹⁴ See *The Grove Book of Opera Singers*, ed. Laura Macy (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 374.

the events that took place.

Or écoutez, grands et petits,
Venez entendre le récit
D'une histoire sûre et certaine,
Des sectateurs de Melpomène
Rendant à des filles en rut
Les honneurs dus à Belzébut.

La fille de Castelno
Et la brillante Camargo,
La Duval, le Bref et la Bulle,
Filles au dessus du scrupule,
Se servant indifféremment
Et du derrière et du devant.

Elles allèrent après l'Opéra,
Avec l'escroc monsieur Campra,
Au magasin trouver Gruère.
Soyez les bienvenues, mes chères!
Parbleu! vous dînerez icy,
Royer, Magnac, y sont aussi.

A diner on but largement
D'un bourguignon assez friand;
Comme les chaleurs étoient fortes,
L'on fit ouvrir fenêtres et portes;
Sans s'embarrasser d'être vu,
On s'est déshabillé tout nu.

D'abord l'impudique Pélissier
Etala son flasque fessier,
Des tetons mollets et sans grâce,
Un ventre qui fait la grimace,
Croyant par là dédommager
Celui qui donnoit à manger.

Mais pour la faire enrager
Sans se faire beaucoup prier,
La Camargo, toute de zèle,
Plus jeune et plus fraîche qu'elle,
Nue et montrant tous ses appas,
A battu plusieurs entrechats.

La Bulle avec discrétion,
Imitant leur dévotion,
Défit blanc jupon et chemise,
Mais, hélas! quelle fut leur surprise
De voir endroit dont la grandeur
A saint Christophe auroit fait peur!

Leurs crins sur leurs chefs se hérissant,
Chacun se lève en frémissant;

Now listen, large and small,
Come hear the recitation
Of a sure and certain story,
Of the followers of Melpomene
Rendering to girls in a rut
The honors due Beelzebub.

The daughter of Castelno
And the brilliant Camargo,
Duval, the Brief and the Bull,
Girls without any scruple,
Availed themselves indifferently
And behind and before.

They proceeded after the Opéra
With the swindling sir Campra,
To the warehouse where Gruère was.
Be thus welcome, my dears!
By Jove! you will dine here,
Royer, Magnac, are here too.

At dinner they drank mostly
Of a right tasty burgundy;
As the heat was oppressive,
They opened the windows and doors;
Without care about being seen,
They undressed completely nude.

At first the indecent Pélissier
Displayed her flaccid ass,
Breasts soft and lacking grace,
A belly that would make one grimace,
Believing thus to compensate
Those given to eating.

But to enrage her
Without doing much praying,
La Camargo, completely zealous,
Younger and fresher than her,
Nude and showing all her charms,
Executed several *entrechats*.

La Bulle, with discretion,
Imitating their devotion,
Undid her white skirt and blouse,
But alas! such was their surprise
To see something whose grandeur
Would make St. Christopher afraid!

Their hair on their heads bristling,
Everyone gets up with a shudder;

Las de voir cette horrible ornière,
On lui fit tourner le derrière,
Et dédaignant son bel agnus,
Tous vinrent lui baiser l'anus.

Mais la fringante Camargo,
Croyant l'avoir encore plus beau,
Étala gentille nature.
Manon de dépit en murmure,
Et preste à se courroucer:
Par moi l'on devoit commencer.

Son ami Royer l'apaisa,
Sur la parole la baisa,
Puis l'ajustant à la levrette,
Chose incroyable et malhonnête,
Sans avoir horreur du péché,
On dit qu'il l'a gamahuchée.

Avec ses lunettes, Campra
De fort près regardant cela,
Et se sentant toujours de Rome,
Et vieux citoyen de Sodome,
Si Royer ne l'eût repoussé,
Sans doute il l'eût gomorrhisée.

Or, prions le doux Rédempteur
Qu'il convertisse les pécheurs
Aussi bien que les pécheresses
Qui font parade de leurs fesses!
Espérons tous du bon Jésus,
Qu'il perdra les philotanus.¹¹⁵

Tired of seeing this horrible routine,
They made her turn her back,
And disdaining her beautiful cunt,
They all came to fuck her asshole.

But the energetic Camargo,
Believing she possessed more beauty,
Revealed pleasant nature.
Manon murmured of her irritation,
And was quick to anger:
People were to begin with me.

Her friend Royer soothed her,
Kissed her on the mouth,
Then adjusting her like a dog,
An incredible and dishonest thing,
Without having the horror of sin,
People say he went down on her.

With his glasses, Campra
Regarded this quite closely,
And still feeling Roman,
And an old citizen of Sodom,
If Royer had not rejected her,
He would have sodomized her.

Now pray to the sweet Redeemer
That he convert male sinners
As well as females
Who flaunt their asses!
Let us all hope in the good Jesus
That he will trounce the Jesuits.

¹¹⁵ See the *Recueil dit de Maurepas: Pièces libres, chansons, épigrammes, et autres vers satiriques sur divers personnages des siècles de Louis XIV et Louis XV*, 6 vols. (Leyde: n.p., 1865), IV, 55–58. The reference to philotanus here was likely an homage to *Philotanus*, a satirical poem published anonymously but attributed to the abbé de Grecourt. See *Philotanus. Poëme, par M. l'abbé **** (Paris: Louis Antoine Le Gond, 1720), reprinted with extensive marginalia in the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* for that same year. See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses. Années 1719, 1720, & 1721. Vol. e XV*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12630, folia 101–150. It is unlikely that the *filles de Castelno* described in this ballad is the daughter of Charles-Joseph Patissier de Bussy, marquis de Castelneau (1718–1785), the *maréchal de camp* active in India and later in France. He married Élisabeth-Mélanie-Artémise de Choiseul Beaupré (1744–1764) in 1761 and three years later, she died at age twenty without having had any children. The marquis then married Marie-Charlotte-Justine de Messey (1738–1827) in 1765, the year he was promoted to the rank of *maréchal des camps et armées du Roi*. Two years after his death, Marie-Charlotte, with whom he had no children, married Augustin Louis, vicomte de Talleyrand-Périgord (1735–1799). See Robert Hénard, *Le Mont-Valérien: l'ermitage, le calvaire, la forteresse* (Paris: Émile-Paul, 1904), 170. This *filles de Castelno* is either Petitpas or Pélissier, although their connection to Castelno or Castelneau is unclear. There is also the possibility that *Castelno* refers to the town of Castelno-Pellegrino in Palestine, also called Atlith, on the Mediterranean, described in Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, *Nouveau dictionnaire pour servir*

Mocking the flaccid backside and unappealing breasts and belly of Pélissier, who was reputedly quite attractive, this ballad also cast her as prone to irritation and jealous of La Camargo, who fares better than the elder Duval du Tillet or Pélissier in this account. The combined efforts of the sodomitical Campra and the persuasive Joseph Nicolas Pancrace Royer (1705–1755), who was at the time *chef d'orchestre* of the Opéra, lend this ballad a level of graphic detail that rivals other verses in the Maurepas manuscripts and serves as a reminder that as popular as these women had become as performers, they remained sexual objects in the eyes of their colleagues and superiors.¹¹⁶

A separate verse with the same distinctive opening line as this ribald ballad made much of the greed that had driven Pélissier into the arms of Dulis and also alluded her romantic involvement with the composer and violinist Francoeur, who with Rebel would go on to serve as musical director of the Opéra.

Or escoutez, grands et petits,
Ce qui se passe dans Paris,
D'un Juif avec une Chrétienne,
Qui comme une vilaine chienne,
Couche avec lui impunément,
Le tout pour avoir son argent.

Now listen, large and small,
To what goes on in Paris
Between a Jew and a Christian,
Who, like a nasty bitch,
Sleeps with him with impunity
All to obtain his money.

Elle part donc avec ce juif
Qui pût comme un quintal de suif,
Pour aller faire sa fortune,
Qu'elle dit n'estre pas commune;
Enfin elle suit sans horreur
L'ennemi de nôtre sauveur.

She goes out with this Jew
Who reeks like a load of lard,
To make her fortune,
Which she says is not common;
Finally without horror she pursues
The enemy of our savior.

Elle se moque de cela

She makes fun of this

de supplément aux dictionnaires des sciences, des arts et des métiers, 4 vols. (Paris: Panckoucke, 1776), II, 265. Atlit, a coastal town south of Haifa, Israel, was originally an outpost of the crusaders that fell in the late thirteenth century.

¹¹⁶ See Prod'homme, "Une « prise de possession » de l'opéra en 1753: le neveu de Rameau," *Revue de musicologie* 8 (1921), 102. Royer was *chef d'orchestre* of the Opéra for a period of approximately four years beginning in 1730, after which time Francoeur and Rebel assumed the post. Together with the violinist and composer Mondonville, Royer was also director of the Concert Spirituel from 1748 until 1755, at which point his widow took over his directorship before being forced out of the position by Dauvergne in 1762. See Michel Brenet, *Les concerts en France sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1900), 234–242. Brenet was the pseudonym of the musicologist Antoinette-Christine-Marie Bobillier (1858–1918). See Lionel de La Laurencie, "Michel Brenet," *Bulletin de la Société française de musicologie* 1/4 (1919), 199–202.

Et prend Congé de l'Opéra:
 Adieu, Paris, adieu Parterre,
 Tu ne nous feras plus la guerre.
 Adieu Francoeur mon petit coeur,
 Je te souhaite bien du bonheur.¹¹⁷

And takes Leave of the Opéra:
 Farewell Paris, adieu Parterre,
 Wage no more war against us.
 Bye bye, Francoeur, little love,
 I wish you a lot of happiness.

Other poems recounted the outrageous remarks of the *filles de l'Opéra* on this occasion in the magasin along with the verdicts of Campra. As a lengthy spoofed letter from the abbé Pellegrin to his diocesan flock, the *Lettre Pastorale de Mgr Pancrace Pellegrin Patriarche de l'Opéra aux Fidèles de son Diocèse des deux Sexes* spared neither Pélissier nor La Camargo in its account of their escapade in the company of Campra.

Au Magasin de Saint-Nicaize,
 En plein midy, sans Cotillon,
 Sans Robe, même sans Chemise
 Soeur Camargo, soeur Pélissier,
 Firent danser leurs noirs fessiers
 Aux yeux de la ville surprise.¹¹⁸

In the Saint-Nicaise Magasin,
 At midday, without a Petticoat,
 Without a Dress, even a Blouse,
 Sister Camargo, sister Pélissier
 Shook their dark asses at
 The eyes of the stunned city.

An equally lengthy compilation of nearly forty short verses styled as a *Potpouri fait à l'occasion de ce qui s'en passé au Magasin de l'Opéra le 4 juin 1731* shed further light on the magasin itself, detailing the illicit transactions that took place between patrons and actresses at the Opéra, proceedings that not infrequently moved from backstage at the Palais-Royal to the nearby magasin one block to the south and west. Sung to the tune of the *air du cap de Bonne Espérance* ("air of the cape of Good Hope"), its initial verse mocked or mourned the fate of *les paillards dans les coulisses*, those who acted like beggars and vagrants backstage at the Opéra, waiting for their slice of the action not unlike flattened, impotent pieces of meat themselves.

Dessous est une boutique,
 Que l'on appelle Opéra;
 Plus d'une chose on trafique

Below is a boutique
 That people call an Opéra;
 More than one thing is trafficked

¹¹⁷ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.^e XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 160.

¹¹⁸ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.^e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 67. The text is printed with notes in Guillaume Plantavit de La Pause, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la calotte*, 6 vols. (Aux États calotins: Imprimerie Calotine, 1754), V, 22–29.

Dans cette boutique-là;
 Les paillards, dans les coulisses,
 Y marchendent les actrices,
 Entre un annexe voisin,
 Que l'on nomme magasin.¹¹⁹

In this boutique;
 The shameless, in the wings,
 Haggle actresses there,
 Between a neighboring annex
 That people call a warehouse.

Still another *chanson* made much of the compromising position in which Gruër found himself on that night in the magasin, going so far as to draw René Hérault (1691–1740) into the mix in his capacity as *lieutenant général de police* of Paris.

Si de la Constitution
 Le trop tendre Gruère
 Dans un instant d'émotion,
 Luy baise le derrière;
 Hérault, laisse gronder les gens,
 Ce cas est gratiable;
 Ce que tu fais depuis quinze ans
 Est-il si punissable?¹²⁰

If the exceedingly tender Gruère
 In an instant of emotion
 Fucks the ass
 Of the Constitution;
 Hérault, let people murmur,
 This case is pardonable;
 Is what you have done for fifteen years
 So punishable?

The scandal brought about by this episode in the magasin was so great as to cost Gruër his directorship of the Opéra, an exclusive privilege of over three decades that he had held only since the beginning of April 1730. An *arrêt du conseil d'état* revoked this privilege in November 1731 almost six months to the day after the wild evening on the rue Saint-Nicaise.¹²¹

The most extensive account to follow in the wake of this incident in the magasin de l'Opéra was a satire that appeared in the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* for the year 1731, a *Description des fêtes Pélistiennes célébrées au Magasin de l'Opéra le 4 juin 1731*. The document plays up references to Pélistier and Dulis, unfolding as a series of choruses and recitatives mimicking the alternation of choruses, recitatives, and *airs* in lyric tragedy. Its introduction and initial recitative, written from the point of view of Pélistier, warn the Parisian public of the dangers associated with the charms of actresses on stage and the suspect nature of the pleasures that come from any interaction with women in the theater.

¹¹⁹ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.^e XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 363.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 378.

¹²¹ See Jullien, *Amours d'Opéra*, 27.

Les caresses d'un Juif me furent odieuses,
J'en craignois en secret les suites dangereuses;
Un chacun murmuroit de ce commerce affreux,
Le Parlement le vit, mais il ferma les yeux.

RÉCIT

Sitost sur un sofa se jeta toute nue
Et dit en exposant ses ... à leurs yeux:
Cherchez là du plaisir, abandonnez ces lieux
Où le mal est certain et le plaisir douteux.¹²²

The caresses of a Jew being odious to me,
I secretly feared ensuing dangers;
Each murmured of this ugly trade,
The Parliament saw it, but it averted its eyes.

RECITATIVE

Soon he hurled himself completely nude onto a sofa
And said, exposing his ... to their eyes:
Seek out pleasure there, abandon these places
Where evil is certain and pleasure is suspect.

As the series of choruses and recitatives unfolds, we learn of the infamous display of naked backsides in front of Campra as well as the lengthy exposition of the abominable *jeux Pélissiens* or Pélissier games, the analogue to *Les fêtes vénitiennes* (1710), the wildly popular *opéra-ballet* by Campra himself that saw over sixty productions at the Opéra in its first year and numerous revivals in the decades that followed.

CHOEUR (après l'examen des derrières...)

La « Constitution » emporte la balance;
Faisons lui, tour à tour, notre humble révérence;
Ce fait, après avoir tout bien considéré
Du doigt, du nez, des yeux et de notre bon gré.

RÉCIT

Mais par où terminer cette fête pompeuse?
Disoit le *Camargo*, la célèbre danseuse,
En suivant le modèle de la *Pélissier*,

¹²² See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.° XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folia 351–356. The text is reprinted in its entirety in Gabriel Letainturier-Fradin, *La Camargo, 1710–1770* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1908), 211–214.

Je m'en vais vous donner un plat de mon métier.

Chanteuses, entonnez quelques chansons bachiques;
Pour moy, j'y répondrai par des danses lubriques;
On donne à l'Opéra les jeux Vénitiens,
Célébrons en ces lieux les jeux Pélissiens.

Lorsqu'on peut tout oser, vaincre est une faiblesse;
Allons, bouquins en rut, montrez votre allégresse;
Préparez donc les jeux, allumez les flambeaux,
Et, pour qu'ils soient connus, qu'on ouvre les rideaux.¹²³

CHORUS (after the examination of bottoms...)

The « Constitution » takes the scales;
Let us each in turn bestow our humble reverence;
This fact, after having considered full well
The finger, the nose, the eyes and our good liking.

RECITATIVE

But where shall we end this extravagant holiday?
Said *Camargo*, the famous dancer,
Following the model of *Pélissier*,
I am going to give you a dish of my making.

Singers, intone several bacchic songs;
As for me, I will respond with salacious dances;
At the Opéra they play Venetian games,
Let us celebrate the Pélissier games in these parts.

When one can risk everything, victory is a weakness;
Let us go then, young men in a frenzy, show your joy;
Prepare the games, light the torches,
And, so that people can see, open the curtains.

The invitation to the dancing, merriment, and unhinged sexuality that characterized this infamous evening in the magasin is followed by a short description of La Camargo dancing naked in the company of the other *filles de l'Opéra*, executing charming postures that made the most of her enticing cleavage, trembling limbs, and open knees, which provided a full view of *ce qu'on ne sauroit dire en vers*, something too graphic to be described even in verse. A concluding chorus infuses this ribald verse with a degree of political and religious realism, urging the Parisian public to show respect for these *filles de l'Opéra*, these queens of backstage intrigue, and going so far as to claim

¹²³ Ibid.

that its authors have freely accepted the constitution of the elder Duval du Tillet, dite La Constitution. Accounts from the eighteenth century describe the nickname La Constitution or La Bulle as stemming from her parentage. She was the eldest daughter of Cornelio Bentivoglio (1668–1732), the papal nuncio to Paris who became a cardinal in 1719 and Spanish minister plenipotentiary in Rome in 1726, a position he held until his death. A staunch critic of Jansenism, Bentivoglio was known as a promoter of the constitution of the clergy, hence the nickname of his eldest daughter. Her younger sister was known as Le Bref. The elder Duval du Tillet was an accomplished keyboardist and composed the *opéra-ballet Les génies, ou Les caractères de l'Amour* (1736) for the Opéra, where it received nine performances beginning in October of that year. Among those in the premiere cast were the sopranos Fel, Antier, and Pélissier.¹²⁴ The concluding chorus of the lengthy *Description* also urges the followers of Jansenism not only to renounce their most conservative views but to become Jesuits and to join the royal court and all of Paris in the free enjoyment of the company of women in the theater.

CHOEUR

Commissaires, exempts, inspecteurs de police,
Songez à respecter les Reines de Couliesses;
Nous avons accepté la « *Constitution*, »
Elle nous a donné à tous permission.

Jansénistes, ainsi révoqués votre chisme,
Et venez accepter les lois du Molinisme.
La Cour et tout Paris ont levé le bandeau,
Comme eux, et comme nous, suivez même drapeau.¹²⁵

CHORUS

Commissioners, exempt, police inspectors,
Consider respecting the Queens of the Wings;
We have accepted the « *Constitution*, »

¹²⁴ See François-Henri-Joseph Castil-Blaze, *L'académie impériale de musique: Histoire littéraire, musicale, choréographique, pittoresque, morale, critique, facétieuse, politique et galante de ce théâtre de 1645 à 1855*, 2 vols. (Paris: Castil-Blaze, 1855), I, 90.

¹²⁵ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.º XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folia 351–356.

She gave us all permission.

Jansenists, thus renounce your schism,
And venture to accept the laws of Molinism.
The Court and all of Paris has removed the blindfold,
Like them, and like us, fly the same flag.

At this point in their respective careers, Pélissier and La Camargo were without doubt among the most popular performers in Paris, and they would remain in the employ of the Opéra, off and on, for another decade. They had little choice but to accept the tarnished roles the public had meted out for them.

Contagion

The public was not insensitive to the fact that its assignment of actresses to various symbolic roles from miscreant to miracle worker expressed an uneasy awareness of the effects of the *filles de l'Opéra* on social consciousness. Beyond the misadventures of these women in the theater proper, writers were attentive to the relationship between actresses and their audiences more broadly, especially as it affected the balance of power in social and romantic relationships. The marquis d'Argens delved into detailed accounts of the corruption of women on stage with a view to the great injustice wrapped up in their ability to live well beyond their means, feeding off the good fortune of their patrons and lovers.

La corruption du coeur est aujourd'hui si grande que les Courtisanes & les Filles de l'Opera tiennent un rang distingué à Paris; elles méprisent l'indigente Bourgeoise, & celle-ci n'a ni assez de courage pour leur disputer le pas, ni assez de vertu pour ne pas envier leur état. J'ai vu la *De l'Isle* & la *Camargo* dans les Carosses dorés, chargés de Laquais devant & derrière. Trois mois auparavant je les avois vues sortant d'un de ces Lieux qui ne sont ni Cabarets ni Auberges, & où les jeunes Débauchés ne laissent pas de se bien divertir pour leur argent. La fortune de ces sortes de femmes est encore plus rapide que celle des Gens d'Affaires.¹²⁶

The corruption of the heart is so considerable today that the Courtesans & the Filles de l'Opéra occupy a distinguished rank in Paris; they despise the indigent Bourgeois, & they possess neither sufficient courage to dispute their case, nor enough virtuousness not to envy their state. I saw *De l'Isle* and *Camargo* in gold Carriages loaded with Lackeys in front & behind. Three months earlier I had seen them leaving one of those Places that is neither a Cabaret nor an Inn, & where Debauched young people do not leave without amusing themselves well for their money. The fortune of these kinds of women is even more evanescent than that of Businessmen.

¹²⁶ See Argens, *Lettres morales et critiques sur les differens états et les diverses occupations des hommes* (Amsterdam: Le Cene, 1737), 102.

That women in the theater were hostile to the humble bourgeois who lusted after them and that they dared to flaunt their affluence in public made them even more despicable than corrupt businessmen. These sentiments about the basic poverty of moral principles at the Opéra pervaded the critical discourse on female performers well into the middle of the century, when authors of satires and assessments of the Opéra continued to invoke aesthetic theories from the seventeenth century and the ancient world in support of their conservative views.

A l'égard des filles de Théâtres, pour qui les hommes ont un goût décidé depuis qu'il y a des Théâtres, & qui les courront, tant qu'il y aura des Théâtres, on pourroit dire que cela seroit assez bien, si cet honneur, qui consiste dans la vertu, y gaignoit du côté des femmes, d'autant que selon le conseil de Caton, à ce que dit Horace, c'est une pâture qu'il faut laisser à la Débauche.¹²⁷

Regarding the filles de Théâtres, for whom men have had a decided taste ever since there were Theaters, & who will run them as long as there are Theaters, one could say that it would be well enough if this honor, which consists in virtuousness, was won on the part of women, all the more so since according to the advice of Cato, as Horace says, it is a domain one must relinquish to Debauchery.

In one case, anxieties about the relationship between actresses and men were filtered through a meditation on courtship more generally. The soldier and political advocate François-Étienne Gouge de Cessières (1724–1782), in his *L'Art d'aimer* (1759), mentions the *filles de l'Opéra* in a discussion of the conquest of young women and courtesans by eager young suitors.

La chasse leur est si favorable, qu'ils font une prise à chaque endroit; Rome entiere devient pour eux un *Serrail* ouvert; ils ne savent à qui jeter le *mouchoir*; femmes, filles, cortisannes, veuves, prudes, sottes, jeunes, vieilles, tout leur est bon, tout leur vient à point. Il est vrai qu'il leur faut du *joli*; le Poëte conseille de ne point se decider à la bougie, (précepte qui pourroit nuire aux filles de l'Opera si on le pratiquoit en France). Cette lumière incertaine donne aux femmes comme aux faux diamans des charmes trompeurs.¹²⁸

The hunt is so favorable to them that they make connections in every place; all of Rome becomes for them an open *Seraglio*; they do not know to whom to toss the *handkerchief*; women, girls, courtesans, widows, prudes, silly things, persons young, old, everything strikes them as good, everything falls into place. It is true that *beauty* is crucial to them: the Poet recommends not coming to conclusions by candlelight, (a precept that might harm the filles de l'Opéra if implemented in France). This uncertain light lends women, like imitation

¹²⁷ See *Les préjugés du public, sur l'honneur: Avec des observations critiques, morales, & historiques*, 3 vols. (Paris: De Hansy, 1765), II, 298.

¹²⁸ See François-Étienne Gouge de Cessières, *L'Art d'aimer, nouveau poëme en six chants* (London: n.p., 1759), 209.

diamonds, misleading charms.

The lovers described here enjoy more agency and autonomy than the male patrons and audience members in other accounts. These men are not incapacitated by the charms of the *filles de l'Opéra* but are invigorated by an indiscriminate taste for young and old, chaste and corrupted. The suggestion that too many gentlemen suitors select their sexual prey in the dim light of the theater, where even imitation diamonds are mistaken for something more authentic, is also notable, reliant as it is on popular perceptions that the *filles de l'Opéra* regularly blurred the boundaries between authenticity and falsification, the natural and the artificial. This is a marked reversal of a common trope in the discourse on the *filles de l'Opéra* and their male audiences, in which writers customarily wrote about scenarios in which actresses pursued and threatened men.

As part of a larger discourse about the *filles de l'Opéra* as aberrant and monstrous, many reports drew on medical rhetoric to underscore the damaging effect actresses had on health and public safety. This was a logical consequence of the evolution of critical meditations on the *filles de l'Opéra* into the eighteenth century, which concentrated first on the gendered physicality of these women and subsequently on their immorality and their unruly presence on stage, where their performances were often so dazzling as to cloud the judgment of those in the audience. Outside the theater proper, the *filles de l'Opéra* were likewise regarded as harbingers of disturbance and destruction, generating real and metaphorical noise as they clamored for control of their reputations and spreading ill will as well as actual illness. The marquis d'Argens believed actresses posed a sufficient infectious threat to warrant the issue of warnings to patrons in the theater.

Je voudrois que pour faire ressouvenir ceux qui vont à l'Opera des dangers qu'ils y courent, on mît cette Inscription sur la porte: Le Crime Trouve Ici Sa Punition. Mais la Mode & la bizarrerie pourroient bien rendre cette sage précaution inutile. La passion pour les Filles de l'Opera est une maladie épidémique que l'air du Théâtre communiqué, & qu'on ne peut éviter sûrement que par la fuite; quiconque hante les Coulisses n'est pas moins exposé que celui qui vit dans une Infirmerie de pestiférés. La fureur pour ces Filles a passé de la Capitale dans les Provinces, & l'on est aussi fou à Rouen, à Bourdeaux, à Lyon, & à Marseille, qu'à Paris.¹²⁹

To alert those who go to the Opéra of the danger they face there, I would like for someone to put this Inscription on the door: Crime Finds Its Punishment Here. But Fashion &

¹²⁹ See Argens, *Lettres morales et critiques*, 104.

strangeness could by all means render this wise circumspection useless. The passion for the Filles de l'Opéra is an infectious illness that the air of the Theater encourages, & that one cannot confidently avoid except by escape; whoever lurks in the Wings is no less prone to exposure than someone in a pestilent Infirmary. The rage for these Girls has spread from the Capital to the Provinces, & people are as crazed in Rouen, Bordeaux, Lyon, & Marseille as they are in Paris.

Although the marquis is not quick to enumerate them, the punishments of the Opéra included public embarrassment and ridicule for sexual involvement with the *filles de l'Opéra*, as was the case for the repentant marquis de Bonnac; loss of profession or related privileges, a fate that befell the administrator Gruër; and any number of venereal diseases from illicit affairs with women in the wings or in private. Among the collections of the Tralage manuscripts, one epigram about Louison Moreau and the dancer La Fontaine prefigures the infectious air of the theater that the marquis describes, calling the Opéra itself a school of vice in which a dangerous venom threatened the demise of innocent souls.

Heureuses filles, qu'un sauveur
Vient d'arracher au précipice,
Vous quittez l'Opéra, cette école du vice,
Dont le poison funeste est rempli de douceur.
Ce dangereux venin par les sens tue une ame,
Mais le coeur enchanté ne sent point ce trepas:
Il ignore son mal et chérit ces appas.
O spectacle cruel, ô malheur d'icy-bas,
Jusqu'à quand prendras-tu les mortels dans tes lacs!
Opéra, qui dérobe au Ciel tant de victimes,
Tu perds, par un sermon, ton plus charmant appuy:
Ce qui faisoit ta gloire, et qui causoit tes crimes,
Est de la penitence un miracle d'aujourd'huy.¹³⁰

Happy girls, whom a savior
Has just swept off the precipice,
You take leave of the Opéra, this school of vice,
In which calamitous poison is filled with sweetness.
This dangerous venom kills the soul by way of the senses,
But the delighted heart does not discern this demise:
It ignores its evil and cherishes these charms.
Oh cruel spectacle, oh misfortune here on earth,
Up to the point when you engulf mortals in your snares!
Opera, which prevents so many victims from entering Heaven,
You lose your most charming support due to a sermon:
What made up your glory, and what caused your crimes,
Is a miracle of penitence today.

¹³⁰ See Lacroix, *Notes et documents sur l'histoire des théâtres de Paris*, 107.

As for Louison, the elder of the two Moreau sisters active at the Opéra in the last two decades of the seventeenth century, a pregnancy in the middle of her career forced her to take leave of the Opéra in 1692, when by a *miracle de la pénitence*, she retreated to a community of hospital nuns in the faubourg Saint-Marceau on the left bank. Considerably less attractive than her sibling, Louison was nevertheless swept up into the sexual affairs of the younger Françoise, dite Fanchon. As research by Jane Clark has shown, the sisters braved intrigue, bribery, and something of a case of mistaken identity before competing quite unexpectedly against each other for the affections of the dauphin Louis (1661–1711), the eldest son and heir of Louis XIV (1638–1715).¹³¹ As for La Fontaine, she retired to a convent on the rue Saint-Honoré mere months after the departure of Louison. The rhetoric of poison, venom, death, and destruction that characterizes this short epigram foreshadows the description of infectious illness in the account of the marquis d’Argens some forty years later.

Some writers explored in graphic detail the troubling effects of the *filles de l’Opéra* on public health, complicating the critical and discursive landscape Kathryn Norberg has described, in which women of loose morals were not particularly associated with the spread of syphilis or other venereal diseases until much later in the eighteenth century.¹³² An anonymous author La Gorce has described attacked the voices and vocality of the *filles de l’Opéra* at the end of the seventeenth century, examining at once why women in the theater were shunned and why their presence in society was greeted with such suspicion. Ultimately the powerful effects of the *filles de l’Opéra* were traced to the fascinating and deadly gaze of the basilisk, as the author of this meditation called these women *ces sirènes dont parle Isaïe, qui habitent les temples de la volupté, ces basilics qui empoisonnent et tuent les âmes par les oreilles* (“the sirens of whom Isaiah speaks, who inhabit the temples of

¹³¹ See Jane Clark, “Les Folies Françaises,” *Early Music* 8/2 (1980), 164. On Fanchon, see Richard Somerset-Ward, *Angels and Monsters: Male and Female Sopranos in the Story of Opera, 1600–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 25.

¹³² See Kathryn Norberg, “From Courtesan to Prostitute: Mercenary Sex and Venereal Disease, 1730–1802,” in *The Secret Malady: Venereal Disease in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*, ed. Linda Merians (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 35.

voluptuousness, basilisks who poison and kill souls through the ears”).¹³³ As Darnton has written, the gutter journalist and spy Charles Théveneau de Morande (1741–1805) emphasized the fact that all of society had decayed morally and physically from years of interactions with the *filles de l’Opéra*.¹³⁴ In the anonymous *Le Gazette noir par un homme qui n’est pas blanc, ou Oeuvres posthumes du Gazetier cuirassé* (“The black Gazette by a man who is not white, or posthumous Works of the armored Gazetteer”) attributed to Théveneau de Morande but likely not authored by him, a short anecdote relates the spread of disease at the hands of one *fille de l’Opéra*.

Ecoutez avant cette anecdote. Cette *La Chanterie* étoit autrefois une fille des Choeurs de l’Opéra, d’une beauté rare, ingénue, un ange femelle. Les peintres la prenoient pour modelle. Un d’eux, chargé de peindre une mere du *Christ* pour le tableau d’un maître-autel, avoit eu recours à sa tête, & l’avoit rendue très ressemblante. Un Anglois qui visitoit les curiosités de nos Eglises, mais avoit parcouru auparavant celles de nos spectacles, & en avoit recueilli des fruits amers, appercevant cette belle tête, calquée sur celle de *La Chanterie*, s’écria avec surprise: *Ah! voilà la Vierge qui m’a donné la chaude-pisse!*¹³⁵

First listen to this anecdote. This *La Chanterie* was a girl of the Choruses of the Opéra, a rare, guileless beauty, a female angel. Painters used her as a model. One of them, responsible for painting a mother of *Christ* for the picture of a high altar, based his work on her head, & made her very lifelike. An Englishman who visited the curiosities of our Churches, but had already enjoyed those of our theatrical productions, & had reaped their bitter fruits, saw this beautiful head, modeled on that of *La Chanterie*, and exclaimed with astonishment: *Ah! behold the Virgin who gave me gonorrhea!*

This was not a metaphorical indictment in the least; the anonymous *Gazetier cuirassé, ou anecdotes scandaleuses de la Cour de France* (1771) attributed to Théveneau de Morande likewise made much of the infectious nature of these women, warning that the *filles de l’Opéra* were even more biologically than morally diseased.

On avertit le public qu’il regne parmi les filles de l’Opéra, une maladie épidémique qui commence à gagner les femmes de la cour, & se communique jusqu’à leurs laquais; cette maladie allonge les figures, efface le teint, diminue l’embonpoint & occasionne des ravages effrayans ou elle se fie, on voit des femmes *sans dents*, d’autres *sans sourcils*, on en voit de *paralitiques*, &c. &c. &c. On recommande aux amateurs les baptêmes *du sieur Préval*

¹³³ See Ladvoat, *Lettres sur l’Opéra à l’abbé Dubos*, 77.

¹³⁴ See Darnton, “The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France,” *Past and Present* 51/1 (1971), 102, and Simon Burrows, “A Literary Low-Life Reassessed: Charles Théveneau de Morande in London, 1769–1791,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22/1 (1998), 76–94.

¹³⁵ See *Le Gazette noir par un homme qui n’est pas blanc, ou Oeuvres posthumes du Gazetier cuirassé* (London: n.p., 1784), 197.

docteur en médecine, qui a prouvé démonstrativement qu'on peut passer tout l'opéra en revue sans rien craindre, pourvû qu'on boive de son eau, & qu'on soit baptisé de sa main.¹³⁶

We warn the public that an epidemic disease is raging among the filles de l'Opéra, which is beginning to reach the ladies of the court, & spread to their lackeys; this disease elongates faces, destroys the complexion, reduces the weight, & wreaks havoc wherever it takes root. One sees ladies *without teeth*, others *without eyebrows*, and some completely *paralyzed*, etc., etc., etc. People are recommending that enthusiasts be baptized by the *gentleman Prével, medical doctor*, who has definitively proven that one can sit through an entire opera with little to fear, provided one drinks his water & is baptized by his hand.

This colorful description is an accurate assessment of the late stages of syphilis, which as an infectious disease can lend a callow appearance to the face and as neurosyphilis can cause tremor, muscle atrophy, and paralysis or paralytic dementia. It can also cause the loss of both eyebrows, as opposed to hypothyroidism, in which only the lateral third of an eyebrow is lost.

In the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* writers were less graphic in their descriptions of performers at the Opéra although no less interested in the sexual symbolism of these women and in their ability to compromise the mental and physical health of their patrons. Among the entries for 1706, one *chanson* had been recorded a decade earlier in the Tralage manuscripts as the *branle de Metz Sur les filles de l'Opéra à Paris, en 1696*. In its updated Maurepas version the verse continued to emphasize the intrigues of specific actresses and finally the ridicule of male members of the audience at the Opéra.

Voulez vous scavoir l'histoire
Des beautez de l'Opéra?
Un seul brânle suffira
Pour vous remplir la mémoire
Ah! qu'un brânle convient bien
A tant de Filles de bien.

Would you like to know the story
Of the beauties of the Opéra?
A lone branle will suffice
To fill in your memory
Ah! that a branle so aptly suits
So many good Girls.

Ce beau lieu fournit de belles
A tous les gens d'apresent.
Des Matins pour de l'argent,

This striking place provides beauties
For everyone up to the present.
Desmatins does it for the money,

¹³⁶ See *Le Gazetier cuirassé, ou anecdotes scandaleuses de la Cour de France* (London: n.p., 1777), 126. The passage introduces the *Nouvelles de l'Opéra, Vestales & Matrones de Paris*, part of a series of *nouvelles* in the latter half of *Le Gazetier cuirassé*. Like other libels in the decades before the Revolution, *Le Gazetier cuirassé* boasts notice of its production *à cent lieues de la Bastille* or a hundred leagues from the Bastille, in other words in London among French expatriates. Darnton has described these libels and their authors in the introduction to Anne-Gédéon La Fitte de Pelleport, *Les Bohémiens* (Paris: Laporte, 1790), trans. Vivian Folkenflik as *The Bohemians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), xi.

La Moreau pour des Dentelles,
La grand Guyard pour son pain,
La Rochois le fait pour rien.

La Déchar pour l'abondance,
La Renaud pour un habit,
La Macé pour le déduit,
Des Places pour la Finance,
La du Fort pour des bijoux.
Ah! que les hommes sont foux!

La Florence pour des meubles,
La Ducais à tous venans.
La Denis pour des gands,
La Subligny est toute seule,
La Borgnon n'a pas un chat.

Pelerin pour une Rente,
Maupin pour un Justaucorps,
La Louison comme du Fort.
La Thevenard est puante,
Germain pour un falbala,
La Frieville sans maca.

On marchande la le Maire
Dont on n'aura pas les gands,
La du Cros aime les grands,
Elle fait comme sa mere.
En feinte les trompe tous,
Et se moque aussi de nous.

Valentinois tous vos charmes
Ne l'ont donc pû arrester?
Il s'est lassé de payer.
Croyez moi cachez vos larmes,
Laissez f... en liberté.
Il est un C... tout trouvé.

Ô malheureuse Duchesse!
Dis nous donc fade Choiseuil,
Ton C... est il en gran deuil?
Montre t'il de la tristesse?
Albert est emprisonné
Il est réduit a jeûner.

Foix ne crains tu point d'Affaire
Avecque ce grand Prélat?
Polastron n'est pas un fat
Comment as-tu sçu lui plaire?
Le grivois aime l'argent,

Moreau for Lace,
The great Guyart for her bread,
Rochois does it for nothing.

Déchars for the abundance,
Renaud for a costume,
Macé for the deduction,
Desplace for the Capital,
Dufort for some jewelry.
Ah! how crazy men are!

Florence for some furniture,
Ducais to all those who show up.
Denise for some gloves,
Subligny is all alone,
Borgnon has no pussy.

Pelerin for an Annuity,
Maupin for a Waistcoat,
Louison just as Dufort.
Thevenard reeks,
Germain for a frill,
Frieville has no bite.

People bargain with Lemaire
Whose gloves they will not have,
Ducros likes the big ones,
She carries on as her mother does.
By feints they deceive us all,
They make fun of us as well.

Valentinois, were all your charms
Thus unable to captivate him?
He was tired of paying up.
Believe me, hide your tears,
Let people fuck at liberty.
Yours is obviously a ready-made Cunt.

Oh unfortunate Duchess!
So now tell us, bland Choiseul,
Is your Cunt grieving deeply?
Does it show any sign of sadness?
Albert is imprisoned
He is reduced to fasting.

Foix do you not fear Dealings
With this great Prelate?
Polastron is no braggart
Just how did you know how to please him?
The saucy ones love money,

Je le scais d'un President.¹³⁷

I know of one such President.

The idea that women in the theater were so fickle and financially needy as to have wreaked inestimable damage on the balance of power in bourgeois and aristocratic relationships was at home even in the first decade of the eighteenth century, as the final stanzas of this verse allude to the trials of Marie de Lorraine (1674–1724), the attractive spouse of the duc de Valentinois and prince de Monaco, Antoine Grimaldi (1661–1731) who found herself unable to secure the affections of the royal minister and marquis Louis-François-Marie Le Tellier de Barbezieux (1668–1701) on the side. The bland Louise Gabrielle de La Baume Le Blanc de La Vallière (1665–1698), the wife of the *chevalier des Ordres du Roi* César Auguste de Choiseul (1637–1705), was also demeaned for her alleged role in prompting the lieutenant Louis-Joseph, comte d'Albert to come to blows with the regimental leader and comte Louis de Barberin de Reynac from Liège. Marginalia in the Maurepas collection indicate that Albert was only one of up to four lovers the insatiable duchesse de Choiseul kept at a single time, all in the spirit of lust and greed with which contemporary *filles de l'Opéra* were associated; nor did Marie-Charlotte de Roquelaure as the wife of the *chevalier* and duc de Randan, Henri-François de Foix de Candale, fare any better. Her involvement with the brother of a prominent bishop drew the young regimental officer, comte, and alleged sodomite Jean-Baptiste de Polastron into the mix. Just how and to what extent Marie-Charlotte pleased or pleased such men was the subject of considerable satirical speculation; so were hints that Polastron was the object of male desire. The saucy president of the final lines of this verse is none other than Achille de Harlay, the *premier président du parlement de Paris*.

Of the *filles de l'Opéra* mentioned by name in the Maurepas version of the *branle de Metz*, several remain difficult to identify with any certainty. *Des Matins* was likely the soprano Marie-

¹³⁷ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses; Années 1705 à 1710. Vol.^e XXIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12644, folia 47–49. While Cowart and La Gorce have alluded to portions of this verse in separate studies, they have not detailed the ways in which the Maurepas transmission varies from the Tralage version. This early rendering is reprinted in Lacroix, *Notes et documents sur l'histoire des théâtres de Paris*, 92. See also Cowart, "Of Women, Sex and Folly," 208, and La Gorce, "Vie et mœurs des chanteuses de l'Opéra," 327.

Louise Desmatins (1670–1708). *La Moreau* was either Louison Moreau or the younger Fanchon; both were active at the Opéra from the last two decades of the seventeenth century but were rarely identified by their first names, making it difficult to determine which Moreau sang what part. We do know that Louison and not Fanchon was the mademoiselle who appeared as Amasie in a Chantilly performance of the lyric tragedy *Orontée* (1688) by Paolo Francesco Lorenzani (1640–1713) for a celebration dedicated to the dauphin by Henri Jules de Bourbon (1643–1709), prince de Condé.¹³⁸ *La grande Diart* in the Tralage manuscript is listed in the Maurepas reading as *La grande Guyard*, likely a reference to the Germaine Connet de Guyart who performed in *bas-dessus* or mezzo-soprano roles in and outside of Paris after the turn of the eighteenth century.¹³⁹ As research by Rebekah Ahrendt has shown, documentation from entrepreneurs and refugees like Louis Deseschaliers and Jean-Jacques Quesnot de La Chenée, involved in the recruitment of performers for productions of French operas in The Hague in these years, also singles out the soprano Diart or Diard.¹⁴⁰ The

¹³⁸ On the Chantilly performance, see *La feste de Chantilly: contenant tout ce qui s'est passé pendant le séjour que Monseigneur le Dauphin y a fait, avec une description exacte du Chasteau & des Fontaines* (Lyon: Thomas Amaulry, 1688), published as a supplement to the *MERCURE GALANT, dédié à Monseigneur LE DAUPHIN. SEPTEMBRE 1688* (Lyon: Thomas Amaulry, 1688). See also Lacroix, *Notes et documents sur l'histoire des théâtres de Paris*, 76, and Fader, "The 'Cabale du Dauphin,' Campra, and Italian Comedy: The Courtly Politics of French Musical Patronage around 1700," *Music and Letters* 86/3 (2005), 390. On documentation for other performances in which a number of these women participated, see La Gorce, "Contribution des Opéras de Paris et de Hambourg à l'interprétation des ouvrages lyriques donnés à La Haye au début du XVIIIe siècle," in *Aufklärungen: Studien zur deutsch-französischen Musikgeschichte im 18. Jahrhundert: Einflüsse und Wirkungen*, ed. Wolfgang Birtel and Christoph-Hellmut Mahling, *Annales Universitatis Saraviensis: Reihe Philosophische Fakultät* 19–20 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1986), 96.

¹³⁹ On Guyart, see Jan Fransen, *Les comédiens français en Hollande au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècles*, Bibliothèque de la Revue de Littérature Comparée 25 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1925), 215. See also Max Fuchs, *La vie théâtrale en province au XVIIIe siècle*, Bibliothèque de la Société des historiens du théâtre 3 (Paris: Droz, 1933), 113. On the *bas-dessus* and contemporary vocal ranges in compositional context, see Théodora Psychoyou, "The Historical Implications of a Distinctive Scoring: Charpentier's Six-Voice Motets for mademoiselle de Guise," in *New Perspectives on Marc-Antoine Charpentier*, ed. Shirley Thompson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 213, and Mary Cyr, "On Performing 18th-Century *Haute-Contre* Roles," *The Musical Times* 118/1610 (1977), 291.

¹⁴⁰ On performances by Guyart, Diart or Diard, and others in productions outside of Paris, see Rebekah Ahrendt, "A Second Refuge: French Opera and the Huguenot Migration, c. 1680–c. 1710," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011, 134, and idem, "*Armide*, the Huguenots, and The Hague," *The Opera Quarterly* 29/1 (2013), 2. See also Fransen, *Les comédiens français en Hollande*, 205. On Deseschaliers and his relationship to the Huguenot refugee Quesnot de La

altered or omitted names of the *filles de l'Opéra* in multiple versions of epigrams would seem to suggest that these women existed in and beyond the Parisian public sphere as agents of cultural and musical influence and yet never necessarily as performers whose popularity was invariable or predictable over the course of their careers.

These variants persist in the appearance of *La Macé* in the Maurepas reading for what had been *La Carré* in the Tralage version. *La Rochois* was of course the very Marie Le Rochois who had established herself in Lullian roles and as a mentor to the sopranos Journet and Antier. *La Déchar* was possibly the spouse of the Opéra dancer Pierre Deschars (1660–1734). *Des Places* may have been related to the engraver Louis Desplaces (1682–1739). *La du Fort* was also known as Babet; as the elder of two sisters, she had the distinction of having her portrait produced by Antoine Trouvain (1656–1708), an engraving now in the collections of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. The Tralage version lists *Uzé* as a variant spelling of Heusé, Heuzé, or Huzé, who was active at the Opéra from the very end of the seventeenth century; in the Maurepas manuscript collection this name is replaced with *La Ducais*. *La Denis* was possibly the younger sister of Desmatins. *La Subligny* was Marie-Thérèse Perdou de Subligny (1666–1735), active as a dancer at the Opéra in the last two decades of the seventeenth century and the first ballerina to appear professionally in England at the beginning of the eighteenth century. *Maupin* was Julie d'Aubigny (1670–1707), dite La Maupin, the fencer and contralto who would replace Le Rochois after her retirement. *La Louison* could well be Louison Moreau, although other epigrams in the Tralage manuscripts refer to a Louyson Senes among the actresses of the Opéra in these years.¹⁴¹ *La Thevenard* is likely the spouse of Gabriel-Vincent Thévenard (1669–1741), the celebrated tragic baritone and pupil of Destouches.

The threat of deception or mockery by the *filles de l'Opéra* held currency for male patrons who were concerned not to fall prey to authentic experiences of the historical association between musicality, sensuality, and effeminization. Being duped by actresses in the theater was the

Chenée, see Quesnot de La Chenée, *L'Opéra de La Haye: Histoire instructive et galante* (Cologne: Les Heritiers de Pierre le Sincère, 1706), 85.

¹⁴¹ See Lacroix, *Notes et documents sur l'histoire des théâtres de Paris*, 105.

supremely terrifying end result of the aesthetics of deception and artifice that Aïssé, Voltaire, and others described.¹⁴² It was the logical consequence of what the chevalier de Méré, Antoine Gombault (1610–1684) had described as the nature of talent, one class of *agréments* or pleasing attributes that charmed by its novelty or perfection and thus represented an artifice, a product of learned knowledge rather than a natural, innate, and noble attribute.¹⁴³ Well before the height of the popularity of Le Maure and Pélissier in the third decade of the eighteenth century, Teissier too had expressed concern about the compromised position of men in the theater, naming one epigram about actresses *Le ridicule des jeunes gens à l'Opéra* (“The ridicule of young men at the Opéra”).¹⁴⁴ The fear for male patrons enchanted by these women was not just effeminization but susceptibility to deceit. They worried that their identification with female performers would culminate in their enchantment and powerlessness. Those charmed by the *filles de l'Opéra* in the theater also stood to lose a great deal of money in lavishing gifts on these women. One *chanson* from the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* for the year 1738 was sung to the tune of the *air L'eau qui tombe goutte, à goutte* (“The water that falls drop by drop”) from the Lullian lyric tragedy *Atys* and made much of the worldly qualities of the *filles de l'Opéra* who relieved a number of patrons of their fortunes.

Les appas des Filles d'Opéra,
Par les Galans, sont mis a l'enclere;
Et c'est à qui les enmenera
Sur les rivages de Cithere;
Mais quelquefois avant tout cela
Sans autre affaire
Dans le Parterre
Leurs traits gracieux
Lancent des feux,
Font des heureux,
Et bien souvent
Pareille jouissance

The charms of the Filles d'Opéra
Are up for auction by the Gallants;
And this is who they will lead away
On the shores of Cythera;
But occasionally before any of that,
Without another affair
In the Parterre,
Their gracious traits
Start fires,
Make people happy,
And quite often
The same rapture

¹⁴² See Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, 20, and Voltaire, *Oeuvres de M. de Voltaire*, III, 118.

¹⁴³ See Fader, “The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic,” 12. See also Antoine Gombault de Méré, “Des agréments,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Charles-Henri Boudhors, 3 vols. (Paris: Fernand Roches, 1930), II, 16, and Buford Norman, “The Agréments—Méré, Morality and Music,” *The French Review* 56/4 (1983), 556.

¹⁴⁴ See Teissier, *Veritez sur les moeurs*, 52.

Epargne la finance
D'un pauvre galant.¹⁴⁵

Spares the cash
Of a poor gentleman.

Even for writers who did not sketch the seductive properties of the *filles de l'Opéra* in such dangerous terms, the experience of attending the Opéra or indeed any theater carried with it the threat of enchantment and loss. The verse *Le Mondain* ("The Socialite") attributed to Voltaire in a volume of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* addresses these concerns.

Il faut se rendre à ce Palais magique
Où sont les beaux vers, la Danse, la Musique,
L'art de charmer les yeux par les couleurs,
L'art plus heureux de séduire les coeurs.
Il va siffler quelque Opéra nouveau,
Ou malgré lui court admirer Rameau.
Allons souper: Que ces brillants services!
Que ces ragouts ont pour moy de délices!¹⁴⁶

One must return to this magical Palace
Where one finds beautiful verses, Dance, Music,
The art of charming eyes with colors,
The happiest art of seducing hearts.
He will hiss at a few new Operas
Or in spite of himself admire Rameau.
Let's sup: What brilliant crockery!
How delightful to me these stews are!

Presenting anything but a straightforward and didactic experience, the magic palace of the Palais-Royal seduces hearts and overpowers its innocent spectators through colors and the artifice of theatrical makeup. This characterization of the Palais-Royal affirms what the historian James Johnson has written about the Opéra as an aesthetic and social manifestation of pleasure to which audiences flocked to indulge in magnificence, enchantment, and mischief.¹⁴⁷ Dance and music are reduced in this epigram to deceptions, making it impossible to discern what to esteem. This

¹⁴⁵ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses. Années 1738, 1739, 1740 & 1741. Vol.° XX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12635, folio 108.

¹⁴⁶ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 80.

¹⁴⁷ See Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 50.

description of clouded judgment had been a marked critical topos a century before the appearance of this verse, when in the midst of the debate about dramaturgical practice known as the *querelle du Cid*, which one modern historian has called a classic case of the failure of conservative critics to recognize genius when they saw it, the novelist and poet Georges de Scudéry (1601–1667) attacked *Le Cid* (1637), the *tragi-comédie* of Pierre Corneille (1606–1684).¹⁴⁸ The principal arguments Scudéry set forth in his *Observations sur le Cid* (1637) revolved around his distaste for the enchantment brought about by staging and spectacle, which he claimed impeded true appreciation of the quality of a given work, which was best judged not by its staging or representation but by its reading in private.¹⁴⁹ Throughout the century that separated the *querelle du Cid* from the appearance of this Voltaire verse, questions about the utility of the performing arts revolved around whether the enchantments and seductions of the stage could ever be compatible with critical judgment.¹⁵⁰ The socialite Voltaire describes admires the music of Rameau in spite of himself, as though he would choose otherwise if not bombarded with seductions in the theater. He retires to supper and leaves unsaid any misgivings about the magic, or rather black magic, of the Palais-Royal.

Noise

The acknowledgment of noise and attendant calls for silence and civility exploded at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when audiences in the theater confronted the symbolic noise

¹⁴⁸ See M. Sedgwick, “Richelieu and the *querelle du Cid*,” *The Modern Language Review* 48/2 (1953), 143. See also Armand Gasté, *La querelle du Cid, pièces et pamphlets publiés d’après les originaux, avec une introduction* (Paris: H. Welter, 1898), Colbert Searles, “L’Académie française et *Le Cid*,” *Revue d’Histoire littéraire de la France* 21/2 (1914), 331–374, and Déborah Blocker and Elie Haddad, “Protections et statut d’auteur à l’époque moderne: Formes et enjeux des pratiques de patronage dans la querelle du *Cid* (1637),” *French Historical Studies* 31/3 (2008), 381–416.

¹⁴⁹ See Georges de Scudéry, *Observations sur le Cid* (Paris: n.p., 1637), and Hélène Merlin, “Effets de voix, effets de scènes: Mondory entre *Le Cid* et *La Marianne*,” in *À haute voix: diction et pronociation aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: actes du colloque de Rennes des 17 et 18 juin 1996, sous le haut patronage de la Société française d’étude du seizième siècle*, ed. Olivia Rosenthal, Actes et colloques 52 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1998), 155–176.

¹⁵⁰ See Annie Becq, *Genèse de l’esthétique française moderne: de la raison classique à l’imagination créatrice, 1680–1814*, 2 vols. (Pisa: Pacini, 1984), II, 604, and Élisabeth Décultot and Mark Ledbury, eds., *Théories et débats esthétiques au XVIIIe siècle: éléments d’une enquête*, Études internationales sur le dix-huitième siècle 4 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), 216.

generated by the clamor of actresses for attention, the sublime noises of orchestral forces and the performing voice, and the vocal reactions of members of the audience. Noise in the theater proper was processed and glossed in terms of a broad spectrum of experience extending from the pleasures of listening to the pains of its unfolding before a jostling, boorish crowd. As research by Jeffrey Ravel has shown, Parisian audiences at this time could be as noisy as the gossips in the taverns or the performers they heard singing on stage; they responded to legislation against those who generated a racket in the theater by resorting to coordinated choruses of coughing, spitting, and sneezing to express disapproval of performances.¹⁵¹ Accounts of noisemakers in the theater were widespread, detailed in autobiographical memoirs as well as in periodicals like the *Mercure de France*. The fourth and ninth satires of Boileau took *les siffleurs* or hissers to task as did a pensive entry in the *Mercure Galant* from the end of the seventeenth century.

Ces sortes de Juges-là ne cherche qu'à se divertir aux dépens du bon sens et de la raison qu'ils veulent bannir de toutes les pièces de théâtre. On veut siffler, parce qu'on excite par là un désordre que l'on trouve plus divertissant que tout ce qu'on pourroit entendre. Je ne prétens pas, en condamnant les siffleurs, justifier toutes les pièces qui sont sifflées, mais on ne doit pas aussi conclure que toutes celles qui sont sifflées soient méchantes.¹⁵²

These sorts of People seek only to amuse themselves at the expense of common sense and reason and they want to banish all plays from the theater. They want to hiss, because in so doing they excite a riot that they find more amusing than anything they could possibly hear. By condemning hissers, I do not pretend to justify all the pieces at which they hiss, but one should not also conclude that all the pieces people hiss at are malicious.

The *Véritez sur les mœurs* of Teissier also detailed the disquiet among audiences who went out of their way to generate more noise than performers.

Les François aiment la Musique:
Mais quand ils sont à l'Opera,
C'est à qui de plus de bruit fera.
Par vanité chacun se pique
De chanonner, & d'estre Connoisseur;

¹⁵¹ See Ravel, *The Contested Parterre*, 43. On the effects of police mandates on behavior in the theater, see Lagrave, *La Vie théâtrale à Bordeaux des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1985), 438. On the noisiness of audiences in London in the eighteenth century, see Michael Burden, "Pots, Privies, and WCs: Crapping at the Opera in London before 1830," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 23/1–2 (2012), 27–50.

¹⁵² See the *Mercure Galant, dédié à Monseigneur le Dauphin. Décembre 1694* (Paris: Michel Brunet, 1694), 285.

L'un chante plus haut que l'Acteur;
 Un autre marque la mesure
 A contre temps sur le plancher;
 Et la plûpart y vont chercher
 Leurs amis, ou quelque aventure.¹⁵³

The French like Music:
 But when they are at the Opéra,
 It is a question of who will make the most noise.
 Out of pride everyone is drawn
 To humming along, & being an Expert;
 One sings louder than the Actor,
 Another marks the beat
 Out of time on the floor,
 And the majority of people go there
 To seek out their friends or some adventure.

Noise generated by members of the audience at the Opéra grew so great at times that it interrupted or obscured the spectacle on stage.

A une représentation de cet Opéra, un Fat chantoit dans le Parterre, en même tems que Thevenard, & si haut qu'il incommodoit tous ses voisins. L'un d'eux, Gascon, moins endurant que les autres, disoit à chaque instant: *le Fat! Le maudit Chanteur! Le Bourreau! Le chien de Chanteur!* & autres termes même plus énergiques. "Est-ce de moi que vous parlez, lui dit le Chanteur fâcheux? Non, répliqua le Gascon; c'est de Thevenard qui m'empêche de vous entendre."¹⁵⁴

At one performance of this Opera, a Showboat was singing in the Parterre at the same time as Thévenard, & so loudly that he was disturbing all his neighbors. One of these, Gascon, who was less patient than the others, kept saying: *That Blowhard! That confounded Singer! That Torturer! That dog of a Singer!* & other even stronger epithets. "Are you talking about me?" asked the tiresome Singer. "No," replied Gascon, "It's Thévenard who is keeping me from hearing you!"

Certain writers made their sensitivity to noise all the more apparent by taking special note of tranquil moments when they were able to enjoy musical performances in silence.

Je viens de l'Opéra d'Orphée;
 Je l'ai vu fort à l'aise & tout me promenant:
 Le silence étoit surprenant,
 Point de sifflet, point de huée;
 Le bon goût au Parterre étoit incognito,
 Et l'on se contentoit d'y siffler in petto.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ See Teissier, *Veritez sur les mœurs*, 52.

¹⁵⁴ See Clément and La Porte, *Anecdotes dramatiques*, I, 91.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., II, 26.

I have just come from the opera *Orphée*
Which I witnessed in total comfort as I wandered around.
The silence was surprising,
Not a single hiss, not a catcall.
The Parterre kept their good taste to themselves
And contented themselves with hissing *in petto*.

These comments on silence in the opera house reveal how sensitive listeners in the eighteenth century remained to noise in the audience and perhaps even more to the serenity that came over them in its absence. This was especially notable before the appearance of directives for concert etiquette early in the nineteenth century. Consider the advice of the Wurttemberg court musician and Italian language instructor Johann Baptist Schaul (1759–1822), in whose *Briefe über den Geschmack in der Musik* (1809) we learn that *Die Zuhörer müssen, gleichsam in Todesstille versunken, von den Spielenden entfernt sitzen, um sie nicht der Zerstreuung und Störung auszusetzen; diese aber, wenn sie ihre Instrumente gestimmt haben, müssen sich des, jedem empfindlichen Ohre, so unangenehmen Präludirens enthalten, um die schöne und große Wirkung nicht zu schwächen, welche Stille und Überraschung so wunderbar hervorzubringen wissen. Kurz, alles muß wie in einem Heiligthum seyn* (“Listeners, as it were sunk in the silence of the grave, must sit at some distance from the players, so that they cause neither distraction nor disturbance; players, however, once they have tuned their instruments, must avoid those preludes so unpleasant to every sensitive ear, so as not to weaken the beautiful, grand effect such stillness and surprise elicits so wonderfully. In short, everything must be as in a holy place”).¹⁵⁶

While it was common practice to parody popular performers, accounts in the eighteenth century speak to the incredible force of public opinion in comparing and contrasting the *filles de l’Opéra*. The resultant popularity contest was as much an exercise in testing the limits of reputation as a viable register of discourse as it was an exploration of rhetorical tropes from elsewhere in aesthetic criticism, including references to monstrosity and to the metaphor of noise. The journalist and editor Georges Touchard-Lafosse (1780–1847) remarked on the din caused by the reputation of

¹⁵⁶ See Johann Baptist Schaul, *Briefe über den Geschmack in der Musik* (Karlsruhe: Macklot, 1809), 12. See also Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 296.

singers like La Maupin, of whom he writes *Mais elle fit dans le monde plus de bruit que les Castelly, les Rochois et les Antier, par sa beauté, par ses aventures et surtout par son humeur belliqueuse* (“But she generated more of a racket in the world than the Castellys, the Rochoises, and the Antiers, by her beauty, by her adventures and above all by her bellicosity”).¹⁵⁷ Such accounts provide evidence that the *filles de l’Opéra* were associated with the generation of noise in polite society. The volume of reportage on the misadventures of actresses had risen to such a level even in the early eighteenth century that commentators were forced to confront the possibility of silencing these women once and for all. We read threats to this effect in one epigram in the *Chansonnier Maurepas*, where marginalia reveal that the *filles de l’Opéra* spoke regularly, loudly, and publically about the quality of the lovers they took.

A la cour, quel malheur,
Oh! Dieu, quelle infortune,
De six filles d’honneur,
Il n’en reste pas une.
Zon, zon, zon,
Lisette ma lisette,
Zon, zon, zon,
Lisette, ma Lison.

At court, what woe,
Oh! God, what misfortune,
Of six honorable girls,
There remains not one.
La, la, la,
Lisette, my Lisette,
La, la, la,
Lisette, my Lison.

En sortant du Moustier
La jeune mariée
Va chez le Peletier,
Pour etre mieux fourrée.
Zon, zon, etc.

By leaving the Monastery
The young newlywed
Goes to the Furrier,
To be better decked out.
La, la, etc.

Filles de l’Opéra,
Apprenez a vous taire,
Où bien l’on vous dira,
Allez vous faire faire;
Zon, zon, etc.

Filles de l’Opéra,
Learn to quiet down,
Or people might well say to you,
Are you going to do, do
La, la, etc.

Peut on voir Potenot
Sans l’aimer a la rage;
Mais un homme dévot
Nous bouche le passage.
Zon, zon, etc.¹⁵⁸

Can anyone see Potenot
Without loving her to the point of rage?
But a devout man
Blocks our way.
La, la, etc.

¹⁵⁷ See Georges Touchard-Lafosse, *Chroniques secrètes et galantes de l’Opéra 1667–1845*, 2 vols. (Paris: Ledoyen et Giret, 1846), I, 215.

¹⁵⁸ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses depuis 1686 jusqu’en 1690. Vol.^e VI*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12621, folio 167.

Marginalia in the manuscript on this page identify the six *filles d'honneur* as colleagues of Marie-Anne-Christine-Victoire de Bavière (1660–1690), the dauphine of France. A truncated version of the same verse on a separate page names these six women outright, from Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force (1654–1724), comtesse du Roure, to Marie-Françoise de Rambures, comtesse de Polignac; mademoiselle de Levestein, marquise de Danjeau; mademoiselle de Grammont; mademoiselle de Stafford; and mademoiselle de Simeac, abbesse de Poussé, or Poussay, a commune in Lorraine. The same manuscript collection boasts a verse from a *chanson* on the *air flon, flon* (“blare, blare”) concerning the charms of the popular Potenot who ensnared the abbé François Courtin (1659–1739).

Avec un teint de plastre	With a plastery complexion
Potenot sait charmer,	Potenot knows how to charm
Un Abé plein d'emplastre	An entirely maladroit Abbot
Qui n'est bon qu'à berner. ¹⁵⁹	Who is no good unless he is fooled.

As research by Nicholas Hammond has shown, references to gossip in the Maurepas volumes from the seventeenth century describe the importance of silence in the maintenance of civil order; they furthermore champion quiet speech or no speech at all as a means of counteracting the harmful effects of the spread of gossip.¹⁶⁰ A number of satirical texts from the middle of the seventeenth century including the *Mazarinades* that targeted the cardinal and diplomat Giulio Raimondo Mazzarino or Jules Mazarin (1602–1661) at the time of the wars of the Fronde were replete with allusions to noisy gossip and the solace and satisfaction of silence. One *chanson* composed in 1651 on the occasion of the besiegement of Bordeaux by Mazarin discouraged all those who frequented bars and cafés from indulging in seditious speech, claiming the enjoyment of a beverage in public far outweighed the threat of arrest or the issue of *lettres circulaires* or briefs written by bishops or cardinals to their clergy.

Amis ne parlons plus d'affaire,
Surtout dedans le Cabaret,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 82.

¹⁶⁰ See Nicholas Hammond, *Gossip, Sexuality and Scandal in France (1610–1715)*, Medieval and Early Modern French Studies 9, ed. Noël Peacock (Bern and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 41.

Ce verre vaut mieux qu'un arrêt,
Et que la Lettre Circulaire,
Laissons là Mazarin et vivons sans soucy,
Au Diable soit le sot, s'il revient plus icy.¹⁶¹

Friends, let us not speak of affairs any more,
Above all in the Tavern.
This glass is worth more than an arrest
And a Lettre Circulaire.
Let us leave Mazarin where he is and live without a care.
The fool can go to the Devil if he comes back here.

A *chanson* from 1679 on the *air des Ennuyeurs* ("air of the Bores") elaborated on the idea of the uselessness of gossip, recommending not just softer, more restrained speech but complete silence.

The narrator of this *chanson* warns the chevalier Julien Pantin de La Guere (1628–1708), to whom the verse is dedicated, that those who speak loudly and in excess are doomed to fall into disfavor.

Parlez bas, vous parlez trop haut;
Mais faites mieux ne parlez gueres,
Trop parler est un grand défaut;
Je vous en avertis, la Guere,
Il est constant que les Bavards
Sont detestez de toutes parts.
Si Jamais vous avez la touche
Ne crachez point en Compagnie;
Pour cracher, demeurez chez vous
Ou ne crachez point je vous prie;
Ou tout au moins crachez si loing
Qu'on ne s'en apperçoive point.¹⁶²

Speak quietly, you are speaking too loudly;
But even better, speak hardly at all,
Speaking too much is a great defect;
I am warning you, La Guere,
It is a constant fact that Babblers
Are detested everywhere.
If you Ever have a connection with someone
Do not spit in pleasant Company;
If you must spit, stay at home
Or I beg you do not spit at all;
Or at least spit far enough away

¹⁶¹ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses depuis 1646 jusqu'en 1666. Vol.º II*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12617, folio 91.

¹⁶² See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1673 jusqu'en 1679. Vol.º IV*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12619, folio 565.

That people do not notice.

This attack on La Guere was in all likelihood a result of the fact that by order of the *Arrêt de la Chambre de la Réformation de la Noblesse de Bretagne*, he had been declared *noble d'ancienne d'extraction* or a member of the nobility by birth instead of an individual ennobled by an official or monarch through the issue of *lettres d'anoblissement*.¹⁶³

An *adieu des Ecrivains* or farewell to Authors in the collections of the Maurepas manuscripts for 1650 was quite possibly related to a collection of *Mazarinades* published as triolets under the same title that same year and decried prying, informal discussions about the politics of the court, the monarchy, and the state of affairs a short distance from Paris in Vincennes, to which Ana María Mauricia (1601–1666) as regent of France and Mazarin had banished the aristocratic general Louis de Bourbon, dit le Grand Condé (1621–1686) together with his brother Armand de Bourbon, prince de Conti (1629–1666) and Henri II d'Orléans, duc de Longueville (1595–1663).¹⁶⁴ It was not the first time Mazarin had sent a prominent member of the military with significant court connections to Vincennes, as François de Vendôme, duc de Beaufort (1616–1669), the cousin of Louis XIV and illegitimate grandson of Henri IV, had been imprisoned there on the orders of the cardinal seven years earlier.¹⁶⁵ This triolet insisted so forcefully on the cessation of all gossip and reportage on such events that it reiterated its reproachful introductory line twice.

Qu'on ne parle plus de la Cour
N'y de l'Estat ny de Vincennes.
Il vaut mieux se taire tout court,
Qu'on ne parle plus de la cour;
On pourroit faire un mauvais tour

¹⁶³ See the *Archives de Bretagne: recueil d'actes, de chroniques, et de documents historiques rares ou inédites publié par La société des bibliophiles bretons et de l'histoire de Bretagne*, 15 vols. (Nantes: Société des bibliophiles bretons et de l'histoire de Bretagne, 1883), I, 142. See also the *Recueil de généalogies, pour servir de suite ou de supplément au Dictionnaire de la noblesse. Contenant la suite des Généalogies, l'Histoire, la Chronologie des Familles Nobles de France*, 15 vols. (Paris: Badiez, 1784), XIV, 454.

¹⁶⁴ See *L'adieu des écrivains. Triolets* (Paris: Denys Pelé, 1650).

¹⁶⁵ See *The Cambridge Modern History, planned by the late Lord Acton*, ed. Adolphus William Ward, George Walter Prothero, and Stanley Leathes, 13 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), IV, 596.

A ces médisans pour leurs peines;
Qu'on ne parle plus de la Cour
Ny de l'Estat ny de Vincennes.¹⁶⁶

Let people speak no more of the Court,
Nor of the State nor of Vincennes.
It is better to keep quiet completely.
Let people speak no more of the court;
It is possible to teach these
Gossips a lesson for their troubles;
Let people speak no more of the Court,
Nor of the State nor of Vincennes.

Several texts elaborated on the significance of silence by drawing attention not to brash, noisy nobles or to those who lingered in bars to spread malicious rumors but to the silent or anonymous authors of gossip satires or libels. Such is the case in a *chanson* on the *air du Bransle de Metz* ("air of the Metz Branle") from 1708.

L'auteur de ce vaudeville,
Ne dira jamais qui il est;
La raison est qu'il se plait,
A voir de loin la Bastille;
Il ne dira point son nom,
Ni s'il est garçon ou fille,
Il ne dira point son nom,
Ainsi finit sa Chanson.¹⁶⁷

The author of this vaudeville
Will never say who he is;
The reason being he is happy
To stay far away from the Bastille;
He will not say his name,
Nor whether he is a boy or a girl,
He will not say his name,
And so ends his Song.

There was nevertheless a sense that in spite of the anonymity of a number of authors of subversive satires and song texts, these powerful instances of textual and vocal gossip persisted in making themselves heard.

¹⁶⁶ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses; Années 1650 à 1664. Vol.^e XXIII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12638, folio 21.

¹⁶⁷ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, de puis 1707 jusqu'en 1710. Vol.^e XI*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12626, folio 176.

Si par hazard on estime
 Ces Portraits sans rien nommer,
 Qu'on n'aille point s'informer
 De l'auteur de cette rime.
 Je n'en diray pas le nom,
 Il est compris dans un Crime,
 Je n'en diray pas le nom.
 Or escoutez ma Chanson.¹⁶⁸

If by chance you approve of
 These Portraits without naming anything,
 Do not try to discern
 The author of this rhyme.
 I will not say the name,
 He is implicated in a Crime,
 I will not say the name.
 Now listen to my Song.

Inspired by these allusions to gossip in the streets of Paris and the numerous appeals to real and metaphorical silence that followed in their wake, several texts in the Maurepas collection relied on what Hammond has called the knowing silence common to authors and readers who were party to scandalous information and who relied in their transmission of such details on what was explicitly left unsaid.¹⁶⁹ Among a collection of *chansons sur l'Air vous m'entendés bien* ("songs on the Air you know what I mean") from the last quarter of the seventeenth century about a number of personalities of both genders associated with the court, salacious details that were the delight of ardent gossips are presented in code. The relationship between Louis XIV and the widow of the prolific poet and dramatist Paul Scarron (1610–1660), Françoise d'Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon (1635–1719), is celebrated in one verse that never mentions either party by name; reference to the *Roman Comique* of Scarron was a nod as much to the misadventures of the actors in the fictional work as to the intrigues among those who acted out in real life at court.

Si Scarron vivoit aujourd'huy,
 Il trouveroit de quoy chez luy,
 Faire un Roman Comique,

¹⁶⁸ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1700 jusques en 1706. Vol.^e Xe*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12625, folio 269.

¹⁶⁹ See Hammond, *Gossip, Sexuality and Scandal in France*, 44.

Eh bien,
D'un sujet heroïque,
Vous m'entendez bien.¹⁷⁰

If Scarron were alive today,
He would find in his house
Well,
A heroic subject about which
To write a Comic Novel,
You know what I mean.

A separate verse in the same collection was positively vicious in its indictment of the sexual preferences of Lully and also advanced a twisted and condemnatory perspective on the relationship between the monarch and his Jesuit confessor, François d'Aix, seigneur de La Chaise (1624–1709), the very man instrumental in moderating royal resistance to Jansenism as well as the priest who had married the king to the marquise de Maintenon in secret.

Le Pere la Chaise en courroux,
Dit au Roy, pourquoi souffrez vous,
Que ce vilain Baptiste,
Eh bien,
Fasse le Jésuite,
Vous m'entendez bien.¹⁷¹

The Father La Chaise, in anger,
Says to the King, why are you tolerating
This villainous Baptiste who,
Well,
Makes like a Jesuit,
If you catch my drift.

Marginalia in the manuscript alert us to the fact that *fasse le Jésuite* in the case of the unfortunate Baptiste actually meant that Lully *étoit grand Sodomite* or was a great Sodomite, aligned in a strange way not only with a circle of contemporary libertines who indulged in such sexual practices but with the conservative rigor of Jesuitism, which would be criticized into the eighteenth century

¹⁷⁰ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, de puis 1680 jusqu'en 1685. Vol.^e V*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12620, folio 406.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 405.

for its reliance on moral equivocation in the form of the practice of casuistry.¹⁷² This collection of *chansons sur l’Air vous m’entendés bien* ceaselessly repeats the refrain *Vous m’entendez bien* and stresses the unspoken cultural and political knowledge to which the satirical author as narrator and the reading or listening audience of gossips were privy, never going so far as to tell the full story in saucy detail. As in the case of a number of other satirical texts, its cultivation of knowing silence, of not giving up too much detail and thus not generating excessive linguistic or conceptual noise, is a subtle means of articulating the danger inherent in the mocking political details it referenced and the enjoyment that sprang from deciphering the coded nature of its language.

At the root of numerous references to noise as a negative repercussion of performances as well as the recourse of audiences who observed them was the possibility that much more than musical meaning was threatened when the *filles de l’Opéra* or their onlookers generated a racket. At stake for those who bemoaned the noisiness of populations and performances was the structure and serenity of society. Noise was anathema to reason and propriety in the same way monstrosity was to the normative physiological order. As deviations from reason, order, and serenity, monstrosity and noise flew in the face of order and clarity. Bound up with concerns about interpersonal interaction, noise metaphors at this time in the French eighteenth century addressed a populace that could at any moment degenerate into the conflict and chaos so vividly referenced by the Old Provençal *naufa*, one of the roots of the word noise. A number of writers crafted subtle critiques of composers, performers, and the operatic genre using noise metaphors whose meanings were volatile and variable.¹⁷³ Like the knowing narrator of *Le neveu de Rameau*, the commentator who wielded the epithet of noise did so with the idea that people would understand it; at the same time the words and

¹⁷² See Henry Prunières, *La vie illustre et libertine de Jean-Baptiste Lully*, Le roman des grandes existences 27 (Paris: Plon, 1929), 251. See also Albert Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 11, and Johann Sommerville, “The ‘new art of lying’: equivocation, mental reservation, and casuistry,” in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Edmund Leites, Ideas in context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 159.

¹⁷³ See Dill, “Ideological Noises: Opera Criticism in Early Eighteenth-Century France,” in *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries*, ed. Roberta Marvin and Downing Thomas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 66.

values behind the metaphor itself only remained available to the public epistemologically as charged particles or shifting signifiers, as discourse that risked veering off into the vagueness Diderot had described.¹⁷⁴ An anonymous epigram on Rameau among the entries in the *Chansonnier Maurepas* for the year 1737 ridiculed the reception of his lyric tragedy *Castor et Pollux*, taking the composer to task for the fine art of having inspired noisy Parisian audiences to hiss and whistle in unison.

Contre la moderne Musique,
Voici ce que dit la critique.
Si le difficile est le beau,
C'est un grand homme que Rameau;
Mais si le beau par aventure
N'estoit que la simple nature,
Dont l'art doit être le tableau;
C'est un sot homme que Rameau.

In opposition to modern Music,
Here is what criticism says.
If the difficult is beautiful,
Then Rameau is a great man;
But if by chance the beautiful
Is only simple nature,
Of which art should be the picture;
Then Rameau is a fool.

Enfin Rameau s'est fait connôître
Et dans son dernier Opéra
Il vient de faire un coup de maître,
Que n'eût jamais tenté Campra,
C'est plus qu'il n'osoit se promettre,
Quoiqu'il soit tant soit peu gascon;
Car il a trouvé l'art de mettre
Tous les sifflets à l'unisson.¹⁷⁵

Finally Rameau has made himself known
And in his latest Opera
He has delivered a masterful blow
Such as Campra never attempted,
It is more than he dared to promise himself,
Whether a great or meager braggart;
Since he has discovered the art of mobilizing
All the hisses in unison.

The volume of criticism on the *filles de l'Opéra* who sang Rameau roles had reached disturbingly high levels in part because of the pervasiveness of these performers as cultural symbols.

Commentators turned to the *filles de l'Opéra* not only in meditations on the magic palace of the Palais-Royal but whenever they required a suitably base characterization of female immorality.

Women of questionable repute well beyond the confines of the theater drew comparisons with actresses, as in a vignette recorded in *L'esprit du siècle* (1746) of the *lieutenant général des armées du Roi* and memorialist Armand de Mormès de Saint-Hilaire (1652–1740) that also appeared in the autobiography of the author Charles Pinot Duclos (1704–1772).

On trouve à la fois dans Madame de la commodité & les agrémens que l'on rencontre avec une fille de l'Opera, & le ton & l'esprit d'une femme du monde. Vive, libertine, emportée,

¹⁷⁴ See Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 150.

¹⁷⁵ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 157.

serieuse, raisonnable, elle réunit toutes les qualités qui peuvent séduire & amuser; il ne se passé gueres de jours qu'on n'entende raconter quelqu'unes de ses aventures.¹⁷⁶

At the same time one finds in Madame de the traits & trimmings one encounters with a fille de l'Opéra, and the tone & mind of a woman of the world. Lively, libertine, carried away, serious, reasonable, she consolidates all qualities that entice & entertain; not a single day passes that one doesn't hear told several of her escapades.

As this aside would seem to suggest, writers were abundantly aware of the metaphorical and actual noise generated by circulating tales about the *filles de l'Opéra*; they were also mindful of the reputations of women who were not actresses but whose questionable morals drew comparisons to those of female performers in the theater.

* * *

A survey of historical vignettes about a small number of these performers goes some way toward showing the striking level of attention they received in an era when neither women nor their presence in the theater were considered subjects worthy of serious meditation. As for the *filles de l'Opéra* taken to task by writers as diverse as Aïssé, Barbier, Voltaire, and the numerous anonymous authors of texts in the Maurepas and Tralage manuscripts, they were looked upon as a discrete class of performers who plied their trade on stage and off, mingling with patrons in the theater proper and interacting with men and women at court, in the streets of Paris, and in the magasin de l'Opéra. At the same time these women were perpetually punished for their association with deception, obfuscation, and hybridity. Their performances blurred the boundaries between good and bad taste, reality and the world of fiction and fantasy, in such a way as to remind writers of the subversion of normative morality or order that arose in instances of biological or metaphorical monstrosity. As research by Arnold Davidson has shown, the horror inspired by the various objects, genres, bodies,

¹⁷⁶ See Armand de Mormès de Saint-Hilaire, *L'esprit du siècle* (Amsterdam: Pierre Mortier, 1746), 72. See also Charles Pinot Duclos, *Les Confessions du comte de **** (Paris and Geneva: Slatkine, 1996), 97.

and women considered monstrous at this time sprang from their confusion of categories, whether animal or human, female or male.¹⁷⁷

While the sheer force with which many writers attacked these women as dissolute resonates with a long tradition of distrust for femininity and immorality in the theater, the diversity of commentators who weighed in on the musicality and mores of the *filles de l'Opéra* speaks volumes about the power and influence these women actually wielded in social and political circles. They truly touched both commoners and the court, hacks and surgeons, anonymous wags and street poets as well as great lights of literature; in performances on and off stage they paraded elements of transgression, noise, and even revolution before the eyes of the broadest possible public. An essential development in the aesthetic shift that unfolded at the beginning of the eighteenth century was the contention that performance moved and touched not only learned, elite audiences but the entire public. The democratization of performing bodies and of the passions they incited posed considerable critical problems and was met with unflagging resistance into the century, as tensions arose between the reception of the plastic and performing arts and attendant social concerns, from political absolutism to the rise of capitalism and the increasing social and political autonomy of women.

When commentators used issues in political, social, and religious thought to frame operatic practice, they were no longer simply metaphors. These broader issues granted insight into opera itself, characterizing not just the repertoire and the performers in question but the continued significance of the genre for French society. The prominence of opera and the Opéra in these decades provided an opportunity for the Parisian public to interrogate staged works of art, and it was through the very term *utilité*, which could variously refer to usefulness, interest or profitability, and even the portrayal of roles of minor importance in the theater, that writers from the early seventeenth century to the nineteenth century reflected on the integration of the performing arts

¹⁷⁷ See Arnold Davidson, "The Horror of Monsters," in *The Boundaries of Humanity: Humans, Animals, Machines*, ed. James Sheehan and Morton Sosna (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 36.

into social consciousness.¹⁷⁸ Ultimately commentators questioned whether the value of performers and performances rested in their moral and ideological utility or in their aesthetic efficacy and their appeals to emotion and the senses. Those who debated the significance of the *filles de l'Opéra* were concerned not only that feminine immorality would adversely affect the integrity of theatrical entertainment but that these women were both creative and destructive presences among patrons and royalty, capable of devising new choreographic and dramaturgical feats and at the very same time jeopardizing traditional values like modesty, restraint, and sincerity.

The criticism of the *filles de l'Opéra*, in which concerns about immorality, sexuality, and excess freely gave way to metaphors of disease and disturbance, guile and greed, is a discursive register in which the Parisian public evaluated the early modern female performer from multiple points of view, taking into account her physiology, her gestures and pantomimes, her social charms and her broader political and cultural significance. Well in advance of the height of the concert virtuoso in the nineteenth century, the *filles de l'Opéra* were described as powerful, autonomous individuals, indeed as women who tapped into something of the contagious appeal and affiliation with actual contagion that would characterize later virtuosi. Their connection to prurience and scandal was so ubiquitous that a number of these women topped lists of the most notorious members of society in their day. While these lingering associations have skewed subsequent attempts to construct and reconstruct their reception history, the *filles de l'Opéra* nevertheless rank among the most striking artists of the early eighteenth century. Their performances of great tragic and balletic roles on stage and great social and sexual cameos in public life made them polarizing figures in early modern French musical thought. These mademoiselles and demoiselles, *cantatrices* and *comédiennes* figured in debates about what audiences stood to gain from attending the Opéra, about what transformations took place when spectators immersed themselves in its enchantments, and finally, paradoxically, about what constituted the essence of the *filles de l'Opéra* as ideal mythological heroines in the theater and imperfect, polarizing villainesses and vixens in real life.

¹⁷⁸ See Déborah Blocker, *Instituer un « art »: politiques du théâtre dans la France du premier XVIIIe siècle*, *Lumière classique* 83 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009), 279.

Chapter Two

Marie Anne de Cupis de Camargo and Marie Sallé

From the inception of the Paris Opéra in the seventeenth century, when the Opéra was known as the Académie royale de musique, dance remained a vital component of staged works, although ballet in these years was not yet an independent theatrical form; it was an extension of the Opéra itself. Louis XIV (1638–1715), himself a dancer, had established a royal ballet school in 1661 as the Académie royale de danse, and in the last two decades of the seventeenth century, until the death of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687), the school was directed by the dancing master and choreographer Pierre Beauchamp (1631–1705), who was noted for having codified the five primary positions of the feet in classical ballet. When the king made the Opéra a state institution in 1713, he established a resident company of dancers known as the ballet de l'Opéra, while the Académie royale de danse, which would disappear in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, remained independent. As research by Laurence Senelick has shown, a full century before this it had been customary for masked boys to dance as nymphs and shepherdesses, while deities and furies were played by grown men.¹ It was not until May 1681 that female dancers first appeared on the Opéra stage in a production of the Lullian *opéra-ballet* *Le Triomphe de l'amour* (1681), in which the first *première danseuse de l'Opéra* La Fontaine (1655–1738) was triumphant; after her performance on the first night of the production, she was heralded as *Reine de la danse* or the Queen of dance.² The early decades of the eighteenth century saw women increasingly come into view as dancers, gaining primacy in the realm of professional performance, where they would be lionized later in the century. As research by Nathalie Lecomte has shown, women were relative newcomers to the Opéra early in the century and yet while male dancing was predominant at this time, female professional dancing

¹ See Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre*, Gender and Performance, ed. Susan Bassnett and Tracy Davis (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 182.

² See Adolphe Jullien, *Histoire du costume au théâtre depuis les origines du théâtre en France jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Georges Charpentier, 1880), 49.

was nevertheless of high quality.³ Women were outnumbered by their male counterparts as professional dancers and their status and pay were typically lower than that of men, yet they were already laying the groundwork for the ascendancy of women in professional ballet in and outside of France, a phenomenon that would reach its height in the nineteenth century in the hands of the internationally renowned Marie Taglioni (1804–1884), Lucile Grahn (1819–1907), and Caronna Adela Giuseppina Maria Grisi (1819–1899), known as Carlotta.

Among the numerous dancers who graced the stage of the Opéra from the end of the seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century, two women stand out, Marie Anne de Cupis de Camargo (1710–1770), known as La Camargo, and Marie Sallé (1707–1756). Praised as innovators in technique, costuming, and choreography, La Camargo and Sallé were also the subject of contrasting observations about their respective dancing styles, which ranged from the tenderly expressive steps of Sallé to the dramatic, forceful, and physical movements of La Camargo. Known for her striking vigor and verve, La Camargo was credited with being the first dancer to execute an *entrechat quatre*, a leaping move in which the feet are rapidly interchanged. Sallé was associated with a more sweet, ineffable style of dancing involving postures of striking sentiment and drama. Comparisons of their respective talents rehearsed contrasts that had come to the fore in critical reactions to a number of the *filles de l'Opéra* who sang, most notably the distinction between an unspeakable grace, refinement, and restraint, and a conspicuous technical virtuosity that bordered on offensive.

As the musicologist Charles Cudworth has explained, La Camargo dared to show her ankles and took much higher steps than hitherto considered respectable on the stage, even indulging in occasional vigorous leaps. Sallé gave a new graciousness and interest to simpler dances, while her gestures and pantomimes were always perfectly suited to the dramatic situation at hand.⁴ Many

³ See Nathalie Lecomte, “The Female Ballet Troupe of the Paris Opéra from 1700 to 1725,” in *Women’s Work: Making Dance in Europe before 1800*, ed. Lynn Brooks (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 118.

⁴ See Charles Cudworth, “Handel and the French Style,” *Music and Letters* 40/2 (1959), 126.

believed her tendency toward innovation and the pursuit of novelty for its own sake made La Camargo a less than ideal performer, a woman whose work did not bode well for theatrical entertainment in general, which conservative writers praised most when female performers espoused modesty, sincerity, and restraint in their roles. The salacious behavior of La Camargo beyond the confines of the theater furthermore fueled enthusiastic satires and street songs rife with the mocking tone typical of critiques of other *filles de l'Opéra* in the early eighteenth century. While Sallé was not involved in the same kinds of social and sexual scandals that swirled around her rival, her skill in pantomime amounted to a kind of gestural eloquence that struck writers and audiences as a true paradox, for it bolstered the increasingly popular genre of *opéra-ballet* and was an undeniable attraction in the theater yet at the same time symbolized a dangerously raw, emotional expressivity that conservative members of the audience felt had no place at the Opéra. The criticism of La Camargo and Sallé figures the same comparative air of writings on actresses and singers as well as the broader concern with mores that we find in critiques of other *filles de l'Opéra* at this time. Writers did not limit their fascination with women in the theater to those who sang; they also devoted considerable attention to those who measured their steps in dance, which was an art form that would assume an incredible prominence as lyric tragedy gave way to the popularity of *opéra-ballet* as the eighteenth century progressed.

Marie Anne de Cupis de Camargo was born in Brussels to Ferdinand Joseph de Cupis and Marie-Anne de Smet. From the age of ten she studied dance and movement with Françoise Prévost (1680–1741), known as La Prévôt, and subsequently appeared as a dancer in Brussels as well as in Rouen. She debuted at the Opéra in May 1726 at the age of sixteen in a production of *Les Caractères de la danse* (1715) by Jean-Féry Rebel (1666–1747) with choreography by Prévost. Styled as a *symphonie chorégraphique*, it was a suite of dances that included a courante, a menuet, a bourrée, a chaconne, a sarabande, a gigue, a rigaudon, a passepied, a gavotte, a loure, and a musette. She appeared in numerous new works and revivals at the Opéra in the years following her debut, including a revival of the *opéra-ballet Les amours de Protée* (1720) of Charles-Hubert Gervais (1671–1744) in September 1728, the lyric tragedy *Tarsis et Zélie* (1728) of François Francoeur (1698–1787)

and François Rebel (1701–1775), the *ballet héroïque* *La princesse d'Élide* (1728) of Alexandre de Villeneuve (1677–1756), a revival of the lyric tragedy *Tancrède* (1702) of André Campra (1660–1764) in March 1729, a revival of the lyric tragedy *Hésione* (1700) of Campra in August 1730, a revival of the *ballet héroïque* *Les amours de Mars et de Vénus* (1712) of Campra in 1730, a revival of the Lullian lyric tragedy *Amadis de Gaule* (1684) in October 1731, a revival of the lyric tragedy *Callirhoé* (1712) of André Cardinal Destouches (1672–1749) in January 1732, a revival of the popular *opéra-ballet* *Les fêtes vénitiennes* (1710) of Campra in February 1732, the *opéra-ballet* *Le triomphe des Sens* (1732) of Jean-Joseph Mouret (1682–1738) in June, July, and August, the *ballet héroïque* *L'empire de l'Amour* (1733) of René de Galard de Béarn de Brassac (1699–1771), an amateur composer for the stage who would go on to become a *maréchal de camp* later in the century, the *opéra-ballet* *Les Indes galantes* (1735) of Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764), the lyric tragedy *Achille et Déidamie* (1735) of Campra, the *ballet héroïque* *Les Grâces* (1735) of Mouret, the lyric tragedy *Dardanus* (1739) of Rameau, the *opéra-ballet* *Les fêtes d'Hébé, ou Les talents lyriques* (1739) of Rameau, a revival of the *comédie lyrique* *Les amours de Ragonde* (1714) of Mouret in January 1742, the *ballet héroïque* *Le pouvoir de l'Amour* (1743) of Joseph-Nicolas-Pancrace Royer (1705–1755), the *opéra-ballet* *Les caractères de la Folie* (1743) of Bernard de Bury (1720–1785), *Les Augustales* (1744) of Francoeur and Rebel, the prologue to replace that of *Acis et Galatée* (1686) of Lully, which was at the time enjoying a revival, the *opéra-ballet* *L'école des amants* (1744) of Jean-Baptiste Niel (1690–1775), a revival of *Les fêtes, ou Le triomphe de Thalie* (1714) of Mouret in August 1745, the *ballet héroïque* *Les fêtes de Polymnie* (1745) of Rameau, the lyric tragedy *Scylla et Glaucus* (1746) of Jean-Marie Leclair (1697–1764), the *ballet héroïque* *Le carnaval du Parnasse* (1749) of Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville (1711–1772), and the lyric tragedy *Léandre et Héro* (1750) of Brassac. She retired with a generous pension of 1,500 *livres* instead of the customary 1,000 *livres* in 1751, having spent a brief retirement in the middle of her career at the residence of her lover Louis de Bourbon, comte de Clermont (1709–1771) outside of Paris in Berny. Her name did not appear in print or in the Parisian press after her final retirement until notices of her death at the end of April 1770, when she was living on the rue Saint-Honoré under the nursing care of Marie-

Jeanne Buzeau (1716–1796), the widow of the painter François Boucher (1703–1770). La Camargo also had two brothers, the noted violinist and composer Jean-Baptiste de Cupis de Camargo (1711–1788) and the cellist and composer François de Cupis de Camargo (1732–1808), both of whom were active at the Concert Spirituel.⁵

Marie Sallé, who with her brother François was rumored to have been a pupil of the great dancer Claude Balon (1671–1744), also studied with Prévost, whom she replaced at the last minute in a performance at the Opéra in July 1721. The biographer Émile Dacier (1876–1952) has suggested she may have been a pupil not of La Prévôt but of Michel Blondy (1675–1739).⁶ Her formal debut at the Opéra would come later in the premiere of the *ballet héroïque Les amours des dieux* (1727) by Mouret, a production in which La Camargo also participated. Prior to her appearances at the Opéra, Sallé had performed at the foire Saint-Laurent in the *opéra comique La princesse de Carisme* (1718) with a livret by Alain-René Lesage (1668–1747) and Jacques-Philippe d'Orneval and music by Louis de La Coste (1675–1750), who had been *chef d'orchestre* of the Opéra for a period of approximately four years beginning in 1710.⁷ She also appeared at the foire Saint-Germain in 1722. Early in her career Sallé was active in London, where she was engaged first at Lincoln's Inn Fields, performing dances from *Rinaldo* (1711) by George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) in 1716. Appearing there again in 1718, she went on to dance at the King's Theatre as well as at the Richmond Theatre of the actor and entrepreneur William Pinkethman. Trips to London punctuated her career into the middle of the century. Sallé appeared with her brother for an engagement at Lincoln's Inn Fields in October 1725, dancing regularly throughout that season. Sallé herself then appeared as a soloist in 1727. In 1734 at Covent Garden, she danced in *Terpsicore*, a prologue to the revision of the Handelian opera *Il pastor fido* (1712), as well as in *Oreste* (1734), and she appeared a year later in the premieres of

⁵ See Julie Anne Sadie, *Companion to Baroque Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 116.

⁶ See Émile Dacier, *Une danseuse de l'Opéra sous Louis XV: Mlle Sallé (1707–1756) d'après des documents inédits*, 2de éd. (Paris: Plon, 1909), 11.

⁷ See Gustave Attinger, *L'esprit de la commedia dell'arte dans le théâtre français* (Paris: Librairie théâtrale, 1950), 302.

Ariodante (1735) and *Alcina* (1735). Some scandal ensued following her participation in *Alcina*, for which she appeared in a rather revealing costume as Cupid. She did not appear on the London stage following the production. Her participation in her own production of *Pigmalion*, which she choreographed the year of her Covent Garden debut, spurred her rise to fame, and she subsequently appeared privately before the king and queen in Paris. At the Opéra Sallé appeared as a soloist in an *entrée* of *Les Indes galantes* of Rameau, and in the months that followed she would appear in the lyric tragedy *Scanderberg* (1735) of Rebel and Francoeur, a revival of the lyric tragedy *Thétis et Pelée* (1689) of Pascal Collasse (1649–1709) in January 1736, a revival of the *opéra-ballet* *Les fêtes, ou Le triomphe de Thalie* (1714) of Mouret in 1736, a revival of the *opéra-ballet* *L'Europe galante* (1697) of Campra in June 1736, the *opéra-ballet* *Les voyages de l'amour* (1736) of Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (1689–1755) with choreography by Blondy, and a revival of the Lullian lyric tragedy *Atys* (1676) in January 1738. She continued to appear at the Opéra through 1740, the year she was made a special *pensionnaire* by the king. In these years she danced in a revival of the lyric tragedy *Persée* (1682) of Lully in February 1737, a revival of the lyric tragedy *Jephté* (1732) of Michel Pignolet de Montéclair (1667–1737) in April 1738, a revival of the *opéra-ballet* *Le ballet de la paix* (1738) of Rebel and Francoeur in June and July 1738, a revival of the lyric tragedy *Alceste* (1674) of Lully in January 1739, a revival of the lyric tragedy *Polidore* (1720) of Jean-Baptiste Stuck (1680–1755) with a livret by the abbé Simon-Joseph Pellegrin (1663–1745) in April 1739, and a revival of *Les plaisirs champêtres* (1734) of Jean-Féry Rebel. She also mentored other performers at the Opéra-Comique beginning in 1743.⁸ She appeared at Versailles from 1745 to 1747 and danced in four performances at Fontainebleau in 1752 and 1753, thereafter retiring in Paris with her companion Rebecca Wick. Sallé died in June 1756 and was buried in the Église Saint-Roch on the rue Saint-Honoré.

⁸ See Sarah McCleave, “Marie Sallé, a Wise Professional Woman of Influence,” in *Women’s Work: Making Dance in Europe before 1800*, ed. Lynn Brooks (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 161.

The critical tropes that swirled around these two women, from association with vigorous physicality and even masculinity in the case of La Camargo to celebrations of the eloquence and virtue of Sallé, remain difficult to trace as an evolutionary, discursive process, primarily because details concerning the dates and provenance of satirical texts in manuscript sources remain largely unknown. This makes it almost impossible to determine whether the language that centered on these performers was infectious or whether it was built on a series of independent observations that did not necessarily take into account their antecedents. As research by Arlette Farge has shown, contemporary popular gossip, the domain of these various observations, took its place amid a plethora of commentaries and attitudes, feelings and policies, all equally incapable of keeping it under control.⁹ These tropes nevertheless took on something of a life of their own, forming a lens through which writers and audiences experienced the phenomenon of performance as an amalgamation of technique and artifice in the theater as well as a form of social exhibition off stage. They were in this sense what could be considered memes, units of cultural transmission propagated through writing and speech, through what Aaron Lynch has described as their inherent programming for their own retransmission.¹⁰ Like contemporary references to the imitation of nature in the sphere of aesthetics and philosophy, references to vigor, novelty, virtue, and artifice in the performances of these women functioned in something of the same way as the empty or floating signifier identified by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), who spoke of *ce signifiant flottant qui est la servitude de toute pensée finie, bien que la connaissance scientifique soit capable, sinon de l'étancher, au moins de le discipliner partiellement* (“this floating signifier that is the subjugation of all finite thought, even though scientific knowledge is capable, if not of restricting it, at least of controlling it partially”).¹¹ As research by Jeffrey Mehlman has shown, such signifiers

⁹ See Arlette Farge, *Dire et mal dire: L'opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle*, Librairie du XXe siècle (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 23.

¹⁰ See Aaron Lynch, *Thought Contagion: How Belief Spreads Through Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 2.

¹¹ See Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Bibliothèque de sociologie contemporaine (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950), xlix.

hover in a curious semiotic space of pure symbolism, a kind of symbolic value zero.¹² They are apt to be charged with any symbolic content and are thus impossible to trace to their referents or cultural meanings with any real certainty.

For all their messiness these floating signifiers nevertheless tend to be powerful ones. The way to approach them in the context of the discourse that swirled around the *filles de l'Opéra* is perhaps less as definitions in any strict sense than as volatile components of a language practice, or as the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) might say, less as elements of *langue* or the systematic conventions of a signifying system than as *parole* or the phenomenon of using *langue* in individual and personal speech acts.¹³ What was at stake for commentators who celebrated vigor or virtue among the *filles de l'Opéra*, who wielded epithets, barbs, and memes, was not the status of women so much as that of language or the discursive formations or patterns of communication by which the Parisian public negotiated culture and cultural politics. As Michel Foucault has pointed out, among the significant functions of the discursive formation is its role in charting and even contesting what he has called *grilles de spécification* or grids of specification, the systems according to which different ideas or classifications of knowledge are divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, and derived from one another as objects of discourse.¹⁴ Those who pitted La Camargo against Sallé on the basis of perceived contrasts between the two performers confronted the inconsistencies and complexities of the discursive formations in which their expressions located their meaning. The proliferation of floating signifiers and memes in these years is unsurprising in the context of what Silje Normand has described as the fertile breeding ground for the spread of information in early modern Paris, where the close proximity of people within the urban community combined with the

¹² See Jeffrey Mehlman, "The 'Floating Signifier': From Lévi-Strauss to Lacan," *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972), 23.

¹³ See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Riedlinger (Paris: Payot, 1916), 9.

¹⁴ See Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, Bibliothèque des sciences humaines (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 58.

predominantly oral culture of salons and the court at Versailles to produce remarkable instances of gossip and street intrigue.¹⁵ While for a number of writers the discussion of physicality and seduction in performances of dance stemmed from genuine interest in the workings of performance itself, for others the repeated mention of the *filles de l'Opéra* in a memetic manner was a mechanical reference that allowed them to introduce other issues, from the discussion of sexual politics to their disenchantment with other genres in the theater, from lyric tragedy to pantomime.

Physicality

Distinctions between the forceful choreography of La Camargo and the simpler postures of Sallé fueled enthusiastic comparisons of the two dancers in the middle of the century, when writers celebrated the physicality of La Camargo with ribald verses dedicated to specific parts of her body. These tributes to her physical characteristics, from her legs to her eyes to her backside, revealed a correlation between the emergent interest in execution or interpretation and the fascination with the corporeal medium of performance in its most concrete dimension. An *épître au cul de mademoiselle Camargo* from the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* for 1732 waxes poetic about the composers and writers who glorified her body yet reserves praise at the same time for Sallé.

A toi, beau Cul, qu'une gentille audace
 Fait voltiger à nos yeux ébaubis,
 Cul que Gruère contemple face à face,
 Et qu'à l'Orchestre ainsi qu'en Paradis,
 Le aérien Rebel voit mouvoir avec grâce,
 Cul acre que Cassini dans peu
 Ira lorgner au nombre des Étoiles;
 Toi que le vol d'une menade en feu
 Fait voir déjà sans nuage et sans voile,
 Mes yeux t'ont vu, beau cul digne du jour
 Où l'ont produit Terpsichore et l'amour;
 Reçois l'encens que ma main te dispense,
 Cul de Cupis que Voiture eût chanté,
 Je te consacre à l'immortalité.
 Mais dans la lice un cul rival s'avance,
 Amour sourit autour de lui flottant;
 Belle Salé, faites en voir autant,

¹⁵ See Silje Normand, "Perceptions of Poison: Defining the Poisonous in Early Modern France," Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2005, 14.

A vous sans faute est le prix de la danse.¹⁶

To you, beautiful Ass, of a nice boldness
That makes our astonished eyes flutter,
An Ass that Gruère contemplates face to face,
And that in the Orchestra pit as in Heaven
The etherial Rebel sees moving gracefully,
The acrid Ass that Cassini, before long,
Will ogle like a number of the Stars;
You who have already revealed the
Cloudless and conspicuous flight of a fiery maenad,
My eyes have seen you, beautiful ass worthy of the day
That produced Terpsichore and love;
Receive this incense dispensed from my hand,
The Ass of Cupis that Voiture had sung,
I consecrate you to immortality.
But in the arena a rival ass advances,
Love smiles, floating all around it;
Beautiful Sallé, let us see as much,
You, without fault, determine the price of the dance.

La Camargo was so striking as to draw into her orbit the likes of the director of the Opéra, Maximilien-Claude Gruër, the composer François Rebel, the son of Jean-Féry Rebel and colleague of Francoeur, and Jacques Cassini (1677–1756), the astronomer noted for the measurement of the arc of the meridian from Dunkirk to Perpignan and the subsequent publication of the *Traité de la grandeur et de la figure de la terre* (1723), which explained in detail the measurement of the earth as a spheroid body, one infinitely larger although apparently no less striking than the ass of La Camargo.¹⁷ As Martin Wählberg has pointed out, the clan of Cassini rallied around the astronomer in defense of Cartesian principles, contrasting his work with contemporary scientific trends in England and with the ambitions of the mathematician and scientist Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis (1698–1759), whose expedition to northern Sweden in the third decade of the eighteenth

¹⁶ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1732 jusqu'en 1735. Vol.^e XVIII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12633, folio 158.

¹⁷ See Jacques Cassini, *Traité de la grandeur et de la figure de la terre* (Amsterdam: Pierre de Coup, 1723).

century constituted part of a project to measure the contested shape of the earth.¹⁸ As for those more intimately acquainted with the *filles de l'Opéra*, the scandal brought about by an episode involving La Camargo, the soprano Marie Pélissier (1707–1749), and several other nude, frolicking *filles de l'Opéra* together with Gruër in the magasin de l'Opéra on the rue Saint-Nicaise was so great as to cost Gruër his directorship of the Opéra.¹⁹ The reference to Voiture, who sang the praises of La Camargo, is presumably to the poet Vincent Voiture (1597–1648), one of the earliest members of the Académie française. Born too many years before La Camargo to see or celebrate her body, more than likely this reference is actually to François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694–1778), who occupied the same seat in the Académie française some years later and who was known to have composed madrigals comparing La Camargo with Sallé. Sallé herself emerges as a clear rival in this verse, her alignment with love and faultlessness contrasting sharply with the boldness, astonishment, and wonder that swirled around La Camargo. Sallé, who at this time had returned from London to participate in performances of a new *entrée* of *Le triomphe des Sens* of Mouret in July and August, was noted for a sweeter, more ineffable style of physical expression that did not consecrate her to immortality yet did allow her to demand a salary suited to her talents.

A lengthy satirical account attributed to the salonist and librettist Pierre-Joseph-Justin Bernard (1708–1775) bemoaned the nocturnal orgies of that fateful evening in the magasin de l'Opéra, replete with unclean, unholy lust and so much nudity that the curtains should have been drawn.

Depuis le jour où, captive en ses rets,
Vénus parut en attitude honnête,

¹⁸ See Martin Wählberg, “Osmo Pekonen, *La rencontre des religions autour du voyage de l'abbé Réginald Outhier en Suède en 1736–1737* (Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press, 2010),” *Sjuttonhundratalet: Nordic Yearbook for Eighteenth-Century Studies* (2012), 159. See also Mary Terrall, *The Man Who Flattened the Earth: Maupertuis and the Sciences in the Enlightenment* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 55, Larry Stewart, “The Laboratory, the Workshop, and the Theatre of Experiment,” in *Science and Spectacle in the European Enlightenment*, ed. Bernadette Bensuade-Vincent and Christine Blondel, Science, Technology, and Culture, 1700–1945 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 15, and Larrie Ferreiro, *Measure of the Earth: The Enlightenment Expedition that Shaped the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 28.

¹⁹ See Jullien, *Amours d'Opéra au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Henri Daragon, 1908), 27.

Le dieu jaloux qui l'observa de près,
S'est repenti d'avoir trouble la fête.
Depuis ce tems, tous mystères d'amour,
Gentils ébats, joyeuse liturgie,
Lui sont plaisirs interdits pour toujours.
Pour célébrer ses nocturnes orgies,
Amour attend qu'il ait fini son cours,
Et ses bons tours ne se font qu'aux bougies.

Un jour, Phébus tout plein de ses regrets,
Lui dit: Faut-il qu'un éternel mystère
Au Dieu du jour dérobe tes secrets,
Et que la nuit en soit dépositaire!
Oublie, Amour, que mes yeux indiscrets
On dévoilé les plaisirs de ta mère;
J'ai beau tout voir, il est certains attraits,
Mon cher Amour, fais que je les éclaire.
Je le veux bien, dit le dieu de Cythère.
En un domaine il est certain palais,
Sérail commode où tu peux t'introduire;
J'y vais, suis moi, j'ouvrai les volets.
L'enfant malin, qui cherche à le séduire,
Le mène droit, non dans ces lieux sacrés,
Des vrais amours asile inviolable,
Où tout respire une mollesse aimable,
Mais dans ces lieux des Grâces ignorés,
Réduit impur de la luxure impie,
Vieux temple où gît la mollesse accroupie,
Aile enfin où se sont retirés
Amours bâtards à Lampsaque adorés.
Phébus y voit des prêtresses lascives
Que provoquaient des satyres en feu.
Arme ton char des flammes les plus vives,
Lui dit l'Amour, et nous verrons beau jeu.
Phébus agit, pénètre, s'insinue.
Bras découverts et gorge à demi-nue,
S'offrent d'abord. Ornaments superflus,
Voiles fâcheux ne tiennent déjà plus.
Lieu plus secret, nudité moins connue
S'ensuit bientôt, et le jeu continue.
Tant et si bien, qu'à la fin, aux regards,
Spectacle entier s'offre de toutes parts.
La volupté qui préside à la fête,
S'en applaudit, et soudain leur apprête,
D'antiques jeux inconnus de nos jours.

Tel sacrifice en pareil sanctuaire
Convenait fort. Phébus, avec horreur,
Voit célébrer ce profane mystère.
J'ai cru trouver les Grâces et ta mère.
Perfide Amour; quelle était mon erreur!
Je crois ici reconnaître, au contraire,
Les noires soeurs, compagnes de Cerbère.

D'un vain éclat, vous qui fûtes frappés,
De mille objets adoreurs fantasques,
Pendant qu'ici je fais tomber les masques,
Venez, mortels et soyez détrompés.

Le Dieu finit, et ses mains irritées,
Ont à nos yeux arraché le bandeau.
Ribauds punis, Laïs décréditées,
Une autre fois tirez mieux le rideau.²⁰

Since the day, captive in her nets,
Venus appeared in an honest attitude,
The jealous god who watched her closely
Is repentant for having disturbed the celebration.
Since that time, all the mysteries of love,
Pleasant frolicking, joyful liturgy
Are pleasures forbidden to her forever.
To celebrate his nocturnal orgies,
Love waits for him to finish his course,
And his good turns are made only in candlelight.

One day, Phoebus, full of regrets,
Said to him: Must an eternal mystery
Hide your secrets from the God of day
And of whom the night is a depositor!
Forget, Love, my prying eyes
We have unveiled the pleasures of your mother;
I have seen all your beauties, there are certain attractions,
My dear Love, grant that I illuminate them.
I want it full well, said the god of Cythera.
In one area there is a certain palace
A convenient seraglio where you can introduce yourself;
I am going there, follow me, I shall open the shutters.
The clever child, who tries to seduce him,
Leads him away rightfully, not in these sacred places,
An inviolable asylum of true love,
Where everything exudes a likeable softness,
But in these places the ignored Graces,
Impure reduction of unholy lust,
The old temple where ruined weakness lies,
The wing from which was finally withdrawn
The bastard loves Lampsacus revered.
Phoebus sees lascivious priestesses there
Who provoked inflamed satyrs.
Arm your chariot with the strongest flames,
Love says to him, and we will see a beautiful game.
Phoebus acts, penetrates, slips in.
Bare arms and half-naked cleavage
Offer themselves up first. Superfluous ornaments,

²⁰ See Gabriel Letainturier-Fradin, *La Camargo, 1710–1770* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1908), 209–211.

Unfortunate veils no longer remain.
 Most secret place, nudity less known
 Follows soonafter, and the game continues.
 So much so that in the end, in full view,
 The whole spectacle appears everywhere.
 The pleasure that reigns at this event
 Garners applause, and suddenly prepares them
 For ancient games nowadays unknown.

Such a sacrifice in the same sanctuary
 Is fitting. Phoebus, with horror,
 Sees this profane mystery celebrated.
 I thought I would find the Graces and your mother.
 Treacherous Love; such was my mistake!
 I think I recognize here, however,
 The black sisters, companions of Cerberus.
 Of a vain splendor, you who were beaten,
 Fantastical admirers of a thousand whimsical objects,
 While I remove the masks,
 Come, mortals, and be demystified.

The God finishes, and his irritated hands
 Have ripped the blindfold from our eyes.
 Punished ribald, discredited Lais,
 In the future draw the shades more carefully.

While this lengthy diatribe does not single out La Camargo or the other *filles de l'Opéra* by name, it paints an elaborate allegorical picture of their proceedings in the magasin, going so far as to call these women the black sisters of Cerberus, the hound who guarded the gates of the underworld, women who filled Phoebus, or Apollo, the god of light, truth, and prophecy, with terror and horror. The Corinthian courtesan Lais also makes an appearance here, discredited by her sloppy progeny, the likes of Péliissier, La Camargo, and Duval du Tillet (1718–1775). That writers like Bernard as well as the anonymous author of the lengthy description of this evening in the magasin decried the activities of the *filles de l'Opéra* on this unfortunate occasion, treating them not as a minor lapse in good manners but as a major event worthy of scrutiny, shows the tremendous emphasis the public placed on the importance of proper behavior among the *filles de l'Opéra*.²¹ For these women to cavort in the off hours with noted composers and members of the administration of the Opéra was not only

²¹ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.° XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folia 351–356. The text is reprinted in its entirety in Letainturier-Fradin, *La Camargo, 1710–1770*, 211–214.

a wanton display of poor judgment but a threat to the Parisian public, who constantly struggled to keep these women in check. The fear for society at large was not only the further degradation of the acting profession but the loss of an Opéra where lofty morality and didacticism prevailed. The audacity of the *filles de l'Opéra*, unashamed as they were about flaunting their bodies, retained ties to popular assumptions about the disproportionate emphasis these women placed on physicality; for La Camargo, such assumptions readily came to the fore in the criticism of her choreographic style.

Boldness and physicality were at the forefront of an additional ode to La Camargo that compared her not to Sallé but to the dancer Marie-Françoise Rempon (1728–1803), dite Lyonnois, active at the Opéra for almost three decades beginning in 1740.

Camargo la première osa sur le théâtre
 Battre de simples entrechats.
 Après elle brilla *Lyonnois*, plus folâtre,
 Jusqu'à la gargouillade élevant ses ébats,
 Et reine de la haute danse,
 Dans ses élans hardis, dans les écarts charmans,
 De ses rapides tournoyements,
 De ses charmes secrets déployant la puissance,
 De tous les spectateurs se fit autant d'amans!²²

Camargo was the first in the theater to dare
 To beat simple *entrechats*.
 After her *Lyonnois* was dazzling, more playful,
 Enhancing her frolics by means of the *rond de jambe*,
 And queen of *danse haute*,
 As for her bold impulses, charming splits in the air,
 Her rapid revolutions,
 Her secret charms deploying power,
 All the spectators were captivated!

That La Camargo was bold in her impulses and replete with secret, powerful charms to enchant her audiences only bolstered her standing as the queen of *danse haute*, the style of forcefully physical expression that contrasted with elements of *danse basse*, for which Sallé was known.²³ Although Lyonnois was apparently more playful and doubtless more youthful and carefree, La Camargo

²² See Édouard Georges Jacques Gregoir, *Des gloires de l'Opéra et la musique à Paris: Documents recueillis sur l'Opéra et autres théâtres à Paris et sur tout ce qui a rapport à l'art musical en cette ville jusqu'à l'année 1880*, 3 vols. (Paris: Schott, 1878), I, 62.

²³ See Lilly Grove, *Dancing* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1895), 266.

retained her reputation as a pioneer in choreography, in particular in the execution of the *entrechat quatre* as well as in the deployment of whatever charms were necessary to secure respect and renown from her audiences.

Such charms were not overlooked in the critical literature, and discourses of dissatisfaction with the emergent genre of *opéra-ballet* furthermore dovetailed with literature on individual dancers that took these women to task for emphasizing technique and flashiness at the expense of the modesty and comportment so prized among sopranos and dancers since the seventeenth century. These concerns were also grafted onto musicians of the orchestra of the Opéra, who as representatives of the symphonic tradition clashed with conservative assumptions that purely instrumental music had no place in successful staged works, which should instead concentrate on the poetic livret. Consider the following epigram from the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* for 1731.

Admirez combien l'on estime	Admire how much more people esteem
Le Coup d'archet, plus que la rime;	The <i>Coup d'archet</i> than rhyme;
Que Voltaire soit assommé	That Voltaire is stunned
Thémis se tait, la Cour s'en jouë:	Thémis is silent, the Court plays:
Que Francoeur ne soit qu'allarmé,	Francoeur can only be alarmed,
Le seul complot mène à la roué. ²⁴	The only plot driven to the wheel.

This verse suggests that audiences were more invested in the *coup d'archet*, a unison, bowed attack among string players and an effect that represented the aesthetics and mechanics of purely instrumental music, than in rhyme, that prized attribute of spoken tragedy in the French classical tradition and of the monologues and recitatives of Lullian and Quinaultian lyric tragedy. That Voltaire is stunned by this reversal in taste, that Francoeur is alarmed, that Thémis, the goddess of law, justice, and equity, falls silent, are markers of how deeply ingrained the attachment to the aesthetics of early lyric tragedy had become in the middle of the eighteenth century. The emphasis on physicality and technique among dancers like La Camargo was not lost on the authors of satirical verses, who struggled to reconcile the lively steps and leaps of these women with the mythological

²⁴ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.º XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 360.

plots and didacticism that had characterized staged works more frequently before the turn of the eighteenth century.

Camargo vole en ces beaux lieux;
On voit sans toy languir nos jeux.
De tes pas la vivacité
Est l'image de la volupté;
Pour te suivre, les jeux et les ris
Ont quitté la cour des Cipris;
Ta justesse,
De ta vitesse,
Relève encore le prix.
Camargo, &ca.

Camargo takes flight in these beautiful places;
Without you we see our plays languish.
The liveliness of your steps
Is the image of pleasure;
To follow you, games and laughter
Have left the court of Cypris;
Your accuracy
Further increases the price
Of your speed.
Camargo, &c.

Tu sais par mille nouveaux tours
Enchaîner le Dieu des Amours;
Sans tes pas,
Ses feux pleins d'appas,
Ne triomphent pas.
Camargo, &ca.²⁵

You know by a thousand new turns
How to enchain the God of Love;
Without your footsteps,
His fires full of charms
Do not prevail.
Camargo, &c.

While La Camargo played a vital role in theatrical life in the years she was active at the Opéra, there is a certain hesitance to this verse even as it confirms her importance as an interpreter of staged works. Without her the Parisian public stood to see its plays and productions languish; without her steps no mythological being, no higher power, no allegorical entity could fully flourish. At the same time her charms were not without their drawbacks. She knew by a thousand new turns how to enchain the god of love; that was perhaps several turns too many, for a woman who placed such a premium on technique overshadowed the dramatic content of the staged works she interpreted, not just enchaining the god of love but suffocating and supplanting him. Anxieties about this excess of physicality and display stemmed from a critical and conceptual shift in attitudes toward performance at this time in the century, when interest moved from mimesis in the Aristotelian sense to questions about technique, aesthetics, and judgments based on appeals to the senses. What most captured the attention of audiences in the theater was not the representative nature of the performing body but its ability to execute and thus to touch or subjugate the public. La

²⁵ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1732 jusqu'en 1735. Vol.^e XVIII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12633, folio 157.

Camargo, who knew how to enchain the god of love, was regarded less as a representative image of the characters she portrayed on stage than as a woman who gratified the senses and who was associated with a degree of sexual danger as a result. Also telling is the reference to the lost games and laughter of the mythical court of Cypris, which, together with Cythera, was one of the sites of the cult of Aphrodite, the goddess of pleasure and procreation whose influence over the Parisian public was cut short by the ascendancy of La Camargo. We learn that the swiftness and accuracy of La Camargo as a technician led to an increase in the amount of money she was able to demand for her participation in productions at the Opéra, something that surely had negative consequences for the other *filles de l'Opéra* and for her reputation as an artist first and foremost in the eyes of the Parisian public.

The subtle implication that La Camargo was a dazzling technician with flaws related to her physical prowess was at home in a madrigal by Voltaire that compared her feats to the sweeter and more graceful steps of Sallé.

Ah! Camargo, que vous êtes brillante!
 Mais que Salé, grands Dieux! est ravissante!
 Que vos pas sont legers! mais que les siens sont doux!
 Elle est inimitable, et vous êtes nouvelle.
 Les Nymphes sautent comme vous,
 Et les Graces dansent comme Elles.²⁶

Ah! Camargo, how brilliant you are!
 But Sallé, Heaven knows! is ravishing!
 How light are your steps! but hers are sweet!
 She is inimitable, and you are novel.
 The Nymphs leap as you do,
 And the Graces dance like She does.

The brilliance and light of La Camargo are no match for the sweetness of the ravishing Sallé, who garnered the better share of praise from Voltaire not for being novel but for being a dancer beyond compare. Voltaire contrasts these two performers with a great deal of nuance, focusing not only on

²⁶ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1732 jusqu'en 1735. Vol.^e XVIII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12633, folio 159. This madrigal is discussed briefly in Georges Touchard-Lafosse, *Chroniques secrètes et galantes de l'Opéra 1667–1845*, 2 vols. (Paris: Ledoyen et Giret, 1846), II, 56.

their respective brilliance and enchantment but on their opposing relationships to temporality and historicity. One is inimitable, beyond compare, beyond duplication; she invites no future or progeny, for nothing more perfect is possible after her. The other is novel, ushering in a future full of imitators and duplications, inaugurating a new history of dance.

Novelty was not particularly esteemed in the aesthetics of lyric tragedy, in which tradition, solemnity, and mythology were prized above innovation in form or content. When the organist, composer, and academician Louis Bollioud de Mermet wrote in the middle of the eighteenth century that a number of problems in French operatic practice stemmed from the pursuit of innovation at the expense of nobility and simplicity, he cut to the heart of the matter, exposing what commentators from outside the sphere of the performing arts had lambasted as the artifice of novelty, a product of acquired wit and cunning rather than innate judgment and taste.²⁷

Le Compositeur ne songe qu'à faire du neuf, & pour y réussir il met tout en usage. Il choisit des Sujets d'un chant bizarre & trivial, persuadé qu'il les etribellira à force d'y mêler des traits, des variations, & des fredons. Il sacrifie volontiers la noblesse, la simplicité de l'expression, à quelques saillies échappées à l'imagination que le bon Goût desavoue, mais que l'amour de la nouveauté fait hazarder.²⁸

The Composer dreams only of making something new, & to succeed at it he puts everything to use. He chooses Subjects from a bizarre and trivial melody, convinced he will embellish them by blending in some ideas, some variations, & some trills. He willingly sacrifices the nobility and the simplicity of expression to several fugitive projections from an imagination that good Taste disavows, but the love of novelty risks.

Although it appeared in selected Lullian works, comedy was also something of a novelty in French opera until the premiere of *Les amours de Ragonde* of Mouret at the Château de Sceaux outside of

²⁷ See Antoine Gombault de Méré, "Des agréments," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Charles-Henri Boudhors, 3 vols. (Paris: Fernand Roches, 1930), II, 16. See also Buford Norman, "The Agréments—Méré, Morality and Music," *The French Review* 56/4 (1983), 556, and Don Fader, "The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic: Taste, Rhetoric, and *Politesse* in the 17th-Century French Reception of Italian Music," *The Journal of Musicology* 20/1 (2003), 12.

²⁸ See Louis Bollioud de Mermet, *De la corruption du goust dans la musique françoise* (Lyon: Aimé Delaroche, 1746), 15. On perceptions of this passage in the contemporary literature, see the *MERCURE DE FRANCE, DÉDIÉ AU ROI. SEPTEMBRE. 1746* (Paris: Guillaume Cavelier, 1746), 63. On the significance of these views in contemporary opera criticism, see Georgia Cowart, *The Origins of Modern Musical Criticism: French and Italian Music, 1600–1750*, Studies in Musicology 38 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), 103, and Catherine Kintzler, *Poétique de l'opéra français, de Corneille à Rousseau*, Collection Voies de l'histoire (Paris: Minerve, 1991), 490.

Paris, a work that would not be heard again until after the death of the composer, when it premiered at the Opéra in January 1742. The novelty of the music of Rameau was implied in the comments of Bollioud de Mermet, and the projects the composer mounted, replete with complex harmonizations and rich writing for the orchestra, were seen as something of a threat to Lullian tradition even as Rameau himself remarked on taking the staged works of Lully as a model for his own. In the preface to a printed keyboard arrangement of selections from *Les Indes galantes*, Rameau avowed his admiration for Lully, claiming he was *Toujours occupé de la belle déclamation, & du beau tout de Chant qui regnent dans le Récitatif du Grand LULLY, je tâche de l'imiter, non en Copiste servile, mais en prenant, comme lui, la belle & simple nature pour Modèle* ("Forever occupied with beautiful declamation & the pleasing tones of Singing that prevail in the Recitative of the Great LULLY, I try to imitate him, not as a servile Copyist, but by assuming, as he did, beautiful & simple nature as a Model").²⁹ As research by Charles Dill has shown, this preface introduces issues that characterize the later contributions of Rameau to the genre of the *tragédie lyrique*, including concerns about the integrity of genre, revision, and a belief that the public ultimately determined the aesthetic value of these works.³⁰ The significance of Rameau as a composer of staged works had been challenged by his audiences, who thought his works too complex and novel, and with this print, Rameau responded to criticism with a drastically different version of the score from the one he initially wished to publish. Part promise, part placation, the preface to the print of *Les Indes galantes* assumes contradictory tasks, convincing the reader of the value of the print yet calling attention to its incomplete state, to the fact that it was only a shadow of the work from which it was derived.

As for La Camargo, the label of novelty contained something of the same tinge of negativity that it did in the case of the staged works of Rameau: it was an affront to tradition, a pretense, a passing fancy. That she danced like a nymph while Sallé danced like a Charis is an understated yet

²⁹ See Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Les Indes galantes, balet reduit a quatre grands concerts, avec une nouvelle Entrée complete* (Paris: Boivin, Leclair, et l'Auteur, n.d.), 3.

³⁰ See Charles Dill, *Monstrous Opera: Rameau and the Tragic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 3.

telling comparison. Nymphs differed from goddesses in their lack of immortality; they were young, nubile, prone to outbursts of song and dance, and as personifications of the creative forces of nature, they mated with men and women at will, eventually lending their name to women who behaved similarly in polite society. As in the critique of other female performers in the theater at this time, seduction could be conceived as both a moral and immoral phenomenon yet it remained a valued component of the aesthetics of spectatorship and pleasure among audiences. The Graces or Charites, on the other hand, were goddesses of beauty and fertility, variously considered daughters of Zeus and Eurynome or of Dionysus and Aphrodite. Never wanton, never immoderate, they contrasted with nymphs not only in their immortality but in their gentle and refined approach to the enjoyment of life. For the nymphs to dance as La Camargo did meant that she shared with these mythical beings elements of youthfulness, abandon, and lustfulness that did not necessarily befit a sweet, endearing heroine; these elements were nevertheless at home in popular depictions of the questionable morals of the *filles de l'Opéra*. As for Sallé, her alignment with the Graces spoke to the sweetness and staying power Voltaire and her other admirers attributed to her. In her relatively short career at the Opéra, she was looked upon as something of an immortal, as a dancer beyond compare. The same dichotomy between the mortality of La Camargo and the immortality of Sallé reappears in the writings of the physician and philosopher Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709–1751), who wrote admiringly of the virtuous Sallé and compared her to an immortal enchantress.

Transportons-nous à l'opéra; la volupté n'a point de temple plus magnifique, ni plus fréquenté. Quelles sont ces deux danseuses autour de l'arche de Jephtah? Dans l'une, quelle agilité, quelle force, quelle précision! Le plaisir la suit avec les jeux & les ris, son escorte ordinaire: l'autre, moins étonnante, séduit plus; ses pas sont mesurés par les graces & composés par les amours. Quelle moëlle, quelle douceur! L'une est brillante, légère, nouvelle; l'autre est ravissante, inimitable. Si Camargo est au rang des nymphes, vertueuse Sallé, vous ornerez le chœur des graces. Divine enchanteresse, quelle ame de bronze n'est pas pénétrée de la mollesse de tes mouvemens? Etends, déploie seulement tes beaux bras, & tout Paris est plus enchanté qu'Amadis même!³¹

Let us transport ourselves to the opera; lust has no temple more magnificent, or more popular. Who are these two dancers around the ark of Jephthah? In one, what agility, what force, what precision! Pleasure follows her with games and laughter, her ordinary escort: the

³¹ See Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Oeuvres philosophiques de La Mettrie*, nouv. éd., 3 vols. (Paris: Charles Tutot, 1796), III, 244.

other, less surprising, is even more seductive; her steps are measured by the graces & composed by affections. What pithiness, what sweetness! One is brilliant, light, novel; the other is ravishing, inimitable. If Camargo ranks among the nymphs, virtuous Sallé, you adorn the chorus of the graces. Divine enchantress, what bronze soul is not penetrated by the softness of your movements? Stretch out, deploy only your beautiful arms, & all of Paris is even more delighted than Amadis himself!

La Camargo comes away from this verse as physically forceful and above all novel, while Sallé is cast as tender, ravishing, and beyond compare. As La Mettrie attests, the softness and enchanting quality of the movements of her arms alone render the entire Parisian public more delighted than the virtuous, fictional knight, Amadis. As research by David Tunley has shown, the *douceur* referenced in this description of Sallé has ties not only to sweetness and gentleness but to something natural and simple associated with the ineffable *je-ne-sais-quoi* (“I know not what”), something that defied description and comprehension and was ultimately free from the artifice and unbounded agility so often linked to La Camargo.³²

The characterization of La Camargo as a dancer of particular novelty spilled over into examinations of her artfulness and artifice. One verse dedicated to her in the collections of the Maurepas manuscripts for 1730 quickly devolved from praise to a meditation on the sorrows of a jealous marriage; presumably La Camargo was the cause of the rift.

Ouy, je t'aimerois	Yes, I should love you
Et te le ferois,	And do so
Cent fois plus à gogo,	A hundred times more,
Belle Camargo,	Beautiful Camargo,
Qu'à d'autres objets	Than in the case of other,
Beaucoup plus parfaits.	More perfect objects.
Si tu voles en baisant	If you take flight in kissing
Comme en dansant,	As you do in dancing,
Ton adresse,	Your skill,
Ta souplesse,	Your flexibility,
Vont rallumer tous mes feux.	Will rekindle all my fires.
Tu m'excites,	You excite me,
Tu m'irrites,	You irritate me,
Viens combler mes vœux,	Come fulfill my wishes,
Viens me rendre heureux,	Come make me happy,
Ouy, etc.	Yes, etc.
 Tes moindres mouvemens,	 Your slightest movements
Semblent être charmans;	Appear to be charming;

³² See David Tunley, *François Couperin and 'The Perfection of Music'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 23.

Toi seule, tu pourrais mettre à la mode
 La méthode
 Fort commode,
 Le profit tout clair
 De le faire en l'air.
 Ouy, etc.

You alone could render fashionable
 The very convenient
 Method
 Of doing so in the air
 The advantage is entirely clear
 Yes, etc.

Quel désagrément,
 Dans le sacrement!
 C'est faire sagement
 De rester amant;
 Les soupçons jaloux,
 Les froideurs, les dégoûts,
 Les soucis, les chagrins,
 Suivent l'hymen;
 Une épouse,
 Est jalouse,
 Quand on caresse une Iris,
 Elle enrage,
 Fait tapage,
 Lorsque son mari
 Boit, chante ou rit.
 Quel, etc.

What a nuisance,
 In this sacrament!
 This is wisely done
 To remain lovers;
 The jealous suspicions,
 The coldness, distaste,
 Worries, sorrows,
 Follow the hymen;
 A spouse
 Is jealous
 When one strokes an Iris,
 She is furious,
 Makes a racket,
 When her husband
 Drinks, laughs, or sings.
 What, etc.

Une jeune moitié,
 Vous comble d'amitié,
 Fait l'éloge de la sagesse;
 La traîtresse
 Vous caresse,
 Et tout rabattu,
 Vous êtes cocu.
 Quel, etc.³³

A young significant other
 Fills you with amity,
 Praises wisdom;
 The treacherous one
 Caresses you,
 And entirely demeaned,
 You are now a cuckold.
 What, etc.

The verse is quick to point out her reliance on *adresse*, the term for skill or adroitness associated with artifice and a measure of deception. This reference places the verse squarely within the complex discourse about artifice that also swirled around the soprano Pélissier and a number of other *filles de l'Opéra* into the middle of the century, when the term was associated with *adresse*, *souplesse*, *ruse*, and *finesse*.³⁴ For La Camargo to be associated with *adresse* and cleverness evoked the same tint of

³³ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.^e XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folia 157–158.

³⁴ See Denis Diderot, “Adresse,” in Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols. (Paris: Chez Briasson, David l’aîné, Le Breton, Durand, 1751–1772), I, 146.

negativity that dogged her characterization as novel in the writings of Voltaire. Innovation and artfulness were never more than a few steps away from manipulation and deception, which were ultimately unforgivable despite the skill of the particular *fille de l'Opéra* in question.

Masculinity

Amid reservations about her novelty and artifice, there was nevertheless a healthy share of positive criticism that swirled around La Camargo. A lengthy epistle in the *Mercure de France* detailed the injustices heaped upon her by critics who had failed to take into account her considerable talents as a dancer, including her striking postures, her vivid and expressive tableaux, and the lightness and dazzling qualities of the movements of her legs.

Eh! quoi, la critique t'outrage,
Et s'efforce de t'abaisser!
Pour confondre son vain langage,
CAMARGO, tu n'as qu'à danser.
La voix de l'injuste censure,
Se perd dans ces heureux instans,
Et cent suffrages éclatans,
Etouffent son foible murmure.
Ton triomphe est certain; crois-moi,
Regarde voler sans effroi,
Le trait malin et satirique,
Il te tombe sur le Caustique,
Qui l'ose lancer contre toi.
Je veux publier ta victoire,
Ne craint pas qu'en vengeant ta gloire,
De PREVOST, j'aie basement,
Insulter l'illustre memoire,
Et chicaner sans jugement,
SALLÉ, de qui la Renommée,
Nous apprend qu'Albion charmée,
Prise comme nous l'agrément.
Non, je ne suivrai point la piste,
De maint outré Panégyriste,
Du bon sens ennemi mortel,
Qui préférant son goût aux nôtres;
N'encense jamais qu'un Autel,
Et veut renverser tous les autres.
Mais songeons à te célébrer;
Est-ce un ouvrage à différer?
Que tes attitudes brillantes,
(Peintures vives et parlantes)
Forment des Tableaux excellens!
On ne connoissoit pas encore,
Tous les charmes de Terpsichore,
Quand on ignoroit tes talens.

Hey! what, criticism insults you,
And tries to humble you!
To thwart its vain language,
CAMARGO, you only have to dance.
The voice of unjust censure
Is lost in these happy moments,
And a hundred dazzling prayers
Stifle its feeble whispers.
Your triumph is certain; believe me,
Watch it take wing without fear,
As for the hurtful and satirical trope,
Whoever dares to hurl it against you
Will meet with Denunciation.
I want to shed light on your victory,
Do not fear revenge in your glory,
As for PREVOST, I proceed humbly,
To insult her illustrious memory,
And to quibble without judgment,
SALLÉ, of whose Fame
We learn that the charmed Albion
Takes license as we do.
No, I shall not retrace the steps
Of many a shocked Panegyrist,
Mortal enemy of common sense,
Who prefers his taste to ours;
Who never did incense an Altar,
And who wants to topple all others.
But let us consider celebrating you;
Is it an undertaking to defer?
How your bright attitudes
(Lively and articulate Paintings)
Form excellent Tableaux!
People did not yet know
All the charms of Terpsichore,
When they ignored your talents.

Tu n'est que trop sure de plaire...
 Eh! comment ne plairois-tu pas?
 Ta jambe seule a plus d'appas,
 Que n'en rassemble tout Cithere;
 Sur la Scene qu'elle est legere!
 Que les mouvemens en sont fins!
 Tel Zephire dans les Jardins,
 En cherchant les faveurs de Flore,
 Voltige au lever de l'Aurore,
 Sur les Roses et les Jasmins:
 Les yeux éblouis sur tes traces,
 N'en suivent qu'à peine le cours;
Tes pas enviez par les Grâces.
Sont applaudis par les Amours.
 En lisant ces deux Vers, peut être,
 D'abord on me reprochera,
 Que dans un moderne Opera,
 Je les ai pillés... j'en suis maître;
 Mon titre est que rien galamment,
 Sur la danse ne s'est pû dire,
 Qui ne te soit dû justement.
 Lorsqu'au Théâtre où l'on t'admire,
 Apollon vanitoit sur sa Lyre,
 Terpsicore et son Art charmant,
 Dans les deux Vers que je répète,
 Il ne parloit pas en Poète,
 Inspiré par son vertigo,
 Mais en illuminé Prophete,
 Il chantoit la Danse parfaite;
 C'étoit prédire CAMARGO.³⁵

You are only too certain to please...
 Hey! how could you not please?
 Your leg alone has infinite charms
 That all of Cythera cannot consolidate;
 On the Stage, how light it is!
 How fine are your movements!
 Such a Zephyr in the Gardens,
 Searching out the favors of Flora,
 Vaults to the Dawn sunrise,
 On the Roses and Jasmines:
 The dazzled eyes in your tracks
 Only follow the course;
Your steps envied by the Graces.
Are applauded by Loves.
 In reading these two Verses, perhaps,
 People will initially reproach me,
 That in a modern Opera,
 I have looted them... I am a master of it;
 My title is such that
 Nothing could be said about dance
 That does not precisely owe to you.
 In the Theater where one admires you,
 Apollo boasted on his Lyre,
 Of Terpsichore and her charming Art,
 In the two Verses I repeat here,
 He did not speak as a Poet,
 Inspired by his dizziness,
 But in illuminating a Prophet,
 He sang of the perfection of Dance;
 It was to prophesy CAMARGO.

In this verse the unjust criticism of the Parisian public shrinks before the impressive postures of La Camargo, whose steps are the envy of the Graces and whose ascendancy was predicted by Apollo himself. Praised for her skill in executing moving tableaux, La Camargo is compared here to two great rivals, Prévost, with whom she once studied, and Sallé, neither of whom could hold a candle to her despite their respective successes in France and England. The lightest and most agile legs on the Parisian stage belonged to La Camargo; her movements were fine and delicate; whenever she appeared, a crowd of dazzled eyes followed her every move. A separate verse appearing in the *Mercure de France* only one year later claimed that victory over the minds and hearts of the Parisian public was in fact divided among La Camargo, Sallé, and Catherine Roland (1714–1788), who had also enjoyed a career both in Paris and in London.

³⁵ See the *Mercure de France, dédié au roy. Octobre. 1731* (Paris: Guillaume Cavelier, 1731), 2359.

De *Camargo*, de *Salé*, de *Roland*,
 Maint connaisseur exalte le talent.
 Salé, dit l'un, l'emporte par la grâce;
 Roland, dit l'autre, excelle en enjouement,
 Et chacun voit avec étonnement
 Les pas hardis, la noble et vive audace
 De Camargo.

Entre les trois, la victoire balance;
 Mais si j'étois le berger fameux,
 Je ne sais quoi de grand, de merveilleux
 Me forceroit à couronner la danse
 De Camargo.³⁶

Many a connoisseur praises the talent
 Of *Camargo*, of *Sallé*, of *Roland*,
 Sallé, one says, carries it off with grace;
 Roland, says the other, excels in playfulness,
 And everyone witnesses with astonishment
 The bold steps, the noble and lively audacity
 Of Camargo.

Between the three, victory is balanced;
 But if I were the famous shepherd,
 There is a certain I know not what greatness, what marvelousness
 That would compel me to crown the dance
 Of Camargo.

The grace and sweetness of Sallé contrast with the boldness and audacity of La Camargo, who moves this author to crown her the ultimate queen of the dance not for her tenderness or modesty but for her astonishing ability to tap into a kind of sublime *je-ne-sais-quoi*, rendering her onlookers dumbstruck in the face of her agility.

The root of the turmoil over novelty and artifice in the hands of La Camargo and other *filles de l'Opéra* was a longstanding critical tradition that most highly prized modesty and decorum among female performers in the theater. As research by Don Fader has shown, notions of decorum at this time drew on French humanist interpretations of political and rhetorical theory from the ancient world and particularly on the writings of Cicero, who had described *honestum* and *decorum* as essential to the virtuous propriety of the ideal orator, the figure who embodied temperance,

³⁶ See the *Mercure de France, dédié au roy. Septembre. 1732* (Paris: Guillaume Cavelier, 1732), 2003.

restraint, and consistency.³⁷ Since the height of the popularity of spoken tragedy in the French classical tradition in the seventeenth century, humility and restraint were what audiences most desired in female performers, who were regularly chastised for stepping over established boundaries of decorum and good taste and taking on the postures and mannerisms of male characters. Such sentiments are aptly expressed in the letters of Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé (1694–1733), in which we read that violence and virtuosity should be left to male characters and magicians, while females are expected to be sweet and restrained.³⁸ The justness and nobility of female gestures and mannerisms in the theater could altogether too quickly be overshadowed by an excess of passion or violence, creating discord within the staged work itself. For the marquis Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d’Argens (1704–1771), the encroachment of such masculine traits proved as much a threat for dancers as for actresses.

Les François soutiennent que la Danse est portée chés eux au plus haut Point. Les Etrangers, au contraire, prétendent qu’on ne danse plus à l’Opéra de Paris, mais qu’on y cabriolle. Quelques Personnes de ce País sont aussi de Sentiment. Ils disent, que la *Prévôt* dansoit, que la *Camargo* saute, & que la *Mariette* grimace. Il faut, selon eux, que, dans toutes les Choses, pour qu’elles puissent plaire aux Gens qui pensent sensément, il y ait un Air de Bienséance & de Modestie. Une Femme, qui danse comme un Sauteur, comme un Baladin, quelque Pas surprenans qu’elle fasse, sort de son Caractere, & cause plus de Surprise que de Satisfaction. On voïoit danser la *Prévôt* avec Plaisir: on voit sauter la *Camargo* avec Etonnement; mais, cet Etonnement ne donne point à l’Esprit cette douce Attention, & ne laisse point dans le Coeur ce secret Contentement, que faisoient naitre les Graces de la *Prévôt*.³⁹

The French argue that among them Dance is pursued to its highest Point. Foreigners, however, claim people no longer dance at the Paris Opéra, that all they do is prance there. Some People from this Country are of the same Feeling. They say that *Prévôt* danced, that *Camargo* jumps, & that *Mariette* grimaces. According to them, so that they might please the People who think sensibly, we must assure that in all Things there is an Air of Decorum & of Modesty. A Woman who dances like a Jumper, like a street artist, executes some surprising Steps that come from her Character, & cause more Surprise than Satisfaction. We watched *Prévôt* dance with Pleasure: we watch *Camargo* leap with Astonishment; but this

³⁷ See Don Fader, “The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic,” 8. See also Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library 30 (London: William Heinemann, 1913), 99.

³⁸ See Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, ed. Alexandre Piedagnel (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1878), 8.

³⁹ See Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d’Argens, *Lettres juives, ou correspondance philosophique, historique & critique, entre un Juif Voyageur en differens Etats de l’Europe, & ses Correspondans en divers endroits*, nouv. éd., 6 vols. (The Hague: Pierre Paupie, 1742), VI, 79.

Astonishment does not render to the Spirit that sweet Interest, & does not deliver that secret Contentment to the Heart that gave rise to the Graces of *Prévôt*.

Here a pall is cast over women who dare to dance and contort their bodies like professional jumpers, like male street performers executing surprising steps and leaps. The threat facing these women was not masculinity as the negation of femininity and charm so much as indignity or the shamefulness of the aura surrounding female performing bodies on stage at the Opéra. Their nobility before a refined audience was what the public most forcefully demanded of female performers; they feared that the movements and bearing of these women could at any moment degenerate into caricatures that scarcely differed from the undignified offerings of performers at the Parisian fair theaters. We learn that the better share of modesty, decorum, and performative skill belongs not to La Camargo, who is characterized here as a great jumper, but to Prévost, who executed postures with the satisfaction rather than the astonishment of her spectators in mind and whose success in this regard trumped the showboating to which La Camargo resorted as well as the grimaces and botched pantomimes of Mariette, the mistress of Victor-Amédée de Savoie, prince de Carignan (1690–1741) and the woman who signed off on an elaborate satire of the Opéra and its performers by the abbé Pellegrin.⁴⁰ Above and beyond the comparison of La Camargo to male jumpers and street performers, the ultimate insult is the implication that what was performed on stage at the Opéra in these years could no longer be called dance, that it was instead a feeble prancing, a meager attempt at ballet. Even the astonishing steps and leaps of La Camargo, while more evolved than prancing, proved to be more surprising and astonishing than truly satisfying.

Two meditations on La Camargo in the writings of the great dancer and *maître de ballet* Jean-Georges Noverre (1727–1810) reveal a certain sympathy with comments from the marquis d'Argens and the anonymous contributors to the Maurepas manuscripts and the *Mercure de France*. Above all Noverre remains shocked that La Camargo was such an agile, lively, and endearing performer, for as he claims, nature did not bestow upon her any of the graces of good looks or bodily

⁴⁰ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folia 49–61.

proportion.

J'ai vu danser la Dlle. CAMARGO. C'est à tort que quelques auteurs lui ont prêté des graces. La nature lui avoit refusé tout ce qu'il faut pour en avoir; elle n'étoit ni jolie ni grande ni bienfaite; mais sa danse étoit vive, légère et pleine de gaieté et de brillant. Les *jettés battus*, la *royale*, l'*entrechat* coupé sans frottement, tous ces tems aujourd'hui rayés du catalogue de la danse et qui avoient un éclat séduisant, la Dlle. Camargo les exécutoit avec une extrême facilité, elle ne dansoit que des airs vifs, et ce n'est pas sur ces mouvemens rapides que l'on peut déployer de la grace: mais l'aisance, la prestesse et la gaieté la remplaçoient; et dans un spectacle où tout étoit triste, traînant et langoureux, il étoit heureux d'avoir une danseuse aussi animée, et dont l'enjouement pût tirer le public de l'assoupissement où le plongeait la monotonie.⁴¹

I saw the D  moiselle CAMARGO dancing. It is wrong for some authors to have granted her graces. Nature has withheld from her everything it takes to be fulfilled, she was neither pretty nor great nor well made, but her dancing was lively, light and full of gaiety and brightness. The beaten *jett  *, the *royale*, the *entrechat* executed without friction, all those instances now removed from the catalog of dance that had a seductive brilliance, the D  moiselle Camargo executed them with extreme fluency, she danced only *airs vifs*, and it is not from these rapid movements that one can deploy grace: but ease, quickness, and gaiety replace it; and in a show in which everything was sad, drawn out, and languid, one was happy to have a dancer so animated, and whose playfulness could pull the public out of the slumber into which it had been plunged by monotony.

Grace was thus traced not to conventions of physical beauty and proportion but to the movements of the performing body on stage. This had been a marked trope in the reception of the great *trag  dienne* and interpreter of Jean Racine (1639–1699) in the seventeenth century, Marie Desmares (1642–1698), dite La Champmesl  , who was considerably more homely in person than her wonderfully graceful appearance on stage led audiences to believe.⁴² The astonishing facility with which La Camargo executed steps and leaps made her something of a natural wonder for Noverre, who admired her *jett  * and *entrechat* just as equally as her rapidity and animation. Indeed she is credited with being a breath of fresh air on the stage, a performer who drew the dull, lifeless public out of its monotonous slumber with her grace and gaiety. A shorter meditation in the same collection of letters paints a less flattering picture, although it acknowledges the revolutionary character of La

⁴¹ See Jean-Georges Noverre, *Lettres sur la danse, sur les ballets et les arts*, 4 vols. (Saint Petersburg: Jean Charles Schnoor, 1804), IV, 78.

⁴² See Alain Couprie, *Mademoiselle de Champmesl  * (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 17, Jean Noury, *Mlle de Champmesl  , com  dienne du roy n  e    Rouen 1642–1698* (Rouen: Esp  rance Cagniard, 1892), 160, and Jan Clarke, “In the eye of the beholder?: The Actress as Beauty in Seventeenth-Century France,” *Seventeenth-Century French Studies* 25 (2003), 116.

Camargo as a technician and choreographer.

La Demoiselle Camargo avoit de l'esprit; et elle en fit usage en choisissant un genre remuant, actif, qui ne laissoit pas le temps aux spectateurs de l'anatomiser et de s'appercevoir de ses défauts de construction. C'est un grand art de savoir les déguiser sous l'éclat des talents. Si l'amour-propre mal combiné d'une foule d'artistes, leur permettoit de s'analyser eux-mêmes, combien en verrions-nous qui, à l'exemple de Mlle. Camargo, quitteroient le genre qui ne leur convient pas, pour prendre celui qui s'ajusteroit le mieux à leur taille et à leurs moyens physiques. Après elle, rien en danseuses n'étoit supportable.⁴³

The Demoiselle Camargo had spirit; and she made use of it by choosing a stirring, active genre that did not leave time for viewers to examine it and perceive defects in its construction. It is a great art to know how to disguise these defects with the brilliance of talent. If a number of artists could let go of their pride, analyzing themselves objectively, how much would we see that, following the example of Mademoiselle Camargo, they would abandon whatever genre does not suit them to take up one that best conforms to their proportions and their physical means. After her nothing was bearable among dancers.

In this passage La Camargo emerges less as a pioneering talent than as a trickster, a woman who used her considerable skill to mask defects in the genre of ballet itself, which was not a series of static tableaux but a stirring, active medium that left audiences little chance to examine its flaws in real time. The faultiness of ballet as genre had been a hotly debated issue since the establishment of the Opéra in the seventeenth century, when Lullian staged works contained a number of danced *divertissements* that distracted from the solemnity and didacticism of lyric tragedy. Distaste for dance persisted into the eighteenth century as the genre of *opéra-ballet* and the later *ballet d'action* gained notoriety and women from Marie-Thérèse Perdou de Subligny (1666–1735) to Prévost, Barbara Campanini (1721–1799), La Camargo, and Sallé came to dominate the stage. Indeed the development of the *ballet d'action* in the middle of the century stemmed from a belief that ballet as genre had suffered in the hands of a group of overly proud, highly physical performers whose technical prowess and taste for elaborate costuming masked the true expressive, emotional content of the art. Noverre thus advocated a return to the mimetic expression of character and emotion through the postures and faces of dancers themselves rather than through costumes, props, masks, or elaborate choreography.⁴⁴ This impulse closely parallels the ideology of operatic reform

⁴³ See Noverre, *Lettres sur la danse, sur les ballets et les arts*, IV, 79.

⁴⁴ See Ivor Guest, *The Ballet of the Enlightenment: The Establishment of the Ballet d'action in France, 1770–1793* (London: Dance Books, 1996), 50.

promulgated by Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787) in the middle of the century, in which the drama of staged works themselves was regarded as more important than the performances of star singers.⁴⁵

The consequences of these developments for La Camargo were borne out in a number of critical and satirical verses that took her to task for the emphasis she placed on an exertion and vigor that bordered on the masculine. These same verses bemoaned her novelty, setting it up against the sincerity and inimitability of Sallé as if to suggest that something deceptive and unreliable lurked behind her innovations as a choreographer. For La Camargo in effect to be punished for her sheer physical strength and her contributions to costuming and choreography revealed a persistent negativity in criticism that stretched all the way back to before the early modern era, to the denigration of those associated with the acting profession. That writers went so far as to claim that La Camargo danced like a man was not praise or an acknowledgment of her power in the least; it was a reminder of how far afield she had ranged from feminine sensibilities, from the restraint and reticence most prized among female performers in the theater.⁴⁶ At the same time these remarks about her masculinity could be read as a dismissal of La Camargo as a common street performer who incited laughter and mockery. While references to her masculinity persisted into the middle of the century, it is clear that they seem to have originated with Voltaire, whose footnotes to an early, authorized edition of one of his works described La Camargo as *la première qui ait dansé comme un Homme* (“the first to have danced like a Man”) and Sallé as an *excellente Danseuse, qui exprime les Passions* (“an excellent Dancer, who communicates the Passions”).⁴⁷ The allegation was a reaction to

⁴⁵ See Bruce Alan Brown, *Gluck and the French Theatre in Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 128, and Daniel Hertz, *From Garrick to Gluck: Essays on Opera in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. John Rice, Opera Series 1 (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2004), 314.

⁴⁶ See Deirdre Kelly, *Ballerina: Sex, Scandal, and Suffering Behind the Symbol of Perfection* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2012), 27, and Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), 63.

⁴⁷ See Voltaire, *Le Temple du goût. Par M. de Voltaire. Edition véritable, donnée par l'Auteur* (Amsterdam: Etienne Ledet, 1733), 24.

perceived conflicts between the representation of gender among performers on stage and an element of impropriety in the genre of ballet itself, in which women regularly veered into bold expressions of physicality and forcefulness associated with men. As research by Ann Daly has shown, in order for Camargo as the first masculine female dancer to emerge as a great stage persona, she had to be inscribed as a representation of difference, not only as the feminine other and the object of male desire but as a figure who both cultivated and challenged perceptions of what was native to the female dancing body, what was *gracieuse* or *douce*.⁴⁸ As for the *filles de l'Opéra* who sang instead of danced, the analogy did not and indeed could not cross over, for singing like a man was a physiological impossibility. The literature on singers who subverted feminine sensibilities instead drew parallels between boldness on stage and an adventurous and audacious sexual appetite.

Eloquence

The anecdotal accounts and appreciations of Sallé were overwhelmingly favorable, concerned as they were with her sweetness and charm, her skill in *danse basse*, and her participation in the development of the *ballet d'action* in the middle of the century. The darling of Voltaire, Bernard, Noverre, Louis de Cahusac (1706–1759), and the anonymous contributors to the Maurepas manuscript collection, Sallé charmed her admirers even as she maintained a professional career in Paris and London. She had the additional distinction of having avoided the great social and sexual scandal into which La Camargo had been plunged by her participation in questionable activities beyond the theater proper, particularly in the magasin de l'Opéra. Sallé instead remained a paragon of virtue, a woman who espoused the humility, modesty, and restraint so prized by conservative writers like Aïssé. In contrast to the literature on La Camargo, the verses and epigrams, madrigals and epistles that swirled around Sallé presented no odes to various parts of her body, no celebrations of her vigor and physicality, no condemnations of her unbridled sexuality or her misadventures beyond the theater proper. Instead they championed her grace, the enchanting quality of her performances, her nobility and decency, and her resemblance to the goddesses Venus and Diana.

⁴⁸ See Ann Daly, "Classical Ballet: A Discourse of Difference," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 3/2 (1987), 57.

They were in every sense meditations on the essence of the *je-ne-sais-quoi* that attached itself to definitions of the sublime nature of the performing body, a concept of astonishment and ineffability that was also associated with a certain erasure or denial of corporeality, a sublimation of the body. As research by Richard Scholar has shown, the negative syntax of the phrase itself most often served an affirmative end, to name a quality of expression in language or performance experienced as immediately present yet forever alien to explanation, or in other words, something really inexplicable and inexplicably real.⁴⁹ A short verse from Voltaire captured the workings of such a paradox with special reference to the mastery of Sallé, who reigned over the hearts of the public yet retained no real knowledge of her own particular charms.

De tous les coeurs & du sien la maîtresse,
Elle allume des feux qui lui sont inconnus:
De Diane c'est la prêtresse
Dansant sous les traits de Vénus.⁵⁰

Mistress of all hearts & of yours,
She lights fires unknown to her:
She is the priestess of Diana
Dancing under the guise of Venus.

Mistress of the hearts of her captive audiences, Sallé is compared here to Iphigenia, the high priestess of Diana who had narrowly avoided the sacrifice of her life at the hands of her father Agamemnon. The ritual sacrifices in which the mythic Iphigenia was known to have participated do not seem to factor into this verse, which only claims that Sallé lights fires in the hearts of her public. Unaware of the full effect of her charming performances on her many admirers, Sallé is above pride, above boldness, dancing pleasantly under the guise of the goddess of love and beauty.

Writing only several years before the death of Sallé in the middle of the century, Cahusac called her a performer of rare talent, a woman whose expressions and postures in the theater revealed a whole range of emotions that trumped the talents of any ordinary performer.

⁴⁹ See Richard Scholar, *The Je-ne-sais-quoi in Early Modern Europe: Encounters with a Certain Something* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 35.

⁵⁰ See Voltaire, *Oeuvres de Voltaire*, nouv. éd., ed. Charles Palissot de Montenois, 55 vols. (Paris: Stoupe, 1792), XII, 457.

Mademoiselle Sallé cependant qui raisonnait tout ce qu'elle avait à faire, avoit eu l'adresse de placer une action épisodique fort ingénieuse dans la passacaille de *L'Europe Galante*. Cette Danseuse paroissoit au milieu de ses Rivaux avec les graces & les désirs d'une jeune Odalisque qui a des desseins sur le coeur de son Maître. Sa Danse étoit formée de toutes les jolies attitudes qui peuvent peindre une pareille passion. Elle l'animoit par degrés: on lisoit, dans ses expressions une suite de sentimens: on la voyoit flottante tour-à-tour entre la crainte & l'espérance; mais, au moment où le Sultan donne le mouchoir à la Sultane Favorite, son visage, ses regards, tout son maintien prenoient rapidement une forme nouvelle. Elle s'arrachoit du Théâtre avec cette espece de désespoir des ames vives & tendres, qui ne s'exprime que par un excès d'accablement. Ce tableau plein d'art & de passion étoit d'autant plus estimable, qu'il étoit entièrement de l'invention de la Danseuse. Elle avoit embelli le dessein du Poëte, & dès-lors, elle avoit franchi le rang où sont places les simples Artistes, pour s'élever jusqu'à la classe rare des talens createurs.⁵¹

Mademoiselle Sallé, who nevertheless always had a sound reason for whatever she did, had the cleverness to introduce a most ingenious episodic action into the passacaglia of *L'Europe galante*. This Dancer appeared in the midst of her Rivals with the graces & desires of a young Odalisque who has designs on the heart of her Master. Her Dancing has all the pretty mannerisms that betray such a passion. She animated it by degrees: into her expression one can read a whole range of feelings: we see her hovering in turn between fear & hope; but at the moment when the Sultan awards the handkerchief to the Favorite, her face, her looks and her whole bearing take on an entirely different aspect. She hurls herself off the Stage in utter despair felt only by the most lively & sensitive souls, who in the space of a second can be plunged into the deepest despondency. One must praise this most artistic & passionate tableau, because it was entirely devised by the Dancer. She has filled out and improved upon the framework laid down by the Poet, and in doing so she has far surpassed the talents of the ordinary Performer, and shown herself to possess a rare creative talent.

What distinguished the performances of Sallé from those of La Camargo was the fact that Sallé involved her entire body in execution, marshaling her steps and facial expressions. She is also praised for filling out and improving upon the dramatic framework set forth by librettists, evidence that her pantomimes and the expressive movements of her face lent dramatic depth to the poetic content of staged works, no small feat for someone who spoke no words, who never sang as part of her performances. The assessment is at once traditional, concerned with the accuracy of the mimetic expression of the passions in her performances, and progressive, recognizing the performer as a woman not reduced to the execution of the wishes of the poet or composer but as a creative presence in her own right, a figure who participates in invention and interpretation and can herself attain a level of genius approaching or surpassing that of the composer. This emphasis on the poetic depth of the performances of Sallé speaks volumes about how highly prized her talents were in the middle of

⁵¹ See Louis de Cahusac, *La Danse ancienne et moderne, ou Traité historique de la danse*, 3 vols. (The Hague: Jean Neaulme, 1754), III, 154.

the century, at a time when the lighter genre of *opéra-ballet* was arguably more popular than the more solemn lyric tragedy in which poetry was paramount. A performer who highlighted poetry at a time when it was rapidly losing ground as an anchor of staged works was one who tapped into something of a lost art or dying tradition; she was a woman in touch with the predominantly more linguistic focus of lyric tragedy even in an era when *opéra-ballet* threatened its demise. At the same time the celebrated and sometimes scrutinized sensuality of her interpretations provided her a degree of freedom and autonomy in relation to the text, which stoked enthusiasm for her ascendancy to a level of virtuosity that had in earlier decades been associated rather more with composers than performers.⁵² For Cahusac to pay particular attention to Sallé as a boon to the livret was noteworthy, since he brought the cares and concerns of a working librettist to his writing on dance and the theater, collaborating as he did with Rameau in the middle of the century.

An anonymous contributor to the *Mercure de France* writing more than a decade earlier than Cahusac did not hesitate to heap on Sallé the same praise for her incredible talents as a performer, going so far as to compare her to the singer Françoise Journet (1675–1722) and the great *tragédienne* Adrienne Lecouvreur (1692–1730).

N'attendez pas que je vous décrive *Ariane* comme *Pigmalion*: ce sont des beautés plus nobles et plus difficiles à rapporter; ce sont les expressions et les sentimens de la douleur la plus profonde, du désespoir, de la fureur, de l'abattement; en un mot, tous les grands mouvemens et la déclamation la plus parfaite, par le moyen des pas, des attitudes et des gestes, pour représenter une femme abandonnée par ce qu'elle aime; vous pouvez avancer, Monsieur, que Mlle Sallé devient ici la Rivale des Journets, des Duclos et des Le Couvreur. Les Anglais qui conservent un tendre souvenir de la fameuse Oldfields, jusqu'au point de l'avoir mise parmi les grands hommes de l'Etat dans Westminster, la regardent comme ressuscitée dans Mlle Sallé lorsqu'elle représente Ariane.⁵³

Do not expect me to explain *Ariane* to you as I have *Pigmalion*: it has beauties both more subtle and more difficult to describe; they are expressions and sentiments of the deepest sorrow, despair, fury, and prostration; in a word, every action and emotion of a woman abandoned by the man she loves is perfectly shown, by means of steps, attitudes, and gestures. You may rest assured, Sir, that Mademoiselle Sallé has now become the Rival of Journet, Duclos, and Lecouvreur. The English, who retain fond memories of the famous

⁵² See Sébastien de Brossard, *DICIONNAIRE DE MUSIQUE, CONTENANT UNE EXPLICATION Des Termes Grecs, Latins, Italiens, & François les plus usitez dans la Musique* (Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1703).

⁵³ See the *Mercure de France, dédié au roy. Avril. 1734* (Paris: Guillaume Cavelier, 1734), 772.

Oldfield, to the point of having positioned her among the great men of State in Westminster, are saying that she is reincarnated in the person of Mademoiselle Sallé when she portrays Ariane.

Here the production of *Pigmalion* staged by Sallé in her penultimate season at Covent Garden is heralded as a work of great depth and drama, at once more subtle and more difficult to describe than her choreography for *Bacchus and Ariane* staged that same year. The incredible emotional depth of the performances of Sallé, expressed in her steps yet even more in her attitudes, gestures, and pantomimes, moves this writer to compare her to the English actress Anne Oldfield (1683–1730), praised as one of the finest performers in her day.

An additional verse dedicated to Sallé in the same year as the anonymous meditation from the *Mercure de France* made reference to her choreography for *Bacchus and Ariane* and at the same time praised her graceful movements, the balance and precision of her arms, and the striking range of emotions she was capable of portraying.

Je fais partir SALÈ, l'Ornement de la Scene
Dont le nom en ces lieux justifiant mon choix
Fut déjà pour ta gloire applaudy tant de fois.
Tu las verras unir à sa vive jeunesse
Les grâces de Vénus, de Pallas la sagesse;
D'une noble vigueur s'élever dans les airs,
Faire briller ses pas de battements légers;
Dans ses bras balancez, une justesse active
Donner à la cadence une force expressive;
Y peindre les bergers, les matelots joyeux
Et l'innocente paix de deux amants heureux;
Les Songes, le Réveil, les Craintes, le Naufrage
De la tendre Ariane au Naxique Rivage,
Représenter en Beau de Naïves Couleurs
Tous ses Emportemens, ses Mourantes Langueurs,
Ses Plaintes, ses Fureurs, se rendre à la Tendresse
D'un Dieu pour elle épris d'une Amoureuse Yvresse.⁵⁴

I speak of Sallé, the Ornament of the Scene
Whose name in these places, justifying my choice,
Was already applauded so many times for your glory.
You will see united with your lively youth
The graces of Venus, the wisdom of Pallas;
Of a noble vigor rising up into the air,
Making her steps shine by light movements;

⁵⁴ See Pierre de Bordes de Berchères, *Crane-Court, ou le Nouveau Temple d'Apollon à Londres, Ode à messieurs de la Société Royale de Londres* (London: Idibus Maii, 1734), 12.

In her balanced arms, an active precision
 Gives the pace an expressive force;
 Painting shepherds there, joyous sailors
 And the innocent peace of two happy lovers;
 The Dreams, the Awakening, the Fears, the Horror
 Of the tender Ariadne on the Shore of Naxos.
 Strikingly shown in Naïve Colors
 All of her Transports, her Languish,
 Her Complaints, and her Furies become Tenderness
 For a smitten God of Amorous Intoxication.

That Sallé embodied the graces of Venus as well as the wisdom of Pallas was a rare compliment, an acknowledgment that a female performer could synthesize male and female characteristics, displaying both to great effect in the theater. Pallas, the teacher of Athena, lends Sallé wisdom, whereas she derives her physical graces from Venus, the goddess of beauty and love. This balanced male and female energy extends to her arms, the expressive force behind her successful pantomimes, and further to the emotions she expresses in performances, from transport to lamentation to tenderness.

The range of performances in which Sallé participated factored into a general meditation on changes in the genre of ballet by Noverre, writing several years after the death of Sallé in the middle of the century. As research by Sarah McCleave has shown, Noverre placed Sallé at the forefront of the development of what he called the *ballet d'action*, the genre that shifted emphasis away from elaborate costumes and props toward the freer expression of emotion and dramatic content in the bodies and faces of individual dancers.⁵⁵ While Sallé is not mentioned by name in the following meditation, her notable roles in a range of staged works from *L'Europe galante* of Campra to *Castor et Pollux* of Rameau come to the fore.

En rapprochant toutes mes idées; en réunissant ce que les Anciens ont dit des Ballets; en ouvrant les yeux sur mon Art; en examinant ses difficultés; en considérant ce qu'il fut jadis, ce qu'il est aujourd'hui & ce qu'il peut être si l'esprit vient à son aide je ne puis m'aveugler au point de convenir que la Danse sans action, sans regle, sans esprit & sans intérêt, forme un Ballet ou un Poème en Danse. Dire qu'il n'y a point de Ballets à l'Opéra, seroit une fausseté. L'Acte des Fleurs; l'Acte d'*Eglé* dans *les Talents Lyriques*; le Prologue des Fêtes Grecques & Romaines; l'Acte Turc de *l'Europe galante*; un Acte entr'autres de *Castor & Pollux*, & quantité d'autres, où la danse est, ou peut être mise en action avec facilité & sans effort de

⁵⁵ See McCleave, "Marie Sallé and the Development of the *Ballet en action*," *Journal of the Society for Musicology in Ireland* 3 (2007), 3.

génie de la part du Compositeur, m'offrent véritablement des Ballets agréables & très-intéressants; mais les Danses figurées qui ne disent rien; qui ne présentent aucun sujet; qui ne portent aucun caractere; qui ne me tracent point une intrigue suivie & raisonnée; qui ne font point partie du Drame & qui tombent, pour ainsi parler, des nues, ne sont à mon sens, comme je l'ai déjà dit, que de simples divertissements de Danse, & qui ne me déploient que les mouvements compassés des difficultés mécaniques de l'Art.⁵⁶

By bringing all my ideas together; in gathering together what the Ancients said about the Ballets; by opening my eyes to Art; examining its difficulties; considering what it once was, what it is today & what it could be if the spirit comes to its aid I cannot blind myself to the point of agreeing that Dance without action, without rule, without soul & without interest, forms a Ballet or a Poem in Dance. To say that there are no Ballets at the Opéra would be a falsehood. The Act of *les Fleurs*; the Act of *Eglé* in *les Talents Lyriques*; the Prologue of *Les Fêtes Grecques & Romaines*; the Turkish Act of *L'Europe galante*; among others an Act of *Castor & Pollux*, & much more, where dance is or can be brought into the action with ease & without effortful engineering from the Composer, offer me the truly enjoyable & interesting Ballets; but figured Dances that say nothing; that present no subject; show no character; that trace no connected & rational plot; that form no part of Drama & that, so to speak, fall from the skies, are, in my opinion, as I already said, only simple *divertissements* of Dance, & they deploy only the movements of the mechanical difficulties of Art.

The five works Noverre cites had prominently featured Sallé, including the *entrée Les fleurs* from *Les Indes galantes*, first performed by Sallé in August 1735; the act of *Eglé* in *Les fêtes d'Hébé, ou Les talents lyriques* of Rameau, which she premiered in May 1739; the prologue to *Les Fêtes grecques et romaines* (1723) upon which the Handelian *Terpsicore* was based, featuring Sallé in the title role; the Turkish act in *L'Europe galante*, in which she performed a pantomime in June 1736; and the acts of *Castor et Pollux* in which Sallé premiered the role of *Hébé* in October 1737. Noverre thus implies the centrality of Sallé in the early development of the *ballet d'action*, expressing his admiration for ballets that featured action, strong character development, and *une intrigue suivie & raisonnée* or a connected and logical plot. The *ballet d'action* was a far cry from the *ballet à entrées* of the late seventeenth century in which dances were structured around a dramatic theme, such as the four seasons or the stages in the development of man, rather than a focused narrative; it was also a departure from the aesthetics of lyric tragedy early in the eighteenth century, in which the symbolic role of ballet receded to a supplemental role.⁵⁷ Sallé remains perhaps most notable in the

⁵⁶ See Noverre, *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets* (Lyon: Aimé Delaroche, 1760), 126.

⁵⁷ See Dill, *Monstrous Opera*, 121. See also Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV and the Politics of Spectacle* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 8.

eyes of Noverre for having avoided any participation in what he calls *danses figurées*, figured dances, mere *divertissements* with no real subject, no character development, and no cohesive plot. Her decisive role in the growth and flowering of the *ballet d'action* lent Sallé a pioneering reputation that was never sullied with the negative connotations of novelty and innovation that dogged La Camargo.

A number of texts about Sallé focused not on her generic innovations or her amplification of the poetic content of the livret but on the manner in which she divided her time as a performer between Paris and London and on the jealousy of Parisian audiences. Several closely related epistles dedicated to Sallé following her return to Paris from a stint in London begin with similar introductory verses about the cherubs who mourned her absence from the Parisian stage and subsequently reassembled to celebrate the triumph of Sallé as their queen. The first of these epistles was attributed to Bernard and appeared in a shortened form as well as in a lengthier variant version.

Les Amours pleurant votre absence,
Loin de nous s'étoient envolés;
Enfin les voilà rappelés
Dans le séjour de leur naissance.
Je les vis ces enfants ailés
Voler en foule sur la scène,
Où pour voir triompher leur reine,
Leurs états furent assemblés.⁵⁸

The Cherubs mourning your absence
Have flown far from us;
Finally here they are, called back
In the living room of their birth.
I saw these winged children
Flying in a crowd on the stage,
Where, to see their queen triumph,
Their states were assembled.

In the variant version Sallé is the darling of a group of cherubs who celebrate her inheritance from the goddess Venus yet is also tormented by a coterie of censorious cherubs who find themselves threatened by the beauty and fluency of her movements.

Les Amours pendant votre absence
Avec vous s'étaient envolés.

⁵⁸ See Gregoir, *Des gloires de l'Opéra et la musique à Paris*, I, 62.

Dieux! quel fut leur plaisir extrême,
Ce jour, le plus beau de vos jours,
Où, recevant de Vénus même
Et sa ceinture et ses atours,
Vous vîtes l'avid concours
D'un peuple empressé sur vos traces,
Qui se rappellera toujours
Ces pas mesurés par les Graces.

Pour vous voir, les Graces parées.

Pour empoisonner ces douceurs,
Une troupe d'Amours censeurs
Osa se glisser au parterre,
Amours étrangers, inconnus,
Qui sans doute n'étaient venus
Que pour vous déclarer la guerre.

Laissons l'Anglais se signaler.⁵⁹

During your absence, Cherubs
Had flown away with you.

Gods! such was their extreme pleasure
That day, the most beautiful day of your life,
When, receiving Venus herself
And her belt and her ornaments,
You saw the eager competition
Of a people zealous in your footsteps,
Which will always be remembered
As those steps measured by the Graces.

To see you, the adorned Graces.

To poison this sweetness,
A troop of Cherub censors
Dared to slip into the parterre,
Loves foreign, unknown,
Who no doubt showed up
Only to declare war on you.

Let the Englishmen make light of it.

In the end we are left to lean on the English themselves for further light on just who or what posed a significant threat to the sweetness of Sallé in the theater. La Camargo is never mentioned by name

⁵⁹ See Voltaire, *Oeuvres de Voltaire*, ed. Adrien-Jean-Quentin Beuchot, 72 vols. (Paris: Lefèvre, 1833), XIII, 107. As an editorial note explains, this epistle was published under the name of Voltaire in the *Mercure de France*, but in a letter to Nicolas-Claude Thieriot (1696–1772) written some five years after its initial publication, Voltaire claimed the verse was authored by Bernard.

in this text, nor does the verse appear late enough in the century to take into account the chilly reception of Sallé in London following her rather scandalous appearance in male costume in *Alcina*. It was sufficient for Bernard that Sallé was enticing, graceful, and enough of an heir to the goddess Venus to provoke a surplus of zeal on the part of her public as well as jealousy from minor deities.

An additional epistle with this same introduction was attributed to Voltaire in a volume of the Maurepas manuscripts and bemoaned a group of reckless nymphs who sought to undermine Sallé on the stage. It went on to implore her as the beloved *filles de Terpsichore*, the daughter of the muse of dance, to remain in Paris with her adoring public, never again leaving them behind to perform in London. While this manuscript volume comprises material dating from the years when Sallé was active in London, marginalia added to this particular verse indicate it appeared two years before she performed in the Handelian prologue *Terpsichore*. The reference to the *filles de Terpsichore* is likely to the muse, although it would also have reminded readers of Prévost, with whom Sallé once studied. As research by Lecomte has shown, comparisons between Prévost and the muse Terpsichore stretched back to the writings of the dancing master Pierre Rameau (1674–1748), who called her terpsichorean and prodigious.⁶⁰ Prévost figured not only in accolades from Rameau but in a kind of early modern genealogy of dance in which commentators credited her with inspiring several choreographic works of Jean-Féry Rebel, the violinist and keyboardist for the Opéra who would go on to serve as its conductor in the second decade of the eighteenth century. As research by Vladia Kunzmann has shown, Prévost inspired Rebel to turn his attention to pieces for dance and he subsequently composed *Caprice* (1711), *Boutade* (1712), *Les Caractères de la danse*, and finally *Terpsichore* (1720), all arranged as suites of dances.⁶¹ The success of these works thrust Rebel and Prévost ever more favorably into the public eye. As research by Régine Astier has shown,

⁶⁰ See Pierre Rameau, *Le Maître à danser, qui enseigne la manière de faire tous les différens pas de danse dans toute la régularité de l'art, et de conduire les bras à chaque pas* (Paris: Jean Villette, 1725), xiv. See also Lecomte, "The Female Ballet Troupe of the Paris Opéra from 1700 to 1725," 110, and Moira Goff, "In Pursuit of the Dancer-Actress," in *Women's Work: Making Dance in Europe before 1800*, 190.

⁶¹ See Vladia Kunzmann, "Jean-Féry Rebel (1666–1747) and His Instrumental Music," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1993, 61.

Terpsichore itself was apparently the least popular of these suites, attracting almost no commentary in the press.⁶² As for Sallé, her eventual role as *Terpsichore* for Handel was based directly on the role of the same name that Prévost had premiered in the *ballet héroïque Les Fêtes grecques et romaines* of François Colin de Blamont (1690–1760); Sallé would also go on to appear as *Terpsichore* in the third *entrée* of *Les fêtes d'Hébé, ou Les talents lyriques* of Rameau.⁶³ Even as this variant verse circulated in Paris, commentators who grumbled over her sojourns to London held the *terpsichorean* Sallé and her mentor in high esteem.

Les Amours, pleurant vôtre absence
 Loin de nous s'étoient envolé.
 Enfin les voila rapelez
 Dans le séjour de leur naissance;
 Je les vis ces Enfants aîlez
 Voler en Foule sur la scene,
 Où pour voir triompher leur regne
 Leurs Estats furent assembles,
 Tout avoit déserté Cythère.
 Ce jour, le plus beau de vos jours,
 Où vous reçûtes de leur mère,
 Et sa ceinture et ses atours
 Dieux! quel fut l'avid concours
 Des Jeux qui, marchans sur vos traces
 Aprirent de vous pour toujours
 Ces pas mesurez par les graces,
 Et composez par les amours
 Des ris l'Essaim vif et folâtre,
 Pour voir ces spectacles charmans
 Avoient occupez le Théâtre
 Sous la forme de mille amans,
 Vénus et ses Nymphes parées,
 De modernes habillemens,
 Des loges s'étoient emparées;
 Un tas de vains perturbateurs,
 Soulevans les flots du Parterre,
 A vous, à vos admirateurs,
 Vint encore déclarer la guerre.
 Je vis leur parti frémissant
 Forcé de changer de langage,
 Vous rendre en pestant, son hommage,
 Et jurer en applaudissant
 Restez fille de *Terpsicore*;

⁶² See Régine Astier, "Françoise Prévost: The Unauthorized Biography," in *Women's Work: Making Dance in Europe before 1800*, 133.

⁶³ See McCleave, "Marie Sallé, a Wise Professional Woman of Influence," 182.

L'amour est las de voltiger,
 Laissez soupirer l'Etranger,
 Brûlant de vous revoir encore.
 Je sçai que pour vous attirer
 L'Anglois solide récompense,
 Le mérite errant que la France,
 Ne fait tout au plus qu'admirer
 Par sa généreuse industrie,
 Quelques dons qu'il puisse étaler.
 Est-il rien qui doive égaler
 Le suffrage de la Patrie?⁶⁴

The Cherubs, mourning your absence,
 Have flown far from us.
 Finally here they are, called back
 In the living room of their birth;
 I saw these winged Children
 Flying in a Crowd on the stage,
 Where, to see their queen triumph,
 Their States were assembled.
 All of them had deserted Cythera.
 This day, the most beautiful of all the days of your life,
 On which you received from their mother
 Her belt and her ornaments.
 Gods! such was the eager competition,
 Games marching in your footsteps
 Learning from you forever
 These steps measured by the graces,
 And composed by loves.
 The laughs of the lively and playful Swarm,
 To see these charming spectacles,
 Had occupied the Theater
 In the form of a thousand lovers.
 Venus and her adorned Nymphs,
 In modern dress,
 Were seized from the lodges;
 A bunch of vain perturbators,
 Raising the tide of the Parterre,
 To you, to your admirers,
 They came again to declare war.
 I saw their quivering party
 Forced to change language
 To perturbedly render to you its tribute,
 And vow, applauding at the same time,

⁶⁴ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1732 jusqu'en 1735. Vol.^e XVIII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12633, folia 153–154. The epigram is reprinted in Arthur Pougin, *Un ténor de l'Opéra au XVIII^e siècle: Pierre Jélyotte et les chanteurs de son temps* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1905), 138. It also appears in Pierre-Joseph-Justin Bernard, *Oeuvres de Bernard, ornées d'une gravure d'après Prudhon* (Paris: Janet et Cotelte, 1823), 247, although the attribution in the Maurepas manuscripts is to Voltaire.

Remain here, daughter of Terpsichore;
Love is tired of fluttering,
Let the Foreigner sigh,
Burning once more from the sight of you.
I know that to entice you
The stout Englishman awards
Wandering merit that France
Only admires at the most
By way of its generous industry,
Several talents that it can show off.
Is there anything that could equal
The petition of our Country?

Rife with animosity toward the English as well as the English language in which they praised the performances of Sallé, this epistle nevertheless acknowledges the burning desire Sallé instilled in English and French audiences alike. It swells with pride for her and consigns the English to sigh and fidget as she returns to her native France to be crowned queen of the many talents the country boasted. Animosity between France and England in these years was fueled by the legacy of the attacks of William III (1650–1702) on the French monarchy in the war of the grand alliance, including English attacks on the French colony in Newfoundland in the late seventeenth century, a colony the English would eventually overtake. The war of the Spanish succession early in the eighteenth century also proved to be a point of some soreness, fueled as it was by the French monarchical recognition of James Francis Edward Stuart (1688–1766) as the rightful English sovereign, an affront to William III following the death of the deposed James II (1633–1701) in France. Whatever the political ramifications of these skirmishes, which were never mentioned by name in the literature on the *filles de l'Opéra*, there is a clear sense in this epistle that Sallé was nothing short of a national treasure, one the French were not happy about having to share with audiences in London.

Another recollection from an anthology of *nouvelles à la main* spoke of the great public devotion to Sallé in London, leagues away from her admiring Parisian public.

Que la Sallé, par les plus nobles pas,
Se fasse admirer du parterre,
Qu'on la desire en Angleterre,
Cela ne me surprend pas.
Mais que, pendant qu'elle nous abandonne,
Elle aille chez un calotin

Danser au milieu du festin
Comme la charmante Catin
C'est là ce qui m'étonne.⁶⁵

That Sallé, by the most noble steps,
Makes the parterre admire her,
That people desire her in England,
This does not surprise me.
But that, as she leaves us,
She goes to a cleric
To dance in the middle of the feast
Like the charming Catin;
This is what amazes me.

Sallé is compared here to mademoiselle Catin (1700–1756); as the musicologist Adolphe Jullien (1845–1932) has written, Catin participated in a revival of the Lullian lyric tragedy *Persée* (1682) in November 1722 and went on to premiere the role of Amour in the prologue of the lyric tragedy *Pirithoüs* (1723) of Mouret. She held the position of *coryphée* at the Opéra, where she ranked above the *corps de ballet* yet below the position of soloist.⁶⁶ She had also lent her signature to the *Manifeste de Mademoiselle Lemaure pour faire part au public de ses sentiments sur l'Opéra et des raisons qu'elle a pour le quitter* (1735) of the soprano Catherine Nicole Le Maure (1704–1786), a document that staunchly defended the moral rectitude of female performers at the Opéra in the middle of the century.⁶⁷ Taken together with other verses and epigrams on the lofty morals of Sallé, this reference to Catin and the implicit reference to the *Manifeste* of Le Maure mark Sallé as a performer of particular independence and virtue, a woman who, like Le Maure, remained acutely aware of her powerful effect on spectators as well as her importance to the Opéra as an institution and cultural symbol. Her sway over the parterre is unsurprising in this verse and yet her similarity to Catin and presumably to Le Maure invites suspicion for its links to the bold manner in which these other *filles de l'Opéra* asserted themselves as independent performers whose morals were above blame.

⁶⁵ See the *Journal de la Cour et de Paris, depuis le 28 novembre 1732 jusques au 30 novembre 1733*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 25000, folio 296.

⁶⁶ See Jullien, *La comédie et la galanterie au XVIIIe siècle, au théâtre — dans le monde — en prison* (Paris: Édouard Rouveyre, 1879), 27.

⁶⁷ See Catherine Nicole Le Maure, *Manifeste / de / Mademoiselle / Le Maure. / Pour faire part au Public de ses sentimens sur / l'Opéra, & des raisons qu'elle a de le quitter* (Paris: n.p., 1735).

Sallé was nevertheless the darling of at least one commentator who traced her popularity with English audiences and the London elite to talents she could only have acquired and developed in France. As research by David Charlton and Sarah Hibberd has shown, the anonymous author of a detailed memoir on Rameau and Handel in the middle of the century took time to comment on the skills and savvy of Sallé, who negotiated the fees she collected for her London performances with the utmost restraint. The original recollection of Sallé in this memoir follows a lengthy description of items in the personal library of Handel.

Mlle. *Sallé*, Danseuse Française, qui sçavoit unir les mœurs les plus respectables aux plus rares talens, faisoit assez admirer sur le Théâtre de Londres des graces que les Anglois n'avoient pas encore connues, & qui ne naissent, & ne peuvent s'acquérir qu'en France. Je l'y avois connue, elle parut fort aise de me voir, & je fus témoin du sacrifice qu'elle n'hésita point de faire de plus de mille Louis qui auroient dû lui revenir de son engagement avec *Handel*, quoique sollicitée par les plus grands Seigneurs de Londres de le rompre, pour en prendre un nouveau avec un Entrepreneur qu'un caprice leur faisoit esperer plus agréable. Ce trait d'injustice me fit quitter l'Angleterre sans regret, et je courus en Italie, que j'ai parcourue pendant près de dix ans.⁶⁸

Mademoiselle *Sallé*, the French Dancer in whom the most respectable morals were united with the rarest talents, won admiration on the London Stage for graceful qualities that the English had not yet known, & that originate & are acquired only in France. I was acquainted with her there, she seemed most content to receive me, and I was witness to her unhesitating sacrifice of over a thousand *Louis* which ought to have accrued from her engagement with *Handel*, even though she was encouraged by the greatest Lords in London to break it off, so that she might enter into a new arrangement with a certain entrepreneur, which a caprice led them to speculate would be more desirable. This stroke of injustice led me to leave England without regret, and I hurried to Italy, where I traveled extensively for nearly ten years.

As Charlton and Hibberd have explained, there are no grounds a priori for ruling out the possibility that the author of this memoir met Sallé in London late in 1746. Sources from the eighteenth century, most notably the *Anecdotes dramatiques* (1775) of Joseph de La Porte (1714–1779) and Jean-Marie-Bernard Clément (1742–1812), claim she left France for England after 1741 and the biographical research of Dacier allows that what remains of the historical documentary record is

⁶⁸ See David Charlton and Sarah Hibberd, “‘My Father was a Poor Parisian Musician’: A Memoir (1756) concerning Rameau, Handel’s Library, and Sallé,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 128/2 (2003), 173.

incomplete.⁶⁹ Regardless of when its author had the opportunity to connect with Sallé in London, this memoir reveals the striking level of modesty and restraint Sallé exercised in business affairs as well as a decidedly impartial stance on her incredible popularity with English and French audiences.

Pantomime

A madrigal appearing in the *Mercure de France* just as Sallé was returning to Paris from a series of London performances and only several years before she danced at Covent Garden in Handelian works and in her own production of *Pigmalion* acknowledged the brilliant physicality of La Camargo but reserved the better share of praise for Sallé, who was singled out for the powerful, expressive nature of her gaze and the desire and enchantment wrapped up in the gaze of those beholding her.

De ta danse active et légère,
J'admire, *Camargo*, ton brillant caractère;
Mais que ta rivale a d'appas!
La grâce, au sentiment unie,
Exprime en toi, *Sallé*, l'éloquent harmonie
Du regard, du génie et des pas.⁷⁰

As for your light and active dancing,
I admire, *Camargo*, your brilliant character;
But how many charms your rival has!
Grace, united with feeling,
Express in you, *Sallé*, the eloquent harmony
Of your gaze, of genius and your steps.

As a subtle reference to the striking sentimentality and viscosity of the pantomimes of Sallé, *regard* was described in the *Nouveau dictionnaire de l'Académie française* as the working of sight or the action by which one views something. The entry goes on to describe *regard* in painterly terms as that which *en termes de Peinture on appelle Regard Deux portraits de mesme grandeur ou à peu près, qui sont peints de telle maniere que les deux figures qui y sont représentées se regardent l'une l'autre*. Il a dans son cabinet un regard d'un Christ & d'une Vierge, qu'on estime fort, le mari & la

⁶⁹ See Joseph de La Porte and Jean-Marie-Bernard Clément, *Anecdotes dramatiques*, 3 vols. (Paris: Duchesne, 1775), III, 458. See also Dacier, *Une danseuse de l'Opéra sous Louis XV*, 253.

⁷⁰ See the *Mercure de France, dédié au roy. Janvier. 1732* (Paris: Guillaume Cavelier, 1732), 147. The madrigal is reprinted in Gregoir, *Des gloires de l'Opéra et la musique à Paris*, I, 79.

femme se sont fait peindre en regard (“in terms of Painting people call *Regard* Two portraits of the same size or thereabouts that are painted in such a way that the two figures represented look at each other in turn. *He has in his closet a rendering of a Christ & of a Virgin, which people esteem greatly, the husband & wife are rendered in a painting regarding each other*”).⁷¹ Some two decades before Cahusac would praise Sallé for introducing nuanced performances into the theater in instances when *son visage, ses regards, tout son maintien prenoient rapidement une forme nouvelle* (“her face, her looks, her whole bearing took on a wholly different aspect”), this anonymous madrigal celebrated the genius of her gaze with specific reference to its harmony, as if to suggest that Sallé was not only an expressive performer on the stage but a woman who adjusted her own physical talents to the desires of her audience of onlookers.⁷² She was not only a performer with her own piercing, soulful look but, to paraphrase a paraphrase by Racine, she was the focal point of the enchanted gaze of her admirers who hastened to her performances with almost religious devotion as if to implore *jette sur nous les yeux* (“cast your eyes upon us”) in the manner of a prayer or hymn.⁷³

Only several years before the death of Sallé, pantomime was foregrounded in two staged works by Rameau and the philosopher and amateur composer Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) that would go on to influence developments in the theory and practice of pantomime in the last half of the eighteenth century. As research by Hedy Law has shown, the *acte de ballet Pigmalion* (1748) of Rameau and the *intermède Le Devin du village* (1752) of Rousseau presented pantomime as an alternative to prevailing customs of French social dance even as the symbolism of pantomime began to change in the middle of the century, fueled by a move from the elevation to the denigration of high

⁷¹ See the *Nouveau dictionnaire de l'Académie française, dédié au roy*, 2 vols. (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1718), II, 454.

⁷² See Cahusac, *La Danse ancienne et moderne, ou Traité historique de la danse*, III, 154.

⁷³ See Jean Racine, *Oeuvres complètes de J. Racine, avec une vie de l'auteur et un examen de chacun de ses ouvrages*, ed. Saint-Marc Girardin and Louis Moland, Chefs d'oeuvre de la littérature française 20–27, 8 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1869–1877), V, 355. The text in question is a portion of the Racinian paraphrase of *Consors paterni luminis*, a Latin hymn for matins during the week, included in the *Hymnes du Bréviaire romain*, published with other works under the direction of his second son, the poet Louis Racine (1692–1763), as the *Lettres de Racine, et Mémoires sur sa vie par Louis Racine*, 2 vols. (Lausanne and Geneva: Marc-Michel Bousquet, 1747).

culture in dance and movement. While social dances remained the foundation of most French staged works in these years, pantomime emerged as what Law has called an experimental interface, a medium through which composers contested the established meanings of expressive topoi.⁷⁴ In turn it became not only a prized expressive force in movement but a vehicle for progressive social thinking. At the same time pantomime remained the subject of considerable scrutiny; it was seen variously as the degradation of the noble and didactic aims of the theater, as a promotion of lust, and as a medium whose lack of grounding in poetry and utterance addressed itself only to the eyes and the ears, never penetrating to the mind.⁷⁵ As research by John O'Brien has shown, pantomime drew fire as a popular diversion precisely because it was a diversion; it aspired to nothing more lofty than sensual gratification. It was also suspect for its effects on the audience, an unpredictable, ungovernable collective whose responses to what was placed before its eyes could never necessarily be controlled.⁷⁶

The mechanics of pantomime itself was as complex as these evolutions in its social and cultural symbolism in the middle of the century. The pantomimes of Sallé and numerous other dancers in these years relied on the mute expressive force of gesture, which was the subject of numerous philosophical meditations beginning early in the century, when the theologian and poet François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon (1651–1715) argued in the *Dialogues sur l'éloquence en general et sur celle de la chaire en particulier, avec une Lettre écrite à l'Académie française* that only natural gestures free of strain or excess were truly eloquent.⁷⁷ In the intervening years the abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos (1670–1742) would observe that the pantomimes of ancient Roman theater had

⁷⁴ See Hedy Law, “‘Tout, dans ses charmes, est dangereux’: Music, gesture, and the dangers of French pantomime, 1748–1775,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 20/3 (2010), 241.

⁷⁵ See Emmett Avery, “The Defense and Criticism of Pantomimic Entertainments in the Early Eighteenth Century,” *English Literary History* 5/2 (1938), 136.

⁷⁶ See John O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690–1760* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), xiv.

⁷⁷ See François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon, *Dialogues sur l'éloquence en general et sur celle de la chaire en particulier, avec une Lettre écrite à l'Académie française*, nouv. éd. (Paris: Etienne, 1740), 108.

communicated referential meaning without recourse to spoken language, that they were essentially a kind of mute gestural eloquence.⁷⁸ The fascination with gesture and its apparent naturalness or artificiality was not unique to the eighteenth century, as it had occupied writers in the ancient world and appeared as well in rhetorical treatises in the seventeenth century.⁷⁹ French definitions of gesture as the foundation of pantomime were solidified in the articles on *geste* or gesture authored by Cahusac for the great *Encyclopédie* of Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert (1717–1783). We read among these definitions that gesture as the *mouvement extérieur du corps & du visage* (“exterior movement of the body & the face”) corresponds in dance to the free expression of emotion in the muscles of the face, something that militated against the custom of donning facial masks in balletic performances.⁸⁰ In spoken theater in the French classical tradition, Cahusac observed that gesture antedated speech as a meaningful expressive force and indeed that it should always precede utterance in the theater in order to have the greatest communicative power. The abbé Charles Batteux (1713–1780) had proposed something of the same genealogy several years in advance of this when he explained that *la parole nous instruit, nous convainc, c’est l’organe de la raison; mais le Ton & le Geste sont ceux du coeur: ils nous émeuvent, nous gagnent, nous persuadent* (“speech instructs us, convinces us, it is the organ of reason; but Tone & Gesture are those of the heart: they move us, engage us, persuade us”).⁸¹ For Cahusac the detailed movements of the muscles of the face among performers in lyric theater formed what he called a vivid image of nature, a mimetic expression of the sublime within the theatrical work of art.⁸² As Law has pointed out, the

⁷⁸ See Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, nouv. éd., 3 vols. (Paris: Pierre-Jean Mariette, 1733), I, 412.

⁷⁹ See Jeffrey Wollock, “John Bulwer (1606–1656) and the significance of gesture in 17th-century theories of language and cognition,” *Gesture* 2/2 (2002), 227–258.

⁸⁰ See Cahusac, “Geste,” in Diderot and d’Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, VII, 652.

⁸¹ See Charles Batteux, *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe*, nouv. éd. (Paris: Durand, 1747), 263.

⁸² See Cahusac, “Geste,” 651.

vogue for the historical and theoretical study of gesture and pantomime at this time coincided with the appreciation of a style of dancing at the Parisian fair theaters that located its roots in the Italian *commedia dell'arte*; it was also contemporaneous with the development of the *ballet d'action* or *ballet-pantomime* in the middle of the century.⁸³

The connection these developments maintained to the pantomimes of Sallé will not be immediately apparent. At the same time the reference to visuality and the shared gaze in the praise of her *regard* is telling. Audiences connected to her gestural, expressive performances through the medium of sight, taking in her movements as expressions of emotion and dramatic content that connected to broader contexts for pantomime in the middle of the century, including depictions of muteness, visual portrayals of the passions, and traditional representations of comportment. As Law has suggested, the muteness of these pantomimes necessarily modified the ways in which language, meaning, and mimesis were processed and understood in the theater, placing an overwhelming emphasis on visuality that was not without consequences for the performing body of Sallé.⁸⁴ Indeed the transfer of this fascination with visuality to the body of the performer in the theater and to other realms, from rhetoric to literature, was a component of what Jacqueline Lichtenstein has described as the pictorial paradigm that animated critical discourse in the French seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁸⁵ The very body of Sallé became a communicative tool, a symbol of expressive meaning that in contrast to the body of La Camargo was not treated as a vehicle for rigorous physical expression or sexuality. Sallé remained a figure who embodied grace and comportment, elegance and eloquence. At the same time, expressivity and grace were frequently thought of as contradictory elements until well into the eighteenth century, since the performing body in all its expressivity

⁸³ See Law, "Gestural Rhetoric: In Search of Pantomime in the French Enlightenment, ca. 1750–1785," Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 2007, 5, and Dene Barnett, *The Art of Gesture: The Practices and Principles of 18th Century Acting*, Reihe Siegen 64 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1987), 126.

⁸⁴ See Law, "Gestural Rhetoric," 16.

⁸⁵ See Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *La couleur éloquente: rhétorique et peinture à l'âge classique*, Idées et recherches (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 136.

regularly eluded even the paradigm of the ineffable *je-ne-sais-quoi*; it only became the synthesis of sensuality and signification in exceptional cases such as that of Sallé.

The expressive, tender, and communicative body of Sallé is at the forefront of a meditation by Voltaire in the *Réponse à une dame, ou soi-dissant telle*, in which La Camargo and the sopranos Pélissier and Le Maure also appear, each in turn rendering him incapable of choosing a favorite.

Sur les pas du plaisir je vole à l'opéra,
J'applaudis tout ce qui me touche,
La fertilité de *Campra*,
La gayeté de *Mouret*, les graces de *Destouche*,
Pelissier par son art, *le More* par sa voix,
L'agile *Camargo*, *Sallé* l'enchanteresse,
Cette austere *Sallé* faite pour la tendresse,
Tour-à-tour ont mes vœux & suspendent mon choix.⁸⁶

In the footsteps of pleasure I fly to the opera,
I applaud everything that touches me,
The fertility of *Campra*,
The gaiety of *Mouret*, the graces of *Destouches*,
Pélissier for her art, *Le Maure* for her voice;
The agile *Camargo*, the enchantress *Sallé*,
This austere *Sallé* fashioned for tenderness,
Each in turn seizes my wishes & suspends my choice.

Voltaire applauds Campra, Mouret, and Destouches precisely because of the performative power of the women he mentions, whose voices and movements brought their staged works to life. As for Sallé, she is once again compared directly to La Camargo, whose agility was notable yet no match for the enchanting tenderness of her rival. Enchantment was at the forefront of an additional *bouquet* to Sallé dictated by a young admirer whose mother had introduced her to her storied performances the year after the debut of Sallé in *Les Indes galantes* of Rameau.

Je crus rêver un jour; vers le palais des grâces
Maman me menait par la main,
En riant je suivais ses traces,
Quand toutes à nos yeux apparurent soudain;
J'en vis une parfaite et d'un éclat suprême,
Mon coeur charmé de ses attraits,
Vous nommant, crut après vous-même,
Voler au gré de ses souhaits.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ See Voltaire, *Oeuvres de M. de Voltaire*, nouv. éd., rev., corrigée et augmentée par l'auteur, 11 vols. (Dresden: George Conrad Walther, 1752), III, 118.

⁸⁷ See Gregoir, *Des gloires de l'Opéra et la musique à Paris*, I, 131.

I thought I dreamed one day; toward the palace of the graces
My mother led me by the hand,
Laughing, I followed in her footsteps,
When everything suddenly appeared before our eyes;
I saw there a perfection and a supreme brilliance,
My heart, charmed by her attractions,
Appointing you, believing after yourself,
To fly to the satisfaction of its desires.

As glowing as the many contemporary reviews of the choreography of La Camargo were, none dared to call her steps and leaps supremely brilliant; none bestowed upon her the label of perfection. In offering such a *bouquet* this young admirer of Sallé is surprised by the mastery of the dancer to the extent that she believes she dreams. Charmed by such dramatic gestures and attractions, her heart is wholly overtaken.

Virtue

Of the considerable number of hearts charmed by Sallé in the middle of the eighteenth century, several struggled to resolve the paradoxical relationship between the sensuality of her movements and the fact that she left almost no record of any romantic or sexual relationships. As research by McCleave has shown, Sallé was unique among the *filles de l'Opéra* at this time for having attracted very little public attention of a sensual or sexual nature.⁸⁸ This was a notable reversal of the paradigm outlined by Senelick, who has described the unsettling nature of the corporeality and sexuality of the actor that has historically dictated his or her status as a cultural outsider.⁸⁹ As research by Jan Clarke has shown, the prevailing view among audiences in the French seventeenth century was that female performers in the theater sinned against the natural modesty of their sex merely by speaking or singing in public; the situation was worse among those who were married, who dared to appear beautiful in the eyes of male spectators and to inspire lustful and

⁸⁸ See McCleave, "Marie Sallé, a Wise Professional Woman of Influence," 164.

⁸⁹ See Senelick, *The Changing Room*, 8.

adulterous thoughts.⁹⁰ Early in her career Sallé was the subject of a number of rumors about failed proposals of marriage.⁹¹ A minor scandal subsequently arose upon her final return to Paris from London, when she was implicated in an affair with Manon Grognet, who had also danced in London. As McCleave has explained, the two women were linked romantically for having traveled together from London; an anonymous source moreover reported the existence of at least one love letter from Sallé to Grognet. Only several years later, the London *Universal Spectator and Weekly Journal* would accuse Sallé of an uncommon Coldness and Indifference to the Male Sex, an allegation that had no doubt been picking up steam in Paris as much as a full year earlier, when a short epigram by Bernard circulated in the collections of the Maurepas manuscripts.⁹²

Sur la Salé, la critique est perplexe:
 L'un croit qu'elle a fait maint heureux,
 L'autre prétend qu'elle aime mieux son sexe,
 Un tiers repond qu'elle éprouve les deux:
 Mais un a tort que chacun la dégrade.
 De sa vertu, pour moy je suis certain,
 Renel nous dit qu'elle n'est pas tribale,
 Grognet nous dit qu'elle n'est pas putain.⁹³

As for Sallé, criticism is perplexed:
 One believes she has made many people happy,
 The other says she prefers her own sex,
 A third claims she has feelings for both:
 But it is wrong for each of them to degrade her.

⁹⁰ See Clarke, "Women Theatre Professionals in 17th-century France," in *Women in European Theatre*, ed. Elizabeth Woodrough, Intellect European Studies Series (Oxford: Intellect Books, 1995), 24.

⁹¹ See Dacier, *Une danseuse de l'Opéra sous Louis XV*, 113.

⁹² Ibid., 188.

⁹³ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 24. A variant of this epigram is recorded in François-Henri-Joseph Castil-Blaze, *Molière musicien: notes sur les oeuvres de cet illustre maitre, et sur les drames de Corneille, Racine, Quinault, Regnard, Montluc, Mailly, Hauteroche, Saint-Évremond, Du Fresny, Palaprat, Dancourt, Lesage, Destouches, J.-J. Rousseau, Beaumarchais, etc.; ou se mélangent des considérations sur l'harmonie de la langue française*, 2 vols. (Paris: Castil-Blaze, 1852), I, 32. Its final two lines in this version are *Resnel soutient qu'elle est de Bade, La Grognet dit qu'elle est de Tain* ("Resnel argues she is from Baden Baden, Grognet says she is from Tain"). The epigram has been attributed to Bernard. See McCleave, "Marie Sallé, a Wise Professional Woman of Influence," 165.

As for me, I am certain of her virtue,
Renel says she is no lesbian,
Grognet says she is not a whore.

Disavowing the allegations the London press would subsequently trump up, this epigram has Renel, also known as Louis de Mailly (1689–1767), marquis de Nesle, declare that Sallé was not in fact a lesbian, while it features her confidante Grognet reporting that she was not a whore. An entry appearing one year later in the same manuscript collection extended this declaration of sexual innocence, when a list of books then bought and sold at the Palais-Royal boasted among its entries a volume from none other than Sallé, entitled *Le Triomphe de la vertu, par Mlle Salé, au Marquis de Resnel*.⁹⁴ The marked insistence on her virtue would continue to appear in verses and epigrams, for instance in one that claimed Sallé was the rival of the Graces.

De son Art enchanteur tout reconnut les loix:
Dans Londres, dans Paris, tout vola sur ses traces:
Elle fut sans égale, & parut à la fois
L'élève des Vertus, la rivale des Grâces.⁹⁵

Of her ravishing Art everyone recognized the laws:
In London, in Paris, everyone flew in her footsteps:
She was unparalleled, & appeared at once to be
The student of the Virtues, the rival of the Graces.

An additional tribute to her attractiveness and wisdom did not hesitate to call Sallé the very personification of virtue, dancing at the Opéra.

Pour l'air noble et décent,	For a noble and decent air,
Pour la danse légère,	For light dance,
Pour l'air noble et décent	For a noble and decent air,
L'autre est un modèle charmant.	The other one is a charming model.
Prodige de notre âge,	The prodigy of our age,
Elle est jolie et sage,	She is pretty and wise,
Applaudissons-la.	Let us applaud her.
La vertu lon la,	Virtue herself
Danse à l'Opéra. ⁹⁶	Dances at the Opéra.

⁹⁴ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol. e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 211.

⁹⁵ See Charles Compan, *Dictionnaire de danse, contenant l'histoire, les règles & les principes de cet Art, avec des Réflexions critiques, & des Anecdotes curieuses concernant la Danse ancienne & moderne* (Paris: Cailleau, 1787), 260.

As the picture of virtue and grace as well as the charged object of the fascinated gaze of her admirers, Sallé was in every respect an incarnation of the sublime; she combined the ineffable *je-ne-sais-quoi* with an expressive force and accuracy, a powerful soulfulness, and an enchantment produced by the effect of her glance or *regard*, with the end result of a kind of dematerialization of her body. She receded from view under scrutiny, existing not as the movement of her arms or the tenderness of her gaze but as a metaphysical ideal, as virtue or truth. Although writers in the middle of the eighteenth century did not allude to it, Sallé quite possibly maintained connections in popular thought to the descriptions of virtuous women that had animated the critical discourse on a range of military and literary figures a full century earlier, before the middle of the seventeenth century. As research by Joan DeJean has shown, the early science fiction novel *Epigone, histoire du siècle futur* (1659) of the abbé Michel de Pure (1620–1680) presented an attack on *les précieuses* as dangerous and inhuman salonists whose emphasis on the life of the mind threatened to reduce all of polite society to prudishness and profound unhappiness.⁹⁷ The novel proposed the most violent of possible punishments for the leader of *les précieuses*, the ritual removal of her brain in a gruesome public ceremony and finally her decapitation. These rhetorical attacks would have been popularly understood as maintaining a connection between virtuous women and heroic or strong women, figures of violence represented a decade earlier when the description of women of virtue was understood as code for the homicidal and militaristic heroines promoted by Pierre Le Moyne (1602–1671) in *La galerie des femmes fortes* (1647).⁹⁸ As research by Ian Maclean has shown, the *femme forte* as a creation of male authors was refashioned as an ideological and cultural concept by *les précieuses*, who focused less on the military and political prowess of the strong woman than on her

⁹⁶ See Claude Parfaict and François Parfaict, *Dictionnaire des théâtres de Paris, contenant toutes les pieces qui ont été représentés jusqu'à présent sur les différens théâtres françoise, & sur celui de l'Académie royale de musique*, 7 vols. (Paris: Rozet, 1767), V, 554.

⁹⁷ See Joan DeJean, "Violent Women and Violence Against Women: Representing the 'Strong' Woman in Early Modern France," *Signs* 29/1 (2003), 134.

⁹⁸ See Pierre Le Moyne, *La galerie des femmes fortes* (Paris: Antoine de Sommerville, 1647).

intellectualism. The vocabulary of heroism and strength that had characterized the *femme forte* in history and literature subsequently came to be replaced by a series of adjectives that touched on the intellectual acumen of the *précieuses*, who were hailed as *incomparable*, *nonpareille*, and *sans exemple*.⁹⁹ Whatever her ultimate connection to these earlier discourses, it is also clear that through an expressive, physicalized connection to the notion of the sublime and the *je-ne-sais-quoi*, Sallé validated a notion that had been popular since the seventeenth century, namely that critical apprehension and explanation were the acts most frustrated by this quality of *je-ne-sais-quoi*. The secretary and critic Antoine Baudeau, sieur de Somaize, born in the fourth decade of the seventeenth century, had described the expression in precisely this sense in *Le grand dictionnaire des précieuses* (1661), in which he noted it militated against clarification, interpretation, and expression.¹⁰⁰

Without recourse to the attacks on sexuality and mores that characterized a number of epigrams and verses on La Camargo and other *filles de l'Opéra*, the literature on Sallé focused on the physiological cornerstones of her pantomimes. An extended verse on the *air De l'amour tout subit les Loix* ("All Laws submit to love") from *Le triomphe des Sens* of Mouret appeared following the run of performances of this work in which Sallé participated in June, July, and August 1732.

Mais quells accords harmonieux,
 Dans ce séjour délicieux
 J'aperçois une autre Bergere;
 Son maniere est doux et leger;
 Ah! Salé, c'est toy que je vois,
 Viens aussi jouir de tes droits,
 Viens voir l'empire de Cithere,
 Pour toy se partager.

Tes bras aimables séducteurs,
 Charment, touchent les spectateurs.
 Tes voluptueux mouvemens
 Bien ménages, sont des sentimens;
 Mais quel accords &ca.

⁹⁹ See Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature, 1610–1652* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 269.

¹⁰⁰ See Antoine Baudeau de Somaize, *Le dictionnaire des précieuses, par le sieur de Somaize, nouv. éd. augm. de divers opuscules du même auteur relatifs aux précieuses, et d'une clef historique et anecdotique par M. Ch.-L. Livet*, 2 vols. (Paris: Pierre Jannet, 1856), I, 124.

Pour dompter les plus grands héros,
Pour fléchir le plus fier courage,
Ton art employe à propos
De tes yeux le tendre langage,
Les attraits flatteurs.

Sont seurs de captiver tous les coeurs.
Mais quels accords harmonieux
Dans ce séjour délicieux &ca.¹⁰¹

But what harmonious chords
In this delightful spot
I see another Shepherdess;
Her manner is sweet and light;
Ah! Sallé, it is you I see,
Come enjoy your rights,
Come see the empire of Cythera,
Divided up for you.

Your arms, pleasing seducers,
Charm and touch the audience.
Your voluptuous movements,
Always well controlled, are sentiments;
But what chords &c.

To tame the greatest heroes,
To bend the proudest courage,
Your art employs the most tender language
By way of your eyes,
The most flattering attractions.

They are sure to captivate every heart.
But what harmonious chords
In this delightful spot &c.

The sweetness and light of Sallé, who reigned over the empire of Cythera, home of the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love, extended from the seductive allure of the movements of her arms to the tender language of her gaze. The description of Sallé as nothing short of voluptuous places this verse somewhat at odds with others that celebrated her modesty and restraint. It alludes to the subtext of seduction and danger that was never far below the surface of critical meditations on

¹⁰¹ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1732 jusqu'en 1735. Vol.^e XVIII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12633, folio 155.

the art of pantomime at this time in the eighteenth century.¹⁰²

Writers and audiences alike feared that pantomime carried within itself the potential to negate and undermine the power of spoken language, that most basic of communicative tools and that most cherished anchor of French opera in the Lullian tradition. Wrapped up as it was in physicality and gesture, pantomime appealed to audiences on a visceral, physiological level that stirred primitive emotions and urges; it was as universal in its reach as any utterance. Its wide appeal is in fact what drove the composer André Ernest Modeste Grétry (1741–1813) in the latter part of the century to describe pantomime as an art whose dangers were inextricably linked to its charms.

Pourquoi la pantomime est-elle si dangereuse à l'art dramatique dont elle fait partie? c'est parce qu'elle est une adresse à tout venant. Si je n'entends pas, c'est ma faute; je fais moi-même les paroles du drame qu'on représente, et ce que je dis est toujours si bien dit! car c'est au juste la limite de mon intelligence, quelle qu'elle soit. C'est trop, diront les amateurs de la pantomime, que des paroles soutenues d'une musique expressive; le geste de ces paroles et la musique suffisent. Oui, la pantomime suffit pour dire ce qui est aisé à entendre, pour répéter par gestes ce qu'on nous a déjà dit avec des paroles; mais essayez de mettre un sujet original en pantomime, vous verrez s'il sera expliqué, et si rien égalera l'impatience des spectateurs. Sans femmes, sans décorations brillantes, seroit-elle supportable?¹⁰³

Why is pantomime so dangerous to the dramatic art of which it forms a part? It is because it is addressed to everyone. If I do not understand, it is my fault. I myself am making the words of the drama that we perform, and what I am saying is always so well said! for what it would be is exactly the limit of my intelligence. It is too much, the devotees of pantomime will say, for words to be sustained by expressive music; the gestures of these words and music suffice. Yes, pantomime is adequate to say what is easy to understand, in order to repeat through gestures what we have already said to ourselves with words; but try to set an original subject as pantomime, and you will see whether it will be explained, and whether anything will equal the impatience of the spectators. Without women, without brilliant decorations, would it be bearable?

For Grétry as for those who celebrated the gestures of Sallé in the middle of the century, pantomime occupied a curious space beyond language; it was expressive in such a way that it could mingle with music to produce narratives of intense emotion and meaning beyond even what the combination of music and utterance was capable of producing. The added effect of staging and the allure of the women who performed pantomime made this gestural art irresistible. This was a fraught

¹⁰² See Law, “‘Tout, dans ses charmes, est dangereux,’” 267.

¹⁰³ See André Ernest Modeste Grétry, *Mémoires, ou Essais sur la musique* (Paris: n.p., 1797), 154.

development following decades of critical turmoil that antedated Grétry; years earlier the value of the operatic genre had been called into question and conservative writers from Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, seigneur de Saint-Évremond (1613–1703) to reformists like Toussaint Rémond de Saint-Mard (1682–1757) and the abbé Gabriel Bonnot de Mably (1709–1785) debated the joys and sorrows of the gradual move from the Lullian tragic tradition to the new complexities of the staged works of Rameau and the new, considerably more frivolous genre of the *opéra-ballet*, replete with dancing and pantomime.¹⁰⁴ At almost the exact same time as the publication of these remarks from Grétry, the violinist, composer, and theorist Michel Paul Guy de Chabanon (1730–1792) expressed fears about the power of gesture in relation to spoken language, which it had every potential to supplant.

Le geste appliqué à un mot métaphysique, en devient la démonstration physique, & la définition détaillée. L'amour embrasse, la haine tue, l'orgueil met au dessous de soi. La vérité d'un tel langage a quelque chose d'effrayante: elle dit ce que des mots ne disent pas. Tous les jours on prononce & l'on entend ce mot: *je hais*, sans être ému; qui ne le seroit pas, si le geste du meurtre remplaçoit la parole?¹⁰⁵

Gesture applied to a metaphysical word becomes its physical demonstration & detailed definition. Love embraces, hate kills, pride debases one. The truth of such a language comprises something frightening: it says what words do not say. Every day we say and hear this word: *I hate*, without being upset. Who would not be upset if the gesture of murder were to replace the word?

The voluptuousness of Sallé and the enchanting, seductive properties of her pantomimes spoke to the danger that lurked just beneath the surface of her celebrated gestures, the danger that operatic entertainment in these years was losing the conservative stronghold it had enjoyed since the seventeenth century, that it risked becoming an affair of movement over meaning, physicality over poetry. While Sallé did not entirely escape condemnation for her participation in the controversial

¹⁰⁴ See Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, seigneur de Saint-Évremond, “Sur les opéras,” in *Oeuvres meslées*, 12 vols. (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1684), XI, 77–119, Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, *Lettres à madame la marquise de P... sur l'opéra* (Paris: Didot, 1741), and Toussaint Rémond de Saint-Mard, *Réflexions sur l'opéra* (The Hague: Jean Neaulme, 1741).

¹⁰⁵ See Michel Paul Guy de Chabanon, *Observations sur la musique, et principalement sur la métaphysique de l'art* (Paris: Pissot, 1779), 89.

medium of pantomime, she continued to be celebrated as a paragon of virtue by the likes of Bernard and Voltaire.

The dichotomy between descriptions of La Camargo as innovative, novel, and artful and Sallé as graceful and eloquent was fueled by a pronounced tension between what was considered artificial and natural in the critical discourse on the performances of other *filles de l'Opéra*. References to the eloquence of Sallé revealed an alignment of her efforts with nature and the natural that was expressed with great subtlety in an article on elocution by d'Alembert in the middle of the century.

J'ai appelé l'éloquence *un talent*, & non pas *un art*, comme ont fait tant de rhéteurs; car l'art s'acquiert par l'étude & l'exercice, & l'éloquence est un don de la nature. Les règles ne rendront jamais un ouvrage ou un discours éloquent; elles servent seulement à empêcher que les endroits vraiment éloquents & dictés par la nature, ne soient défigurés & déparés par d'autres, fruits de la négligence ou du mauvais goût. Shakespeare a fait sans le secours des règles, le monologue admirable d'Hamlet.¹⁰⁶

I have called eloquence *a talent*, & not *an art*, as so many rhetoricians have done, for artifice is acquired by study & exercise, & eloquence is a gift of nature. Rules will never make a work or a discourse eloquent. They serve only to prevent the truly eloquent passages & those dictated by nature from being disfigured and spoiled by other ones resulting from negligence or bad taste. Shakespeare wrote the admirable monologue of Hamlet without the aid of rules.

Here the talent of eloquence so celebrated in the gestures of Sallé is described as a gift of nature, a benefit wholly removed from artifice and its attendant connotations of unnatural and belabored skill. As Fader has pointed out, the musical understanding of the concept of *politesse* or noble etiquette in the early eighteenth century drove judgments of amateur performance in salons, as when writers applied *mondain* or worldly principles of emotional restraint and the rejection of artificiality to the critique of excess and difficulty in Italian repertories, which they compared to purportedly French characteristics of gentleness and naturalness.¹⁰⁷ For those who read more deeply into these juxtapositions, the dichotomy between natural talent and learned artifice, between eloquence and exercise, mapped directly onto Sallé and Camargo, the one a marvel of nature and the natural and the other a slave to learned rules that could all too easily collapse into negligence or bad taste. In the

¹⁰⁶ See d'Alembert, "Élocution," in Diderot and d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, V, 521.

¹⁰⁷ See Fader, "The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic," 30.

case of La Camargo, who was repeatedly associated with novelty and artifice, the connection to negligence and bad taste would not immediately have been apparent, and yet her association with art and artifice placed her at odds with nature and the natural, meaning abandon and laxity, or negligence and bad taste, were never far away. Sallé retained the critical upper hand for avoiding the pitfalls of novelty and fashion associated with La Camargo and for being gifted with the graces of nature itself. At the same time, as with so many characterizations in the discourse about a number of other *filles de l'Opéra*, coming to conclusions about the significance and stability of the terms themselves is no easy task. We cannot simply define novelty or masculinity or virtue, tracking the popularity and prevalence of these terms and assigning those who used them to exclusive or competing groups; we must instead recognize what remains caught in Foucauldian grids of specification, what elements of the discourse itself were forever divided, contrasted, related, and regrouped as popular understandings of the *filles de l'Opéra* themselves evolved.¹⁰⁸

* * *

The critical language that swirled around these two women, divided as it was between praise for eloquent pantomimes and faint criticism of the overly novel and artful, between tributes to virtuous postures and misgivings about the alarming power of sheer physicality, was not so polarized that clear distinctions between these two women emerged. It remains difficult to determine whether Sallé was not considered in her own way as novel as La Camargo for the generic developments she inspired, to say nothing of her innovations in costuming and choreography. The critical comparison of Sallé and La Camargo in rhymed verse and satirical song was ultimately more of a polemical topic that the authors of ribald texts used to position themselves in the discursive field than it was a strict opposition of the respective qualities of the dancers themselves. At the same time, while they were never necessarily black and white, the distinctions between Sallé as a performer of particular naturalness and virtue and La Camargo as physically forceful and more in touch with her sexuality spoke to an unease about developments within the operatic genre that would not be fully felt until

¹⁰⁸ See Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, 58.

years after both of these performers had retired from the stage. The waning popularity of lyric tragedy in the early decades of the eighteenth century came face to face with the increasing popularity of *opéra-ballet*, which conservative writers viewed as anathema to the literary solemnity of lyric tragedy. The *opéra-ballet* threatened the rise not only of opera as entertainment rather than didacticism but of performers who boasted intimate knowledge of their dangerously enchanting effects on their audiences. As research by Georgia Cowart has shown, distinct as it was from the tradition of Lullian lyric tragedy, the *opéra-ballet* foregrounded an aesthetic of modernism based on a radical freedom from the rules of classicism; it also celebrated the human body and its capacity for sensuous and virtuosic movement.¹⁰⁹ Those who danced and sang in works of *opéra-ballet* confronted critics who worried over the turn of operatic entertainment away from edification as well as those concerned that the genre engendered performers too wrapped up in physical spectacle to give operatic texts their due. In the critical literature on La Camargo, this concern about an excess of physical force and spectacle is all too apparent. Even among responses to Sallé, there lurked a veiled suspicion of the seductive properties of her pantomimes, movements that inevitably drew attention away from the linguistic content of the works at hand and, like the sheer physicality of La Camargo, threatened to reduce French opera to an enterprise in which the movement of an arm trumped the turn of a phrase, in which, as one epigram put it, the *coup d'archet* was more esteemed than rhyme.

Tensions related to these generic pressures and changes were always, if not always apparently, making themselves felt in the critical literature on these two dancers. References to the secret charms of La Camargo confirmed that writers approached her tremendous physical strength and virtuosity with suspicion for what havoc they would wreak on staged works and on the serenity and composure of audiences. The rhetoric of voluptuousness and seduction that animated the literature on Sallé was similarly replete with concerns about the dangers inherent in her pantomimes, which were increasingly a fixture on stage with the growth in popularity of *opéra-ballet*. The attention these women received as participants in the genre of ballet, in which language

¹⁰⁹ See Cowart, "Watteau's 'Pilgrimage to Cythera' and the Subversive Utopia of the Opera-Ballet," *The Art Bulletin* 83/3 (2001), 462.

and utterance played no part, was notable not least because it forced commentators to focus on physicality and the display of the body in the midst of staged works in which language remained highly prized. Such a focus was remarkable in the history of French theater, in which poetry and didacticism had historically trumped visuality, physicality, and musicality. Ultimately the discourse that centered on these two women struggled to contend with the voluptuousness and virtuosity of the female body itself, something that was always at the forefront of the critique of the *filles de l'Opéra* but never more forcefully than when these women danced.

Chapter Three

Marie Péliissier and Catherine Nicole Le Maure

I once made the mistake of describing a guest at my table as a *prima donna*. Her fellow guests were suitably impressed, but she was visibly annoyed. She was a singer, she said, an opera singer, and she didn't want people to think of her as "some sort of royal bitch with a chip on her shoulder." Exactly when the term *prima donna* came to imply such a thing is hard to determine, but opera has existed for four centuries and I doubt if there has ever been a time when singers have been thought of as models of good behavior. Certainly not in the eighteenth century, when they were generally quite out of control—it took Gluck's legendary temper, or Mozart's charm and genius, to put them in their proper place—and the nineteenth century was not much better: Angelica Catalani at the beginning of the century, Giulia Grisi in the middle, and Nellie Melba at the end, to give just three examples, were legendary monsters. But they could get away with it because they sang like angels.¹

While Richard Somerset-Ward, writing on the history of the operatic soprano, is quite right that we know little about precisely when the term *prima donna* took on its most negative connotations, he hints at a separate paradox that was in place well before the nineteenth century, namely that singers, especially women, straddled the distance between being perceived as angels and as monsters. French critics in particular elaborated on the trope of monstrosity, to which they turned when anything from a sculpture to a soprano proved too unwieldy, too otherworldly for the mind or the senses to grasp. This was in many senses a consequence of critical and rhetorical trends that reached their height in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, when references to the *je-ne-sais-quoi* ("I know not what") in aesthetic criticism attached themselves to definitions of a new, delicate sublime that contrasted with the overpowering, majestic sublime that had been a topos in the ancient world, particularly in writings attributed to Longinus and rekindled in French thought in the seventeenth century in translations by Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711).² The reception of the *filles de l'Opéra* in these years was also swept up into references to a kind of worldly *je-ne-sais-quoi*, a characterization not only of the idealized *honnêteté*, *urbanité*, *galanterie*, and *bel*

¹ See Richard Somerset-Ward, *Angels and Monsters: Male and Female Sopranos in the Story of Opera, 1600–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), ix.

² See Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *Oeuvres diverses du sieur D***: avec le Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours, traduit du grec de Longin* (Paris: Denys Thierry, 1674).

esprit of the *honnête homme* of Parisian salon culture but of his analogue, the *honnête femme*.³

While distinctions between these idealized models of polite masculinity and femininity were typically divided between an emphasis on the liberty and courage of men and the physicality, beauty, and purity of women, conceived as corollaries of their chastity, modesty, and restraint, the conceptual distance was not great between references to the *je-ne-sais-quoi* of salonists and the enchanting, stupefying performances of the *filles de l'Opéra* in the theater.⁴ As research by Aurora Wolfgang and Sharon Nell has shown, moral discourse in the seventeenth century at the time of the establishment of French opera did not portray women as equal to men in the masculine values of virtue, honor, and courage; it instead began to regard women as different from yet complementary to men.⁵

Two actresses rose to fame in the early eighteenth century and became the targets of criticism that mingled rhetorical explorations of monstrosity as what was aberrant, atypical, or heterogeneous with complicated and at times altogether oblique references to what was considered natural or artificial in musical performance, in which women sometimes concealed and at other times laid bare their expressive techniques. Marie Péliissier (1707–1749) and Catherine Nicole Le Maure (1704–1786) became focal points in a stream of criticism that confronted a complicated shift in taste among audiences beginning in the third decade of the eighteenth century, as the genre of *opéra-ballet* rose to prominence and debates about *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733), the revolutionary first lyric tragedy of Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764), called into question the significance of opera, a

³ See Richard Scholar, *The Je-ne-sais-quoi in Early Modern Europe: Encounters with a Certain Something* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 190.

⁴ See Antoine Furetière, “HONNESTETÉ, ou HONNETETÉ,” in *Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement tous les mots françois, tant vieux que modernes, et les termes des sciences et des arts*, 3e éd., rev. corr. & augm. par Basnage de Bauval, 3 vols. (Rotterdam: Leers, 1708), II. See also Jacques du Bosc, *L'honneste femme, divisée en trois parties. Reveuë, corrigée & augmentée en cette dernière édition. Par le R. P. Du Bosc, religieux cordelier, conseiller & predicateur ordinaire du Roy* (Lyon: Pierre André, 1665), and Jean de La Bruyère, *Les Caractères de Théophraste traduits du grec avec Les Caractères ou les Mœurs de ce siècle*, ed. Robert Garapon (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1962).

⁵ See Aurora Wolfgang and Sharon Diane Nell, “The Theory and Practice of *honnêteté* in Jacques du Bosc’s *L’honnête femme* (1632–36) and *Nouveau recueil de lettres des dames de ce temps* (1635),” *Cahiers du dix-septième: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 13/2 (2011), 56.

genre that was itself lambasted as monstrous. Whereas the relatively unattractive Le Maure came to represent traditional critical concerns about forthrightness and fortitude, Pélissier presented a different kind of theatricality that drew on the deceptive nature of artifice. As research by Don Fader has shown, negative reactions to opera at this time in the French eighteenth century centered on professional singers who emphasized pageantry and affectedness at the expense of *honnête* expression, restraint, and effacement.⁶ Writing decades before the popularity of Pélissier and Le Maure, the theologian and philosopher Marin Mersenne (1588–1648) spoke to popular perceptions of contrasting national musical styles and particularly of Italian violence or eccentricity versus French moderation and gentleness.⁷ The composer and theorist Bénigne de Bacilly (1621–1690) likewise differentiated between two styles of singing, describing a dramatic style of vocal performance suited to theatrical recitative and a separate, more restrained approach native to the salon.⁸

That these women were scrutinized and celebrated in the years leading up to the Parisian operatic debut of Rameau is significant as a reflection of their fraught celebrity and even more of the doubt into which the operatic genre itself was cast. Administrators and audiences alike questioned whether lyric tragedy could continue to flourish given the establishment of the Opéra-Comique and the lure of the offerings of the Parisian fair theaters as well as the increasing prominence of the genre of *opéra-ballet*, whose ascendancy was so feared that the Opéra enacted legislation in the second decade of the eighteenth century to ensure that new lyric tragedies would mark the start of each winter and summer season.⁹ At issue in the questionable viability of lyric tragedy was the popular belief that the quality of its livrets had declined since the era of Philippe Quinault (1635–

⁶ See Don Fader, “The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic: Taste, Rhetoric, and *Politesse* in the 17th-Century French Reception of Italian Music,” *The Journal of Musicology* 20/1 (2003), 30.

⁷ See Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle, contenant la théorie et la pratique de la musique*, 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1965), II, 356.

⁸ See Bénigne de Bacilly, *L’Art de bien chanter de M. de Bacilly, augmenté d’un discours qui sert de réponse à la critique de ce traité et d’une plus ample instruction pour ceux qui aspirent à la perfection de cet art* (Paris: Blageart, 1679), 11.

⁹ See Jacques-Bernard Durey de Noinville, *Histoire du théâtre de l’Académie royale de musique en France, depuis son établissement jusqu’à présent*, 2de éd. (Paris: Duchesne, 1757), 127.

1688) as well as an unease about the performers who brought the genre to life, whose fluency and physicality in its danced *divertissements* distracted from a medium that had always been most prized for its poetic rather than its balletic or musical content. While the fascination with Le Maure and Pélissier centered on perceptions that these women were at best sirens or enchantresses and at worst liars or thieves, it did not stray far from concerns that the perceived monstrosity of the operatic genre itself was rubbing off on its female performers. Their angelic voices and gestures never quite squared with suspicions that these women were by nature too hybrid, too resistant to categorization to fit seamlessly within a framework in which poetry and purity held pride of place.

The critical discourse that drew Le Maure and Pélissier into its orbit and alluded to artifice and nature, secrecy and salience, reflected a popular fascination with contrasting approaches to performance and execution, one involving clarity and the other a kind of concealment of the technique and effort that went into a given production. This reflected the coexistence of contrasting models of performance on stage at this time. One model of performance as civility and effacement stressed elements native to the description of courtly conversation in the writings of Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529), whose *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528) outlined the importance of *sprezzatura* or stylish nonchalance and regarded the ornaments of personal talent as artifices whose complexities should be concealed so as not to make performances seem contrived or affected.¹⁰ The author and salonist Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701) stressed the merits of concealment in some of the same terms the chevalier de Méré, Antoine Gombault (1610–1684) had used to capture the essence of the *galant homme* of Parisian salon culture, who possessed an inexplicable grace, ease, naturalness, and lack of affect or pretense in conversation and whose charms drew on intellect and wit yet always concealed any air of cunning.¹¹ In the realm of opera criticism, Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, seigneur de Saint-Évremond (1613–1703) connected French musical values with those of the noble

¹⁰ See Fader, “The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic,” 10.

¹¹ See Madeleine de Scudéry, *Artamène ou Le Grand Cyrus...par Mr. de Scudéry*, 10 vols. (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1650–1654), X, 893. See also Antoine Gombault de Méré, “De l’esprit,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Charles-Henri Boudhors, 3 vols. (Paris: Fernand Roches, 1930), II, 69.

and graceful *honnête homme* or salonist, who concealed all technique behind an effortlessly pleasing courtly exterior.¹² As research by Véronique Lochert has shown, such models of performance were thrown into relief by contemporary practices in *didascalie* or stage direction, which reflected the desire for authorial control over performers and performances even at a time when the art of the actor had achieved considerable independence. The ultimate goal of shaping and controlling the act of performance was increasingly suspect in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when *didascalie* and efforts to police the *mise en scène* of plays and staged works were pilloried as measures that hampered interpretation.¹³ As the German poet and translator August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845) noted early in the nineteenth century, recourse to stage directions undermined the dramatic integrity of staged works and infringed at the same time upon the creative power of the actor as an emotional medium.

Auch durch die von ihm aufgebrachte Sitte, das Gebehrdenspiel weitläufig vorzuschreiben, hat Diderot der dramatischen Beredsamkeit großen Abbruch gethan. Der Dichter stellt damit gleichsam eine Anweisung auf den Schauspieler aus, statt aus seiner eignen Tasche zu zahlen. Alle guten Dramatiker haben sich gewiß immer das Gebehrdenspiel hinzugedacht; allein wenn der Schauspieler des Unterrichts darüber bedarf, so wird er schwerlich das Talent besitzen ihn geschickt zu befolgen. Die Reden sollen billig so eingerichtet seyn, das ein einsichtsvoller Schauspieler das rechte Spiel gar nicht verfehlen kann.¹⁴

By the custom he introduced of thoroughly notating the silent play, Diderot did great harm to dramatic eloquence. It is as though the poet had drawn up a bill of exchange for the actor, instead of paying out of his own pocket. Without a doubt all good dramatic authors meditate on the silent play when writing; but if the actor needs to be given instructions in this regard, it is feared that he might not even have the talent to follow them wisely. Dialogue should be written in such a way that an intelligent actor has no potential to be mistaken about the manner of grasping the details of his role.

The abuse of power of which Schlegel accuses Denis Diderot (1713–1784) amounts to what Pierre Frantz has described as an admission of weakness on the part of the author, who only manages to impose a vision for the realization of the work through recourse to the written instructions of stage

¹² See Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, seigneur de Saint-Évremond, “Sur les opéra,” in *Oeuvres meslées*, 12 vols. (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1684), XI, 110.

¹³ See Véronique Lochert, *L'écriture du spectacle: Les didascalies dans le théâtre européen aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Geneva: Droz, 2009), 175.

¹⁴ See August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Ueber dramatische Kunst und Litteratur: Vorlesungen*, 2 vols. (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1809), II, 288.

direction and prompt notes, which manifest as what Frantz has called *l'écho d'une frustration* ("the echo of a frustration").¹⁵ This admission of authorial weakness also reflects a change in the understanding of language and hermeneutics at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when language was regarded less as a transparent system of signifiers than as performative in its own right and thus subject to interpretation.¹⁶

From the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century, stage directions appeared as an expedient of poets who felt their hegemony was threatened by a body of performers who exercised greater interpretive freedom, whose incarnations of a theatrical persona blurred the boundaries between fiction and reality just as equally as those between members of the audience and the performers with whom they identified emotionally.¹⁷ As research by Antonia Banducci has shown, in the realm of lyric theater the earliest surviving prompt notes issue from a score used in a production of the lyric tragedy *Tancrède* (1702) of André Campra (1660–1744) at Versailles in the middle of the century. These notes dictate entrances and exits, set preparations and changes, costume changes, and the use of machinery, although we cannot be certain who was ultimately responsible for the directions they indicate.¹⁸ Like critical meditations on authorship and performance, a number of references to the sincerity of Le Maure as well as the censure of artifice and concealment in some of the techniques of Pélissier rested on opposite ends of a spectrum of the goals of performance, which ranged from reverence for performance as decorum, civility, and restraint, to celebrations of

¹⁵ See Pierre Frantz, *L'esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*, Perspectives littéraires (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998), 145.

¹⁶ See Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 93, and Pierre Swiggers, "Ideology and the 'Clarity' of French," in *Ideologies of Language*, ed. John Joseph and Talbot Taylor, Routledge Politics of Language Series (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 116.

¹⁷ See Guy Spielmann, "Acteur, personnage, *persona*: modes de l'individualité et de l'altérité dans la comédie classique," in *L'autre au XVIIème siècle: Actes du 4e colloque du Centre International de Rencontres sur le XVIIe siècle, University of Miami 23 au 15 avril 1998*, ed. Ralph Heyndels and Barbara Woshinsky, Biblio 17, 117 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1999), 129.

¹⁸ See Antonia Banducci, "Staging and its dramatic effect in French baroque opera: Evidence from prompt notes," *Eighteenth-Century Music* 1/1 (2004), 7.

artificiality, technique, and passionate display, and from what was perceived as natural to what was obviously rather contrived although no less fascinating. Over the course of the first half of the eighteenth century these women became true cultural touchstones, referenced not only for their respective approaches to performance, which often clashed yet at other times were infuriatingly similar, but for the force of change they represented for French society and the operatic genre. As research by Reinhart Koselleck has shown, the conflicting labels assigned to models of performance and expressivity in the work of Le Maure and Pélissier, what we might call asymmetrical classifications or counterconcepts, actually do not depend solely on the words from which conceptual pairs are composed; the words themselves are replaceable even as the asymmetrical structure of their opposition persists.¹⁹ Such thorny aspects of historical discourse and epistemology make it exceedingly challenging to sort out apparent contrasts between these women.

Marie Pélissier, born in 1707 to Marion de Druix and mademoiselle de Meneton, debuted at the Concert Spirituel in 1726 and subsequently created a string of roles in the staged works of Rameau, notably in the initial versions of the lyric tragedies *Hippolyte et Aricie*, *Castor et Pollux* (1737), and *Dardanus* (1739) and in two noted works of *opéra-ballet*, *Les Indes galantes* (1735) and *Les fêtes d'Hébé, ou Les talents lyriques* (1739). She also participated in at least eight Lullian revivals, subsequently collaborating with François Francoeur (1698–1757) and François Rebel (1701–1775) on four separate occasions, with Campra three times, André Cardinal Destouches (1672–1749) four times, and finally appearing in more than a dozen revivals and premieres of works of composers from Pascal Collasse (1649–1709) to Jean-Joseph Mouret (1682–1738) and François Colin de Blamont (1690–1760). Her marriage to the theater impresario Victor Pélissier in 1722 was troubled in its early years by his bankruptcy, a development that prompted her to return from his theater in Rouen to Paris, where she appeared to great acclaim in the May 1726 revival of the lyric tragedy *Thétis et Pélée* (1689) by Collasse and went on to appear as Polyxène in the lyric tragedy *Pyrrhus* (1730) by Joseph Nicolas Pancrace Royer (1705–1755), who was at the time *chef d'orchestre*

¹⁹ See Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 216.

of the Opéra. Several years later in February 1734, Pélissier was dismissed from her position at the Opéra for a scandal involving her lover, the wealthy Dutch Jew of Portuguese descent, François Lopez Dulis. She fled to London but returned to Paris in April 1735, remaining in the employ of the Opéra until her retirement in October 1741. Prodigiously wealthy from a combination of her earnings at the Opéra and the riches she secured from Dulis, Pélissier purchased the costumes and jewels of the great *tragédienne* Adrienne Lecouvreur (1692–1730) for a reputed 40,000 *livres* and wore them around Paris to the awe and chagrin of the public.²⁰ As research by Pierre Goubert has shown, some 40,000 *livres* would be roughly equivalent in value to 400,000 American dollars late in the twentieth century or over 900,000 dollars today.²¹

Catherine Nicole Le Maure debuted as soloist at the Opéra in 1721 in a production of the Lullian opera *Phaëton* (1683); she had been a member of the Opéra chorus since 1719.²² Another notable premiere for Le Maure was in a 1724 revival of the *opéra-ballet* *L'Europe galante* (1697) by Campra. Noted for her capriciousness and lack of discipline, she regularly left and returned to the

²⁰ See Nérée Desarbres, *Deux siècles à l'Opéra (1669–1868): Chronique anecdotique, artistique, excentrique, pittoresque et galante* (Paris: Dentu, 1868), 44. See also Georges Monval, *Lettres de Adrienne Le Couvreur, Réunies pour la première fois et publiées avec notes, étude biographique, documents inédits tirés des archives de la Comédie des minutiers de notaries et des papiers de la Bastille*, Bibliothèque elzévirienne 82 (Paris: Plon, 1892), 238.

²¹ See Pierre Goubert, *Le siècle de Louis XIV: études* (Paris: Fallois, 1996), 98.

²² Sources from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries do not reproduce uniform birth and death dates for Le Maure. While the supplement to the *Biographie universelle des musiciens* of François-Joseph Fétis (1784–1871) by Arthur Pougin (1834–1921) lists her birth year as 1703 instead of 1704 as in the other Fétis volumes, later sources like the biographical compendium of Roger Blanchard and Roland de Candé list her birthdate as 3 August 1704. The date of her death is even more contested, with Blanchard and Candé placing it in 1783, while George Buelow, following the *Correspondance complète de la marquise du Deffand avec ses amis le président Hénault, Montesquieu, d'Alembert, Voltaire, Horace Walpole*, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1865) of Mathurin François Adolphe de Lescure (1833–1892), lists 14 January 1786. According to the chronicles of Edmond-Jean François Barbier, Le Maure died in 1783. Other sources variously list the year of her death as 1781 or 1787. See Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763), ou Journal de Barbier, avocat au parlement de Paris*, 6 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1866), II, 58, Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, 2de éd., 10 vols. (Paris: Didot, 1860–1881), VI, 106, idem, *Biographie universelle des musiciens, et bibliographie générale de la musique. Supplément et complément*, ed. Pougin, 2 vols. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1881), II, 97, Blanchard and Candé, *Dieux et divas de l'Opéra*, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1986), I, 183, and Buelow, *The Late Baroque Era: From the 1680s to 1740*, Man & Music (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1994), 180.

Opéra, first in May 1725 after a performance as Pomone in the Palais-Royal revival of the *opéra-ballet Les éléments* (1721) by Destouches and Michel Richard de Lalande (1657–1726), and more notably in 1727, when she was admitted for three years as a nun to the convent of Longchamps, where her dedicated fans from the Opéra came to hear her sing tenebrae services on Wednesdays and Thursdays during Holy Week.²³ On a separate occasion in March 1735, authorities issued a *lettre de cachet* condemning her to spend one night in Fort-l'Évêque prison after her refusal to perform on stage at the Opéra in the role of Iphise in a revival of *Jephté* (1732) by Michel Pignolet de Montéclair (1667–1737).²⁴ The Parisian lawyer and journalist Edmond-Jean-François Barbier (1689–1771) reports that upon her release from Fort-l'Évêque Le Maure fled to the convent of Précieux-Sang on the left bank, not far from the Palais du Luxembourg, where she refused to return to the Opéra.

À l'Opéra, mademoiselle Le Maure, première actrice et une des plus belles voix qu'on ait jamais entendues, soit qu'elle se soit trouvée mal effectivement, soit qu'elle eût autre chose à faire, a quitté son rôle au milieu du spectacle, un jour de représentation. M. le comte de Maurepas, qui y étoit ce jour-là, a donné sur-le-champ une lettre de cachet, et on a conduit mademoiselle Le Maure au For-l'Évêque. (Comme secrétaire d'État de Paris, il a l'inspection sur l'Opéra.) Quelques-uns ont dit que c'étoit bien fait pour réprimer l'impertinence des acteurs; le plus grand nombre a pensé que cela étoit trop dur. Elle est sortie le lendemain de prison, mais non sans rancune, tellement qu'elle a quitté l'Opéra. C'est une grande perte. La règle est que les actrices ne peuvent quitter qu'en avertissant six mois auparavant, pour que l'on puisse remplacer les sujets. Elle a eu recours à M. le duc d'Orléans, fort ennemi des spectacles profanes. Il lui a offert une pension, qu'elle a refusée; et, malgré les règles et le crédit de M. le comte de Maurepas et de M. le prince de Carignan, directeur en chef de l'Opéra, elle s'est retirée dans un couvent sous la protection de M. le duc d'Orléans.²⁵

At the Opéra, mademoiselle Le Maure, a principal actress with one of the most beautiful voices anyone has ever heard, either because she basically felt ill, or because she had something else to do, left her role in the middle of the production one day during the performance. The comte de Maurepas, who was there that day, immediately issued a *lettre de cachet*, and people conducted mademoiselle Le Maure to Fort-l'Évêque. (As secretary of state of France, he was charged with the regulation of the Opéra.) Several people said that this was well done as a reprimand for the impertinence of actors; the greater number of

²³ See Arthur-Louis Penel-Beaufin, *Histoire complète et inédite, religieuse, politique, sociale et descriptive de Boulogne-Billancourt depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, 2 vols. (Boulogne-sur-Seine: Doizelet, 1904–1905), I, 51.

²⁴ See Antoine-Augustin Bruzen de La Martinière, *Anecdotes ou Lettres secrètes sur divers sujets de Literatures & de Politiques* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1735), 527.

²⁵ See Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763)*, III, 9.

people thought it was too harsh. She left prison the following day, but not without rancor, so much so that she left the Opéra. This was a great loss. The rule is that actresses can only retire by giving six months of advance notice, so that people can replace subjects. She had recourse to the duc d'Orléans, that great enemy of secular shows. He offered her a pension, which she refused; and, in spite of the rules and the credit of the comte de Maurepas and the prince de Carignan, director of the Opéra, she retired to a convent under the protection of the duc d'Orléans.

She did indeed retire from the Opéra for a period of time from 1735 to 1740 immediately following the incident with *Jephté*, but subsequently returned to the stage before her final retirement in 1744. Unmarried during the height of her popularity as a performer at the Opéra, Le Maure married the baron de Montbruel in 1762.

Rivalry

The longstanding condemnation of actresses and singers in France is background for the more nuanced distinctions critics made between Le Maure and Pélissier. The two sopranos figure in a vignette recorded in a 1726 letter by Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé (1694–1733), a tale of performance and eccentricity in *Pirame et Thisbé* (1726), a lyric tragedy by Rebel and Francoeur that premiered at the Opéra in October of that year.

Il y a une nouvelle actrice, nommée Pellissier, qui partage l'approbation du public avec la Le Maure: pour moi, je suis pour la Le Maure; sa voix, son jeu, me plaisent plus que celui de mademoiselle Pellissier. Cette dernière a la voix très-petite, et elle l'a toujours forcée sur le théâtre; elle est très-bonne pantomime; tous ses gestes sont justes et nobles; mais elle en a tant que mademoiselle Antier paroît tout d'une pièce auprès d'elle. Il me semble que, dans le rôle d'amoureuse, quelque violente que soit la situation, la modestie et la retenue sont choses nécessaires; toute passion doit être dans les inflexions de la voix et dans les accens. Il faut laisser aux hommes et aux magiciens les gestes violens et hors de mesure; une jeune princesse doit être plus modeste. Voilà mes réflexions.²⁶

There is a new actress named Pélissier, who shares public approval with Le Maure. Personally, I am for Le Maure; her voice, her acting please me more than those of mademoiselle Pélissier. The latter has a very small voice, and always forces it onstage. She is a very good pantomime. All her gestures are just and noble, but she has so many of them that mademoiselle Antier appears all of a piece next to her. It seems to me that in the role of an amorous woman, however violent the situation may be, modesty and restraint are necessary things. All passion ought to be in the inflections of the voice and the accents. One must leave to male characters and magicians violent and unmeasured gestures; a young princess ought to be more modest. These are my reflections.

Aïssé describes these performers in gendered terms, something unsurprising in this context yet

²⁶ See Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, ed. Alexandre Piedagnel (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1878), 8.

important for understanding historical demands that women be meek and restrained. In spoken theater in the French classical tradition, humility and restraint were necessary products of *bienséance*, the notion of decorum or propriety derived from discussions of *honestum* and *decorum* in the rhetorical theory of Cicero and tied to the concept of *decorum personae* in the writings of Horace.²⁷ In a discussion of what poetic tradition dictates, in the *Ars poetica*, Horace writes, *Singula quaeque locum teneant sortita decentem* (“Let each style keep the place allotted to it”), a warning against the mixture of tragedy and comedy and part of a larger argument about the need for poetry to be charming and morally didactic even more than beautiful.²⁸ In another letter Aïssé provides an equally detailed description of Le Maure, writing *Pour la Le Maure, elle est bête comme un pot; mais elle a la plus belle et la plus surprenante voix qu’il y ait dans le monde; elle a beaucoup d’entrailles, et la Péllissier beaucoup d’art* (“As for Le Maure, she is ugly as a pot, but she has the most beautiful and surprising voice in the world; she has a lot of guts and Péllissier a great deal of artifice”).²⁹ The fascination with the dichotomy between the striking vocality of Le Maure and her considerably less inspiring physical appearance was taken up years later in the *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne* (1780) of the composer and historian Jean-Benjamin de La Borde (1734–1794), in which we read that Le Maure, who was *d’une petite stature, point jolie, dénuée d’esprit & de réflexions, sans goût, sans éducation* (“of small stature, not pretty, devoid of spirit & reflection, without taste, without education”), was nevertheless gifted with *un mystere de la nature* or a mystery of nature in her ability to captivate audiences with the sound of her voice.

Depuis ce moment elle n’a cessé de mériter d’être applaudie avec transport dans tous les rôles dont elle s’est chargée. Jamais la nature n’a accordé un plus bel organe, de plus belles cadences, & une maniere de chanter plus imposante. Mlle le Maure, petite & mal faite, avait une noblesse incroyable sur le théâtre; elle se pénétrait tellement de ce qu’elle devait dire, qu’elle arrachait des larmes aux spectateurs les plus froids; elle les animait & les transportait; & quoiqu’elle ne fût ni jolie ni spirituelle, elle produisait les impressions les

²⁷ See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library 30 (London: William Heinemann, 1913), 99.

²⁸ See Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars poetica*, trans. Henry Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 458.

²⁹ See Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, 20.

plus vives.³⁰

Since that time she has not ceased to deserve to be applauded with transport in every role she has taken on. Nature never bestowed on anyone a more beautiful organ, more beautiful cadences, & a more impressive manner of singing. Mademoiselle Le Maure, small & poorly fashioned, possessed an incredible nobility in the theater; she so penetrated it that whatever she uttered drew tears from the coldest spectators; she animated & transported them; & although she was neither attractive nor spiritual, she produced the most vivid impressions.

Aïssé relegates Le Maure and Pélissier to contrasting positions within the musical and dramaturgical sweep of the theater. Years later Jean Gourret (1933–2006) would speak to something of the same directness that historical commentators had perceived in the voice and stage presence of Le Maure, claiming writers in the eighteenth century addressed what they considered to be an incredible communicative power in performances by Le Maure, an ability to transmit *une émotion intense* to listeners and spectators.³¹ This was a paradoxical ability to be sure, built as it was on a tension between the bold, active arousal of intense emotion in the public and the decidedly restrained quality of her acting and her portrayal of the passions. Gourret nevertheless offers a sensitive reading of terminology from Le Maure criticism as early as the second decade of the eighteenth century, since the word Aïssé so carefully chooses to describe strong stage presence is closely linked in French usage to the transmission of intense emotion. In the middle of the seventeenth century Molière referred to *entrailles* as the seat of sensibility and the affections in the sixth scene of his comedy *La Critique de l'École des femmes* (1663), in which the sympathetic Dorante, explaining the relationship between the pleasure we derive from staged works and the conventions of their construction, suggests to Uranie, *Moquons-nous donc de cette chicane où ils veulent assujettir le goût du public, et ne consultons dans une comédie que l'effet qu'elle fait sur nous. Laissons-nous aller de bonne foi aux choses qui nous prennent par les entrailles, et ne cherchons point de raisonnements pour nous empêcher d'avoir du plaisir* ("Let us thus mock that chicanery to which they want to subject public taste, and let us consult a comedy only for the effect it

³⁰ See Jean-Benjamin de La Borde, *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne*, 4 vols. (Paris: Pierres, 1780), III, 521.

³¹ See Jean Gourret, *Histoire de l'Opéra de Paris, 1669–1971: portraits des chanteurs* (Paris: Publications universitaires, 1977), 32.

has on us. Let us proceed in good faith to things that grasp us by the bowels and not try to pursue arguments that prevent us from having fun”).³²

Attested from the twelfth century, *entrailles* also has metaphorical connotations of grit and stamina that are nearly as old as the term itself. The *Dictionnaire universel* of Antoine Furetière (1619–1688) presents six separate entries for the term in which it is associated with figurative reference to tenderness and emotional sensibility and in particular the heart and not just the intestines.³³ Definitions of the term in *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* revolve around its figurative use in expressions of emotion and affect, in reference to sensitivity and the quality of having a tender heart, and finally in an illuminating explanation at the end of the entries for the term, where we read *On dit, qu'Un Acteur a des entrailles & cela signifie, qu'Il s'affecte de la situation de la pièce, & la rend avec chaleur & vérité* (“One says that *An Actor has guts* & this signifies that He himself is affected by the situation of the piece, & renders it with warmth & truth”).³⁴ These connotations were at home in a description not of Le Maure but of Pélissier, who was praised for the depth of feeling she brought to her portrayal of the title character in the September 1729 revival of the lyric tragedy *Hésione* (1700) of Campra, which she sang *avec ce pathétique et ces entrailles que tout le monde lui connaît* (“with that pathos and feeling everyone has come to expect of her”).³⁵ As Aïssé contends, Le Maure, lacking good looks, nevertheless maintains a measure of fortitude or guts on the stage, whereas Pélissier is noted for a more questionable talent, the ability to

³² See *La Critique de l'Escole des femmes, comédie par J.-B. P. Molière* (Paris: Quinet, 1663).

³³ See Furetière, “ENTRAILLES,” in *Dictionnaire universel, contenant generalement tous les mots françois*, II. See also *Le nouveau Petit Robert: dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française*, nouv. éd., ed. Paul Robert, enlarged ed. Josette Rey-Debove and Alain Rey (Paris: Dictionnaires de Robert, 1996), 778. The sixth definition under the heading *entrailles* in the Littré describes *sensibilité* and *tendre affection*, evidence that *entrailles* could be closely associated with emotional intelligence. See Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, 4 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1874), II, 1428.

³⁴ See *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Paris: Bernard Brunet, 1762), I, 639.

³⁵ See Claude Parfaict and François Parfaict, *Histoire de l'Académie royale de musique: depuis son établissement jusqu'à présent*, 2 vols., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds nouvelles acquisitions françaises 6532, II, folio 51.

enchant audiences by relying on deception or artifice.³⁶ Voltaire would echo these contrasts in his *Réponse à une dame, ou soi-disant telle*, singling out Pélissier for what he described as her art or artfulness, while Le Maure captured his attention on a humbler level, the level of physicality, guts, and vocality.³⁷ So heated had debates become about the contrasting talents of these two performers that as Aïssé noted, swords were drawn in the theater parterre and anagrams circulated on the name Pélissier, from *Pilleresse* (“female pillager”) to *Pille le reste* (“pillage the rest of them”).³⁸ A later study of these women dating from the nineteenth century compared their rivalry to tensions in the reception of staged works at the end of the century and claimed with respect to Pélissier that *Il y a eu une rivalité bien dangereuse entre cette artiste et la célèbre Le Maure. On avait à l’Opéra des Pélissiens et des Mauriens, comme on avait plustard les Gluckistes et les Piccinnistes* (“There was a very dangerous rivalry between this artist and the famous Le Maure. At the Opéra there were *Pélissiens* and *Mauriens*, as there were subsequently partisans of Gluck and of Piccinni”).³⁹

Concerned that a measure of deception in the artful expressivity of Pélissier threatened to compromise her relationship with her audiences, commentators expressed apprehension about these developments in indirect, ambiguous language, never condemning artifice outright; indeed the sources that censure individual performers for deception or artifice do so so obliquely that it is often difficult to determine whether they do not at the same time reserve a measure of praise for these women. That artifice could displace beauty is a sentiment we find in the Aïssé letters as well as in

³⁶ See Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, 20.

³⁷ See Voltaire, *Oeuvres de M. de Voltaire*, nouv. éd., rev., corrigée et augmentée par l’auteur, 11 vols. (Dresden: George Conrad Walther, 1752), III, 118.

³⁸ See Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, 20. These anagrams are discussed in François-Henri-Joseph Castil-Blaze, *Molière Musicien, notes sur les oeuvres de cet illustre maitre, et sur les drames de Corneille, Racine, Quinault, Regnard, Montluc, Mailly, Hauteroche, Saint-Évremond, Du Fresny, Palaprat, Dancourt, Lesage, Destouches, J.-J. Rousseau, Beaumarchais, etc.; ou se mêlent des considérations sur l’harmonie de la langue française*, 2 vols. (Paris: Castil-Blaze, 1852), I, 117.

³⁹ See Édouard Georges Jacques Gregoir, *Des gloires de l’Opéra et la musique à Paris: Documents recueillis sur l’Opéra et autres théâtres à Paris et sur tout ce qui a rapport à l’art musical en cette ville jusqu’à l’année 1880*, 3 vols. (Paris: Schott, 1878), I, 27.

the manuscript collection compiled by the comte de Maurepas, for instance in one epigram that claims *Le manège et les talens y peuvent tenir lieu de beauté* (“Intrigue and talents can take the place of beauty”).⁴⁰ The marquis Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d’Argens (1704–1771) would describe these abilities as native to the *filles de l’Opéra* when he wrote that *La feinte & l’artifice sont les talens dans lesquels les filles de l’Opéra excellent* (“Feint & artifice are the talents in which the filles de l’Opéra excel”).⁴¹ Playing up the contrast between clarity and artifice, this comment also alludes to the feints of fencing, maneuvers designed to distract or mislead. In the middle of the eighteenth century few readers would fail to grasp this as a reference to Julie d’Aubigny, dite La Maupin (1670–1707), who was described in one contemporary biographical dictionary as an actress *qui avait un goût naturel pour l’exercice des armes* (“who had a natural taste for brandishing arms”); she was also well known for her escapades as a fencer.⁴² Critics worried over the relationship between audiences and these newer, more newly artful actresses like Pélissier, but they also maintained a certain fluidity within the discourse itself, on some occasions questioning acting techniques, at other times expressing anxieties about the value of opera as genre, and still at other times using some of the same words to describe singers otherwise regarded as opposites.

Artifice

References to deception and artifice in the critical discourse about the *filles de l’Opéra* are notable for their force and clarity and are all the more interesting as commentaries about women on stage, since artifice was not particularly or at least not primarily associated with theatrical cunning at this time. In the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert (1717–1783), the

⁴⁰ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.^e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 55.

⁴¹ See Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d’Argens, *Lettres juives, ou correspondance philosophique, historique & critique, entre un Juif Voyageur en differens Etats de l’Europe, & ses Correspondans en divers endroits*, nouv. éd., 6 vols. (The Hague: Pierre Paupie, 1742), I, 222.

⁴² See Parfaict and Parfaict, *Dictionnaire des théâtres de Paris, contenant toutes les pieces qui ont été représentés jusqu’à présent sur les différens théâtres françoise, & sur celui de l’Académie royale de musique*, 7 vols. (Paris: Rozet, 1767), III, 351. See also Gabriel Letainturier-Fradin, *La Maupin (1670–1707): sa vie, ses duels, ses aventures* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1904).

anonymously authored article on artifice describes staged feats, fireworks, and pyrotechnics.⁴³ The same article goes on to detail the workings of artifice in theaters with respect to fire ordinances and the coherence and good effect of the theatrical production in question. Closer to the spirit of artifice as we encounter it in the criticism of the *filles de l'Opéra* is the entry on *adresse*, in which Diderot describes artifice as a rhetorical term synonymous with the words *adresse*, *souplesse*, *ruse*, and *finesse*.⁴⁴ This is precisely the sense conveyed in the entry for artifice in *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, where we read that artifice derives from the Latin *artificium*, connoting art, craft, ruse, and manipulative skill. *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defines artifice as that which aims to disguise or confound in addition to the technique by which one achieves end results in art, craft, and ingenuity. Only later in the same entry do we encounter references to pyrotechnic feats and mechanical fires for use in the theater.⁴⁵ The *Dictionnaire universel* of Furetière likewise supplies three distinct definitions of artifice, two of which equate the word with *adresse*, artfulness, and the performance of tasks with great subtlety and precaution. These entries go on to describe artifice as fraud and the worst kind of finesse to which an honest man would never resort.⁴⁶

Only by culling evidence from unrelated articles in the *Encyclopédie* do we arrive at some sense of the pejorative connotations of artifice that animated critiques of Pélissier and the *filles de l'Opéra*. The article by the poet and playwright Joseph-François-Édouard de Corsembleu Desmahis (1723–1761) on woman or *femme* highlights artifice as the last resort of capricious women, whose charms always involve a measure of deception or concealment. Quoting Horace on female cunning,

⁴³ See Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols. (Paris: Chez Briasson, David l'aîné, Le Breton, Durand, 1751–1772), I, 740.

⁴⁴ See Diderot, “Adresse,” in Diderot and d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, I, 146.

⁴⁵ See *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, nouv. éd., 2 vols. (Paris: Libraires associés, 1765), I, 74. The sense of artifice as opposed to nature and the natural persists in the subsequent entries for *artificiel*, *artificiellement*, *artificieusement*, and *artificieux*.

⁴⁶ See Furetière, “ARTIFICE,” in *Dictionnaire universel, contenant generalement tous les mots françois*, I.

Desmahis goes on to describe the sly sensuousness of women who prevail upon the men in their lives by tears, caresses, and the artifice of words.

Horace fait ainsi la peinture des mœurs de son tems, « A peine une fille est-elle sortie des jeux innocens de la tendre enfance, qu'elle se plaît à étudier des danses voluptueuses, & tous les arts & tous les mysteres de l'amour. A peine une *femme* est-elle assise à la table de son mari, que d'un regard inquiet elle y cherche un amant; bientôt elle ne choisit plus, elle croit que dans l'obscurité tous les plaisirs sont légitimes ». Bientôt aussi Chloé arrivera à ce dernier période de la galanterie. Déjà elle fait donner à la volupté toutes les apparences du sentiment, à la complaisance tous les charmes de la volupté. Elle sait également & dissimuler des desirs & feindre des sentimens, & composer des ris & verser des larmes. Elle a rarement dans l'ame ce qu'elle a dans les yeux; elle n'a presque jamais sur les levres, ni ce qu'elle a dans les yeux, ni ce qu'elle a dans l'ame: ce qu'elle a fait en secret, elle se persuade ne l'avoir point fait; ce qu'on lui a vû faire, elle sait persuader qu'on ne l'a point vû; & ce que l'artifice des paroles ne peut justifier, ses larmes le font excuser, ses caresses le font oublier.⁴⁷

Horace painted the morals of his time in this manner, « A girl barely leaves behind the innocent games of loving childhood, when she occupies herself with studying voluptuous dances, & all the arts & all the mysteries of love. A woman is barely seated at the table of her husband, when with an anxious look she searches for a lover; soon she no longer chooses; she thinks that in obscurity all pleasures are legitimate ». Soon also Chloé will arrive at this final stage of gallantry. Already she lends to sensuousness all the appearances of sentiment, and to kindness all the charms of sensuousness. She knows equally well how to simulate desires & to feign feelings, & to fake laughter & to shed tears. She seldom feels in her soul what she reveals in her eyes; what she has done in secret, she persuades herself not to have done; what people saw her do, she persuades them that they have not seen; and whatever the artifice of words cannot justify, her tears render excused, her caresses render forgotten.

In two separate articles by the poet, author, and Rameau collaborator Louis de Cahusac (1706–1759), artifice stands for everything opposed to men of perfection and talent. As the article on *enthousiasme* explains, artifice and any air of intrigue are unbecoming of men of true talent, who instead display a naturally good creed and a certain frankness of character.

Mais a-t-on vû encore quelque espece d'hommes parfaite? en trouve-t-on beaucoup qui portent une raison supérieure dans plusieurs genres? qu'il nous suffise de dire qu'on rencontre communément dans les vrais talens une bonne foi comme naturelle, une franchise de caractere, & surtout l'antipathie la plus décidée pour tout ce qui a l'air d'intrigue, d'artifice, de cabale. Pense-t-on que ce soit-là un des moindres ouvrages de la raison? Aussi lorsque vous verrez un homme de lettres, un peintre, un musicien souple, rampant, fertile en détours, adroit courtisan, ne cherchez point chez lui ce que nous appellons le *vrai talent*.⁴⁸

But have people yet seen some species of perfect men? Do they find any who boast superior

⁴⁷ See Joseph-François-Édouard de Corsembleu Desmahis, "Femme," in Diderot and d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, VI, 474.

⁴⁸ See Louis de Cahusac, "Enthousiasme," in Diderot and d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, V, 722.

reason in several genres? Suffice it to say that one commonly encounters in true talents a good creed as in nature, a frankness of character, & especially the most decided aversion to anything that smacks of intrigue, of artifice, of cabal. Do people think this is one of the slightest works of reason? Moreover when you see a literary man, a painter, a flexible, rampant musician, rich in diversions, an artful courtier, do not search within him for that which we call *true talent*.

A separate article by Cahusac on the technique of *étendue* or extending vocal range calls the practice an artifice by which women on stage garnered some degree of success and praise from Italian and French audiences alike. It was also a technique that gave them a considerable edge over castrati as their rivals in the theater.

Ainsi à force d'art, de travail & de constance, elles ont calqué sur leurs voix plusieurs tons hauts & bas au-dessus & au-dessous du diapason naturel. L'art est tel dans les grands talens, qu'il enchante les Italiens habitués à ces sortes d'écarts, & qu'il surprend & flatte même les bonnes oreilles françaises. Avec cet artifice les femmes se sont soutenues au théâtre, dont elles auroient été bannies, & elles y disputent de talent & de succès avec ces especes bizarres que l'inhumanité leur a donné pour rivales.⁴⁹

Thus by dint of art, by work & by constancy, they copied several high & low tones using their voices above & under the natural diapason. Among these considerable talents, art is such that it delights the Italians, accustomed to these kinds of ranges, & it surprises & even flatters good French ears. With this artifice women supported themselves in the theater, from which they would have been exiled, & where they compete in talent & success with this strange species which inhumanity has given them for rivals.

The article on *élégie*, describing the outstanding panegyrics of the Latin poet Albius Tibullus, praises his truthful, genuine air and his ability to render expressions in prose and oratory without any recourse to artifice.

Dans Tibulle tout respire la vérité. Il est tendre, naturel, délicat, passionné, noble sans faste; simple sans bassesse; élégant sans artifice. Il sent tout ce qu'il dit, & le dit toujours de la maniere dont il faut le dire, pour persuader qu'il le sent.⁵⁰

In the case of Tibullus everything breathes an air of truth. He is tender, natural, delicate, passionate, noble without any pomp; simple without baseness; elegant without recourse to artifice. He feels everything he utters, & always says it in the way it must be said in order to persuade others that he feels it.

Elements of this description of Tibullus would go on to factor into a number of the praises heaped on

⁴⁹ See Cahusac, "Étendue," in Diderot and d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, VI, 47.

⁵⁰ See Edme-François Mallet, Jean-François Marmontel, and Louis de Jaucourt, "Élégie," in Diderot and d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, V, 488.

the voice of Le Maure, from naturalness and nobility without pomp to elegance without artifice. At the same time, however, Pélissier would also be singled out for some of these characteristics, particularly tenderness and passion.

The association between the *filles de l'Opéra* and an element of concealment, deception, and dubiousness in the form of artifice was at home in the work of the *encyclopédistes* in the middle of the century as well as in correspondence and satirical literature that circulated decades earlier both in and outside of France. In a lengthy discussion of the iniquities of women on stage, the marquis d'Argens called attention to the indiscriminate taste these women had for men young and old, affluent and humble, and singled out the deceptive manner in which they feigned poise and modesty to lure their prey.

Qui sont les gens qui fréquentent les filles publiques de la rue Longare & de la Serena? Peu de personnes, en état de faire une certaine dépense, & nées dans un rang distingué, s'abaissent jusqu'au point de se laisser entrainer à de pareils excès. S'ils voient ces sortes de femmes, le commerce qu'ils ont avec elles, ne peut porter préjudice ni à leur honneur, ni à leur bourse. Le peuple, les gens d'une naissance obscure, quelques bourgeois débauchés peuvent tomber dans leurs pièges; encore le cas n'arrive-t-il pas souvent. L'horreur qu'inspire le métier infâme des courtisanes, est un préservatif contre leurs attraits & leurs charmes. L'idée que le public a de leur caractère, les rend moins pernicieuses à la Société; l'on hait ordinairement le vice, qui ne sait pas se couvrir des apparences de la vertu. Leur profession les met à même de voir bonne compagnie, elles savent, sous un maintien déguisé & un air de modestie, couvrir un coeur dévoré de l'amour des richesses, & dépouillé des sentimens de la vertu, qu'elles regardent comme une gêne importune. Elles ont des manières aimables, le vice chez elles est semblable à un serpent caché dans une corbeille de fleurs. Ceux, qu'un long usage a rendu savans dans leurs maximes, ne se laissent point toucher à ces appas extérieurs: ils connoissent trop le fond de leur coeur pour être la dupe de leurs artifices; mais un nombre de jeunes gens sans expérience, de vieillards sans jugement, donnent dans les pièges qu'on leur tend. Ils sont d'autant plus difficiles à éviter, que ces sortes de femmes savent prendre le caractère qu'elles veulent. Prothée ne sut pas se déguiser sous un plus grand nombre de différentes formes qu'une fille de l'Opéra.⁵¹

Who are the people who frequently call on the prostitutes of the rue Longare & de la Serena? Few people in a position to make a certain expenditure, & born into a distinguished rank, lower themselves to the point of being drawn to such excess. If they see these kinds of women, the commerce they strike up with them cannot affect either their honor or their wallet. People, men of obscure birth, some debauched bourgeois, may fall into their traps; even if it does not happen to you very often. The horror that drives the infamous trade of courtesans is a vaccine against their attractions & charms. The idea the public has about their character makes them less pernicious to Society; one who cannot cover the appearance of virtue usually despises vice. Their profession even places them in a position to keep good company, they know, by a kind of disguised poise & an air of modesty, how to overtake a

⁵¹ See Argens, *Lettres juives*, I, 222.

heart consumed by love for wealth, & stripped of virtuous sentiments, which they regard as an unwelcome discomfort. They have likeable mannerisms, among them, vice is like a snake hidden in a basket of flowers. Those whose considerable experience has rendered them wise do not allow themselves to touch these external charms: they are too well acquainted with the foundation of their hearts to be duped by their chicanery; but a number of young people without experience, and the aged without judgment, submit to their snares. They are even more difficult to avoid, since these kinds of women know how to assume whatever character they wish. Proteus does not know how to disguise himself in as many different forms as a *fille de l'Opéra*.

The marquis likened the vices of these women to snakes hidden in baskets of flowers and throughout his lengthy discussion he advanced the same association with which readers of the Aïssé letters would have been familiar, namely that the *fille de l'Opéra* and the *fille publique* or common prostitute were one and the same.⁵² As an attack on the base morality of the *filles de l'Opéra* this discussion was not particularly original or exceptional in the early decades of the eighteenth century. At the same time it acknowledged women on stage in a new way, underscoring their aversion to decorum and decency yet also tracing their success in sexual commerce and musical performance to their unspeakable proteanism, something that was clearly regarded as both a positive and negative attribute. The woman who was able to turn into anything or anyone was obviously an asset in the theater, where she was called upon to portray every imaginable emotion. This same versatility could nevertheless signal the kind of changeability and inconstancy with which thieves and courtesans were associated; such a woman was the ultimate trickster. The marquis went on to detail the supremely terrifying end result not only of romantic involvement with these women but of the experience of being taken in by their charms in the theater.

Celles-ci charment par les oreilles & par les yeux. Lorsqu'un mortel a été assez malheureux pour tomber dans les pièges de ces enchanteresses, il est perdu & renfermé dans un labyrinthe dont il ne sort plus. L'adresse, la fourberie, les faux sermens, la feinte, le désespoir simulé, la fausse assurance d'une tendresse éternelle sont des détours dans lesquels il ne sauroient se retrouver. Le talent de retenir un coeur dans ses chaînes est réservé aux filles de l'Opéra. Apperçoivent-elles que la jouissance & la tranquillité rendent leurs amans moins empressés, elles savent leur donner à propos de la jalousie; mais la dose en est si bien compensée, qu'elles ne craignent point que le dépit fasse ce que l'inconstance auroit pû faire. Croient-elles que leurs amans soupçonnent leur fidélité, aussi-tôt elles se noient dans les larmes; les sermens les plus forts deviennent les garans de leur tendresse. Pour peu qu'elles voient que leurs pleurs ne font pas l'effet qu'elles en esperoient, elles se livrent au désespoir; on diroit que leurs jours ne sont pas assurés, & qu'on doit se défier de la

⁵² See Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, 48.

fureur qui les anime. Un amant ne peut résister aux marques d'une passion si violente, il revient aisément, avoue qu'il a tort, & joint de nouvelles chaînes aux premières. Les filles de l'Opéra excellent encore dans l'art de ruiner leurs amans par les présens qu'elles en exigent; c'est une science qu'elles possèdent en perfection. Elles ont fait de leurs rapines un art qui a ses règles; les vieilles Chanteuses des Choeurs sont les Professeurs qui enseignent aux nouvelles-venues ses préceptes & ses maxims. Lorsqu'elles veulent un diamant, un habit, une coëffure de dentelle d'Angleterre, elles vantent adroitement quelqu'un de ces bijoux ou de ces nippes qu'elles ont vû à une de leurs amies.⁵³

These women charm the eyes & the ears. When a mortal is unfortunate enough to fall into the traps of these enchantresses, he is lost & hidden away in a maze he never escapes. Dexterity, deceit, false oaths, imposture, feigned despair, and the false assurance of eternal tenderness are the circumvolutions he cannot avoid. The talent of detaining a heart in their chains is reserved for the filles de l'Opéra. They know that enjoyment & tranquility render their lovers less eager, they know how they are given over to jealousy; but the dupery is so well executed, they do not fear that scorn accomplishes what fickleness would have. They believe their lovers assume their loyalty; they soon drown in tears; the strongest oaths become the pledges of their affection. As soon as they see that their tears do not have the effect they hoped, they indulge in despair; one could say that their days are numbered, & we must beware of the fury that drives them. A lover cannot resist the marks of so violent a passion, he returns readily admitting he was wrong, & attaches new chains to the first ones. The filles de l'Opéra still excel in the great art of ruining their lovers by the gifts that they demand; it is a skill that they possess to perfection. From their plundering they have fashioned an art that has its rules; the old Singers of the Chorus are Professors who teach novices their precepts & maxims. When they want a diamond, a dress, an English lace wig, they skillfully boast one of these jewels or fripperies that they saw adorning one of their friends.

Ripe with disdain for the dangerous yet ultimately irresistible deceptions of the *filles de l'Opéra*, this passage draws attention to the fury that drives these women and alleges that the tradition of grooming and mentorship among female performers at the Opéra guarantees that their studied pursuit of patrons and their habit of relieving men of their fortunes will not soon cease. Its most powerful condemnation is of the *adresse, fourberie, faux sermens, feinte, désespoir simulé* ("dubious adroitness, trickery, false oaths, mock attacks, and feigned despair") so often associated with these women, a veritable catalog of their most loathed attributes that was notable for its failure to allude to artifice, something the marquis had discussed only several pages earlier in the same collection of letters.

The demonization of artifice in critical reactions to Pélissier has implicit ties to the rhetoric of monstrosity in French critical thought in the eighteenth century. Set up as the negative to

⁵³ See Argens, *Lettres juives*, I, 225.

naturalness, monstrosity manifests as deviation and deformation. The way writers at this time described artifice was as a technique tied to some degree of concealment and artfulness, one that deviated from and even thwarted nature and naturalness. The opposition of art and nature, which Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park have described as an early modern conceptual reflex, extended all the way back to the ancient world, when the distinction between art and nature was elaborated by Aristotle, who claimed artifacts or objects fashioned after more perfect models in nature lacked ontological identity.⁵⁴ This sentiment persisted into the early modern era, when writers revisited Aristotle and remarked on the fundamental inability of art and artfulness to attain the effects of nature and the natural.⁵⁵ The monstrous and the artificial are thus two domains aligned by their negative relation to naturalness. As the fraught result of congenital defects, the so-called monstrous birth was one of the touchstones of discourses of monstrosity in the eighteenth century and shocked commentators both amateur and professional by manifesting deeply ingrained fears about hybridity, abnormality, the grotesque, and that which lay beyond the boundaries of reason and logic. As anathema to normalcy, the monstrous birth and just as equally the monster of metaphor and the imagination challenged the standards of pleasure and perfection that gave order and meaning to Enlightenment epistemology.⁵⁶ The monstrous flew in the face of the natural. In a similar vein, artifice and the artificial, through their alignment with pretense, fraud, and lack of substance, stood at the opposite end of the spectrum extending from the unforced and natural to the mannered and inauthentic. Throughout the various *Encyclopédie* articles in which it makes an appearance, artifice stands for a ruse or deception, a manner of presenting oneself that is decidedly unnatural, strained yet somehow seductive. In theater and at the Opéra artifice was among the elements a singer kept in

⁵⁴ See Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1998), 264.

⁵⁵ See Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983), 272.

⁵⁶ On the normative order against which monstrosity was defined in the eighteenth century, see Roy Porter, “Enlightenment and Pleasure,” in *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (Washington Square: New York University Press, 1996), 1–19, and Frank Manuel, *Shapes of Philosophical History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 92–114.

his or her bag of tricks, which included elaborate pantomimes as well as various techniques of extending and artfully transforming the voice.

The Platonic tradition of hostility toward the artificiality of the actor on stage was taken up again in early Christian philosophy and in the writings of Tertullian, whose moralizing treatise *De spectaculis* lambasted the art of acting as a perversion of divine gifts and lamented the degradation of the image of the divine in the various artifices of actors who disguised themselves, donned masks, and feigned tears and pathetic expressions.⁵⁷ In rhetoric as in the theatrical sphere, artifice undermined the depth and sincerity associated with the unforced and natural. It is no small coincidence that writers in the French eighteenth century who confronted what they considered to be departures from nature and the natural in rhetoric and theater turned to the monstrous and the artificial to animate their critiques. Years after the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the art historian and literary critic W. J. T. Mitchell would explain something of the taboo surrounding the artificiality of imitation or representation, tracing suspicions about imitation all the way back to the philosophy of Plato. This Platonic tradition and its evolution in early Christian thought was secularized in the eighteenth century, when artifice was opposed not to a transcendent truth but to emotional sensibility.

Now it is important to realize that the long tradition of explaining literature and the other arts in terms of representation is matched by an equally long tradition of discomfort with this notion. Plato accepted the common view that literature is a representation of life, but for that very reason he thought it should be banished from the ideal state. Representations, Plato reasoned, are mere substitutes for the things themselves; even worse, they may be false or illusory substitutes that stir up antisocial emotions (violence or weakness), and they may represent bad persons and actions, encouraging imitation of evil. Only certain kinds of representations, carefully controlled by the state, were to be permitted into Plato's republic of rational virtue.⁵⁸

Mitchell goes on to describe the fundamental problem of representation as one involving the exacting of some cost, in the form of lost immediacy, presence, or truth, in the form of a gap between intention

⁵⁷ See Tertullian, *Apology, De spectaculis*, trans. Terrot Reaveley Glover and Gerald Rendall, Loeb Classical Library 250 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 413.

⁵⁸ See W. J. T. Mitchell, "Representation," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, 2d ed., ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 14.

and realization, original and copy. As he has argued, representation is that by which we make our will known and simultaneously that which alienates our will from ourselves in the realm of aesthetics and politics.

The dogged question of the limits of imitation so central to early modern debates about aesthetics comes to bear somewhat on the relationship between the artificial and the monstrous. Writing on painting and poetry in the *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), the abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos (1670–1742) famously described imitation as the recourse of painters and poets who transformed the moving effects of nature into the artificial constructions of brushstrokes and turns of phrase. Imitation as he described it works through a series of references and associations extending from the objects depicted in a given poem or painting to the soul of the affected beholder.

Les Peintres & les Poètes excitent en nous ces passions artificielles, en nous présentant les imitations des objets capables d'exciter en nous des passions véritables. Comme l'impression que ces imitations font sur nous est du même genre que l'impression que l'objet imité par le Peintre ou par le Poète feroit sur nous: comme l'impression que l'imitation fait n'est différente de l'impression que l'objet imité feroit, qu'en ce qu'elle est moins forte, elle doit exciter dans notre ame une passion qui ressemble à celle que l'objet imité y auroit pu exciter. La copie de l'objet doit, pour ainsi dire, exciter en nous une copie de la passion que l'objet y auroit excitée.⁵⁹

Painters & Poets excite these artificial passions in us, by introducing to us imitations of objects capable of inciting true passions in us. Just as the impression that these imitations make on us is the same type as the impression that the object imitated by the Painter or Poet would make on us: the impression that the imitation creates is no different from the impression that the imitated object would make, except that in fact it is less strong, it must excite in our soul a passion that resembles the one that the imitated object would have been able to excite. The copy of the object must, as one might say, excite in us a copy of passion that the object would have excited there.

The excitement of artificial passions in the beholder maintains links to the artificiality bound up in poetic and painterly imitation, which can only render its beholders moved and affected by a kind of second-hand, second-rate copy of the workings of nature and the natural. The impression that imitations make on us is the same as the impression that their models in nature would make on us with one crucial exception, namely that the effects of imitation are less forceful and less pure. For

⁵⁹ See Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, nouv. éd., 3 vols. (Paris: Pierre-Jean Mariette, 1733), I, 26.

Dubos, when we confront the products of poetic and painterly imitation, we deal in copies instead of originals; we enjoy the simulation of a passion instead of the authentic affect occurring in nature.

The passions incited by musical performances remained similarly unnatural in the sense that they were summoned by men and women forever playing a role, feigning a connection to passions in nature.

Dubos is even more clear about the artifice of imitation in a subsequent passage in which he quotes Aristotle on the enticing qualities of the most successful painterly imitation.

On conçoit facilement la raison de la difference qui se trouve entre l'impression faite par l'objet même & l'impression faite par l'imitation. L'imitation la plus parfaite n'a qu'un être artificiel, elle n'a qu'une vie empruntée, au lieu que la force & l'activité de la nature se trouve dans l'objet imité. C'est en vertu du pouvoir qu'il tient de la nature même que l'objet réel agit sur nous. *Namque iis qua in exemplum assumimus subset natura & vera vis, contra omnis imitatio ficta*, dit Quintilien. Voilà d'où procede le plaisir que la Poésie & la Peinture font à tous les hommes. Voilà pourquoi nous regardons avec contentement les peintures dont le merite consiste à mettre sous nos yeux des aventures si funestes, qu'elles nous auroient fait horreur si nous les avions vûes veritablement, car comme le dit Aristote dans sa poétique: *Des monstres & des hommes morts ou mourants que nous n'oserions regarder ou que nous ne verrions qu'avec horreur, nous les voïons avec plaisir imitez dans les ouvrages des Peintres. Mieux ils sont imitez, plus nous les regardons avidement*. Il en est de même des imitations que fait la Poésie.⁶⁰

One easily conceives the reason for the difference between the impression made by the object & the impression made by imitation. The most perfect imitation has only an artificial being, it has only a borrowed life, rather than the force & activity of nature found in the imitated object. It is by virtue of the power that it draws from nature itself that the real object acts on us. *For the models we select for imitation issue from the fullness of nature, whereas all imitation is artificial*, says Quintilian. Here is the source of the pleasure that Poetry & Painting create in all men. That is why we look with contentment at the paintings whose merit consists in placing before our eyes such calamitous adventures that they would render us horrified if we saw them for real, because as Aristotle said in his *Poetics*: *Monsters & dead or dying men at whom we would not dare to look or whom we would regard only with terror—we see them with pleasure imitated in the works of Painters. The better they are imitated, the more eagerly we look at them*. The same is true of the imitations created by Poetry.

That nature offers us a purer source of moving emotions or *force* and *activité* than the imitations of natural objects that appear in painting and poetry would seem to suggest that however successful the imitation produced by the visual and rhetorical arts may be, it is nevertheless tied to elements of the forced and artificial. According to Dubos, the source of the pleasure that the imitative arts of

⁶⁰ Ibid., I, 27.

painting and poetry create in us is nature once removed; it amounts to the artificial passions that an imitated object excites in the beholder, passions that are never as pure, direct, or forceful as those stirred up by nature itself.

For Dubos, imitation remains a step removed from the pure expression of force and emotion in objects in nature. It is powerful enough to render monsters palatable but is in itself unnatural and thus aligned with the realm of the monstrous as an affront to nature. The worst evil of imitation is not that it falls short of its natural models but that it is unnatural in itself, a technique, an artifice. Boileau, for his part, foreshadowed this sentiment from Dubos in the opening of the third canto of his *L'art poétique* (1674), in which Aristotelian views on the depiction of monsters in painting seem to have played an influential part.

Il n'est point de serpent, ni de monstre odieux,
Qui, par l'art imité, ne puisse plaire aux yeux;
D'un pinceau délicat l'artifice agréable
Du plus affreux objet fait un objet aimable.⁶¹

There is no serpent, nor any odious monster
Who, by the art of imitation, is not able to please the eyes;
From a delicate brush comes the agreeable artifice
From the most ugly object comes a likeable one.

For Boileau as for Dubos the art of imitation can turn even the most vile monsters into pleasing sights to behold. Boileau does not cast imitation into suspicion, nor does he condemn it as dangerous or evil; he nevertheless calls it an agreeable artifice, that is to say something of a ruse or pleasant deception. Like Dubos, Boileau acknowledges imitation as powerful enough to render the unpalatable pleasant yet he admits in the end that imitation remains artificial and as such opposed to nature and the natural. Aristotelian mimesis was not conceived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a simple reproduction of models in nature but always as a manufacturing process.

For critiques of Pélissier to trade so feverishly in discussions of artifice and artificiality meant that writers recognized in the techniques of her performances some of the same negative elements we find among references to artifice in the articles of the *encyclopédistes*. For Aïssé to

⁶¹ See Boileau, *L'art poétique de Boileau* (Paris: Delalain, 1815), 17.

describe Le Maure as having *beaucoup d'entrailles* and Pélissier *beaucoup d'art* was a juxtaposition of terms that spoke directly to the legacy of naturalness versus artificiality described by Boileau and Dubos. *Beaucoup d'art* meant that Pélissier concealed some measure of her techniques as a performer, using art and the artificial, rather than guts, determination, and substance, as a means to securing favorable reactions from her public. Pélissier remained a performer whose recourse to artifice placed her at odds with naturalness and ease, whereas Le Maure, possessing *beaucoup d'entrailles*, tapped into a natural fortitude, stamina, and vitality that critics recognized as a marvel of nature and the natural, unforced and uncomplicated. The deep affection with which she performed her roles at the Opéra made Le Maure the antithesis of her rival, who remained caught in something of a web of artificiality and illusion and moreover caught in several humiliating social and sexual scandals in which her forthrightness was called into question. The references to grit and guts that attached themselves to Le Maure also allude to a certain depth of feeling in her performances, a contrast to the dazzling but ultimately more shallow techniques of Pélissier. Closely related to artifice, the term *art* in the expression *beaucoup d'art* is attested as early as the eleventh century and connotes artfulness and manipulative skill. This connotation is supported by definitions in *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, where we read that *art* is synonymous with *adresse*, dexterity, manipulation, and the method by which one makes or does something according to established rules. In a subsequent definition, *art* is specifically that which is opposed to *nature*, as in the examples *Il n'y a point d'art dans tout ce qu'il dit, c'est la nature qui parle, c'est la nature toute pure*, and *Il y a en cela plus de naturel que d'art* ("There is not a dint of art in anything he says, it is nature that speaks, it is wholly pure nature; in this, there is more of the natural than of art").⁶² One performer was thus the natural vocalist and actress who knew no imitators; the other was one who drew comparisons to vile parakeets, monsters, and other aberrations, all for her recourse to art.⁶³

⁶² See *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, nouv. éd., 2 vols. (Paris: Libraires associés, 1765), I, 74.

⁶³ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.° XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 357.

Intrigue

Epigrams and verses dedicated to Pélissier emphasized the ways in which her talents as an actress and singer contrasted with those of Le Maure, who never had to strain her considerably larger voice onstage. Only in one short verse composed on the occasion of her death was Pélissier praised as an enchanting, tender siren in the very same terms that writers reserved for Le Maure.

Pelissier flatteuse sirene,
Non jamais au Théâtre on n'a mieux exprimé
Le plaisir, la douleur, la tendresse, la haine.
En toy jusqu'à la mort, tout paroît animé;
On diroit à te voir dans les flots de Neptune,
Te lancer, voler au trépas,
Qu'un Triton à bonne fortune
Va te recevoir dans ses bras.⁶⁴

Pélissier, gratifying siren,
No, never in the Theater did anyone better express
Pleasure, pain, tenderness, hatred.
In you, up until your death, everything appeared enlivened;
One might say to see you in the waves of Neptune,
To launch you, flying, to your demise,
So that a fortunate Triton
Will receive you in his arms.

This characterization of Pélissier as a siren is polyvalent. While the verse acknowledges her singing as a source of pleasure and beauty it also alludes to the danger of her performative charms and her tendency to be downright seductive in the sense of the Latin root *seducere* about being led away from oneself. At the same time such characterizations indicate a partiality to seduction as a source of pleasure, charm, and aesthetic value. Pélissier was wrapped up in critical misgivings not only about her reliance on artifice but about the value of seduction, about her own affairs beyond the theater as well as her effects on impressionable listeners in the audience. While the author of this verse is not quick to point it out, it is also possible that Pélissier as a *flatteuse sirene* evoked one sense of the Old French verb *flater*, referencing the act of stroking something with the palm of the hand as well as

⁶⁴ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1732 jusqu'en 1735. Vol.^e XVIII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12633, folio 148. A truncated version of the verse appears in Gregoir, *Des gloires de l'Opéra et la musique à Paris*, I, 163.

willful deception or concealment of the truth. The idea that her significant expressive talents were such that Pélissier should become a meaningful sacrifice, thrust into the waves of the sea or even hurled to her demise, was not an uncommon critical reaction in the eighteenth century, when tensions between the celebration of women as gifted performers in the theater and popular perceptions that they threatened the order and integrity of polite society were at a high. That this verse references the connection between Pélissier and some fortunate Triton, the aquatic deity who was usually represented as a merman, is an indication that Pélissier herself was regularly and enthusiastically compared to a siren, a mythological singer and enchantress, a *femme fatale* of particular skill and cunning who could only rightfully commune with the Triton, whose calls were compared to the roaring of wild beasts. Ultimately this verse is a characterization of the remarkable vocal talents of Pélissier that writers were at pains to acknowledge elsewhere: accounts of her early performances in Paris, traced to the biographical dictionary of the brothers François Parfaict (1698–1753) and Claude Parfaict (1701–1777), detailed her success in the role of Thisbé with reservations, claiming she executed its demands *sans posséder une voix des plus éclatantes* (“without possessing the most striking voice”). Le Maure, on the other hand, took up the same role in December 1726 after what was apparently *une longue absence*, reappearing on stage *sur le Théâtre de l’Opéra, dans le rôle de Thisbé, & les applaudissemens qu’elle reçût furent très-favorables à cette Tragédie* (“at the Théâtre de l’Opéra, in the role of *Thisbé*, & the applause she received was quite favorable to this Tragedy”).⁶⁵ The source of this original remark about the feeble voice of Pélissier is difficult to pinpoint with certainty; more than likely Arthur Pougin (1834–1921), writing in the nineteenth century, misattributed the quip to the Parfaicts, since it appears instead in this wording in the *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne* of La Borde, although there is some question as to whether La Borde refers to Pélissier as Thisbé or her lover Pirame, sung by the baritone Charles-Raymond Rochard de Bouillac, who retired in 1764.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See Parfaict and Parfaict, *Dictionnaire des théâtres de Paris*, IV, 309.

⁶⁶ See Arthur Pougin, *Un ténor de l’Opéra au XVIIIe siècle: Pierre Jélyotte et les chanteurs de son temps* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1905), 58, and La Borde, *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne*, III,

A number of other satires and epigrams in which Pélissier appears nevertheless make much of her effortless style of acting, which Aïssé had commented on when speaking of her skill at pantomime. One rhymed verse composed after Pélissier participated in a 1738 revival of the Lullian lyric tragedy *Atys* (1676) went so far as to claim that her tender style of acting put critics in their place once and for all.

Sangaride est triomphante
Des cabaleurs abrutis;
Le parterre, qu'elle enchante,
Devient le rival d'Atis:
Son jeu naturel et tendre
Met la critique en défaut,
Et de l'art il ne sçait prendre
Que les agrémens qu'il faut.
Boileau, s'il pouvoit l'entendre,
Louerait les vers de Quinault.
Le public, censeur sévère,
Des acteurs fait le tourment;
Pour toi son goût persévère,
Pélissier, rien ne te coûte,
Pour nous plaire et nous toucher;
Qui plus te voit mieux te goûte,
Fût-il un coeur de rocher.⁶⁷

Sangaride is triumphant
Over sodden protesters;
The parterre, which she delights,
Becomes the rival of Atys:
Her natural and tender acting
Puts criticism in its place,
And from art it derives only
The most necessary ornaments.
Boileau, if he could hear it,
Would have praised the verses of Quinault.
The public, that strict censor,
Torments actors;
For you its taste persists,
Pélissier, it costs you nothing
To please us and touch us;
Whoever sees you more, tastes you better,
Unless he has a heart of stone.

Here the effortlessness of her acting is aptly expressed in the comment that it costs Pélissier nothing to please and touch her public. Notable also is the emphasis on her natural and tender acting style, which is not forced or reliant on artifice but borrows only the most necessary ornaments from art and artfulness. This is a reversal and reconsideration of descriptions of her artifice in other satirical verses and in the writings of Aïssé and Voltaire, and is proof that the actress polarized the Parisian public in her search for approval as a performer yet was not confined strictly to the category of the artful or deceptive. She was one of those most protean *filles de l'Opéra* of whom the marquis d'Argens spoke, a woman who knew how to appear both on stage and in the circulating critical literature *sous un plus grand nombre de différentes formes*, in a multitude of various forms and in

530. See also Émile Campardon, *Les comédiens du roi de la troupe italienne, pendant les deux derniers siècles: Documents inédits recueillis aux Archives nationales*, 2 vols. (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1880), II, 101, and Jeffrey Ravel, *The Contested Parterre: Public Theater and French Political Culture, 1680–1791* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 60.

⁶⁷ See Gregoir, *Des gloires de l'Opéra et la musique à Paris*, I, 163.

the guise of whomever or whatever she wished.⁶⁸ The tenderness of Pélissier was the subject of another anonymous verse that placed her in the category of the most memorable *filles de l'Opéra* and spoke of her tender accents and honorable bearing.

Pour chanter ta nouvelle gloire,
 Au nom des filles de mémoire,
 Rend *Pélissier* à nos désirs;
 Toi-même prit soin de l'instruire,
 De tendres accens de ta Lire,
 Pour ton honneur, pour nos plaisirs.

To sing your new glory,
 In the name of memorable girls,
Pélissier returns our desires;
 You yourself take care to instruct
 On the tender accents of your Lyre,
 For your honor, for our pleasures.

Dans ce temps heureux que tes graces
 Sous les seuls signes de tes traces,
 Dieu du chant, daigne m'écouter
 Apollon fais la reparoître
 Ne nous l'aurois-tu fait connoître,
 Que pour la faire regretter.⁶⁹

In this happy time when your graces
 Are under the signs of your traces,
 God of singing, listen to me
 Apollo makes her reappear
 You would have introduced her to us,
 Only to make us regret it.

Her honor and glory, tied to the tender accents of her singing, represent the opposite of any recourse to artfulness or artifice. These are particularly striking compliments to appear in an epigram about Pélissier, who in the *Réponse à une dame, ou soi-disant telle* of Voltaire was singled out for her reliance on art, artifice, and deception. The contradictory comments that swirled around her into the fourth decade of the century reflected the evolution of critical thought in an era when several heterogeneous models of performance and interpretation came into conflict.

The majority of epigrams and rhymed verses dedicated to Pélissier chastised the actress for her romantic affair and financial and political involvement with the wealthy Dutch Jew, Dulis. These accounts were replete with scorn for the fickle way in which Pélissier behaved. The most concise account of the affair is recorded in the journals of Barbier for December 1730.

Il a couru une histoire dans Paris, que M. Du Lis, juif, domicilié en Hollande, riche de sept à huit cent mille livres de rente, qui, dans le séjour qu'il a fait à Paris, a eu pour maîtresse mademoiselle Pélisser, une des premières actrices pour le chant de l'Opéra, à laquelle il a donné beaucoup d'argent et de diamants. On dit qu'outre les dons, il s'est plaint, un peu avant son départ, que la Pélissier lui en avoit pris, qu'elle ne vouloit pas lui rendre; qu'il vouloit en avoir raison par les voies de la justice, et que pour cet effet il avoit laissé une somme entre les mains du curé de Saint-Sulpice, pour poursuivre cette affaire.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ See Argens, *Lettres juives*, I, 222.

⁶⁹ See Gregoir, *Des gloires de l'Opéra et la musique à Paris*, I, 163.

⁷⁰ See Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763)*, II, 141.

There is a story circulating around Paris that M. Du Lis, a Jew and resident of Holland, wealthy with from seven to eight hundred thousand *livres* in yearly income, had, during his sojourn in Paris, taken as a mistress mademoiselle Pélissier, one of the principal singers at the Opéra, to whom he gave a lot of money and diamonds. It is said that, just before his departure, he complained that Pélissier had taken some from him that she would not return, that he wished to have recourse to the paths of justice, and that, to this end, he had left a sum of money in the hands of the curé of Saint-Sulpice to pursue the matter.

A lengthier satirical account appears in the anonymous *Memoires anecdotes pour servir à l'histoire de M. Duliz, fameux juif portugais à la Haye, Et la suite de ses Aventures, après la catastrophe de celle de Mademoiselle Pelissier, Actrice de l'Opéra de Paris* (1739), which details the very beginning of the whole sordid affair between Pélissier and Dulis, one that was almost an affair between Dulis and the dancer Marie Sallé (1707–1756).

Il loua une place aux Balcons de l'Opera, où les Seigneurs ne le virent pas de bon oeil, de niveau avec eux; quelques-uns même lui témoignèrent du mépris, dont il porta ses plaintes à un Ministre & il y eut ordre de ne le pas insulter. Comme il lui parut du bel air d'avoir une Maîtresse à ce spectacle, Mademoiselle Salé devint l'objet de son attention. Il chargea un Violon, expert dans les intrigues amoureuses, de lui faire des propositions qu'elle méprisa. On retourna différentes fois à la charge, en augmentant toujours le prix dont on vouloit acheter ses faveurs; mais elle chassa le commissionnaire avec menace de le faire étriller de la belle manière, s'il étoit jamais assez osé de s'adresser à elle pour pareil cas. Cette difficulté ne fit qu'augmenter le desir de Monsieur Duliz: cependant jugeant à la fin que c'étoit peine perdue, il tourna ses vues du côté de Mademoiselle Pelissier, esperant, qu'elle seroit peut-être plus traitable. C'est une Actrice, au chant de laquelle on ne peut rien désirer, qui exprime les passions de manière à les faire sentir jusqu'au fond de l'Ame, & qui avec de si rares talens, a rendu dans la suite Monsieur Duliz amoureux jusqu'à en perdre la raison.⁷¹

He rented a place in the Balconies of the Opéra, where the Lords could not see him very well from their level; several even testified to him about the contempt with which he brought his complaints to a Minister & there was an order not to insult him. Since it appeared favorable to him to have a Mistress in this production, Mademoiselle Sallé became the object of his attention. He charged a Violinist, an expert in amorous intrigues, with making proposals to her, which she disdained. He returned at various times to the charge, always augmenting the price at which he wanted to buy her favors; but she sent away the messenger with the threat of having him soundly trounced, if he was daring enough ever to speak to her again for the same reason. This difficulty only augmented the desire of Monsieur Dulis: however, judging in the end that it was a lost cause, he set his sights on Mademoiselle Pélissier, hoping she would be perhaps more accommodating. Here is an Actress whose singing leaves nothing to be desired, who expresses the passions so as to make them felt in the depths of the Soul, & who with such rare talents subsequently rendered Monsieur Dulis amorous to the point of losing his mind.

⁷¹ See the *Memoires anecdotes pour servir à l'histoire de M. Duliz, fameux juif portugais à la Haye, Et la suite de ses Aventures, après la catastrophe de celle de Mademoiselle Pelissier, Actrice de l'Opéra de Paris* (London: Samuel Harding, 1739), 53.

Enamored of Pélissier to the point of losing touch with reality, Dulis was still determined to secure from her his fair share of respect and admiration. His efforts to this end failed miserably, as Pélissier was briefly dismissed from her position at the Opéra for the affair but retained the money and jewelry she had secured from Dulis, the total value of which was recorded in marginalia in the Maurepas manuscript collection as 150,000 *livres* or more, roughly equivalent in value to one and a half million American dollars late in the twentieth century or between three and five million dollars today, more than twenty percent of the annual earnings of Dulis, which approached 800,000 *livres* or the value of over eighteen million dollars today.⁷² While it is difficult to determine the level of exaggeration in the marginalia among satirical verses in manuscript, there is no denying that Pélissier made the most of her relationship with Dulis as both a sexual and financial affair. In the space of less than two years she amassed a fortune that dwarfed the annual salaries of even the most accomplished *filles de l'Opéra*, a sum that would have been the envy of later writers considered exceptionally fortunate to have received 6,000 *livres* for a single manuscript, as in the case of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) for *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762), or upwards of 120,000 *livres* for sustained work on a project over many years, as in the case of the *encyclopédiste* Diderot.⁷³ The gossipy Parisian public had from the very beginning made much of the fact that Dulis, as a Jew, risked squandering his considerable fortune on a Christian who had no appreciation for his religious beliefs. The infamous transfer of a sizable quantity of diamonds from Dulis to Pélissier was the subject of an elaborate satire of the Opéra and its performers that circulated in the fourth decade of the century as well as in a later, revised version after the middle of the century. The satirist and dramatist François-Antoine Chevrier (1721–1762) as the alleged author of this subsequent version complained that *Les Filles de l'Opéra ont aujourd'hui plus de pierres fines qu'elles n'en avoient de fausses autrefois* (“The *Filles de l'Opéra* now have more gems than they previously had imitations”),

⁷² See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.º XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 162.

⁷³ See Robert Darnton, “Policing Writers in Paris Circa 1750,” *Representations* 5 (1984), 18.

later lamenting the fact that *Leur en donner c'est être dupe; leur en prêter c'est courir grand risque; on en est toujours quitte pour les perdre* ("To give to them is to be duped; to lend to them is to run a great deal of risk; we are still left to lose").⁷⁴ As a reference to the gifts Dulis lavished on Pélissier, the satire warned those who frequented the theater not to become enmeshed in dangerous transactions with the *filles de l'Opéra*, whose considerable cunning threatened the material and political demise of their patrons and lovers.

The affair between Pélissier and Dulis took a startling turn after Dulis, seeking the return of the diamonds he had offered her, enlisted the services of François Aline, dit Joinville, dit La France, who was paid a sum of 15,000 *livres* and entrusted with disfiguring the face of the great actress with some corrosive agent or, in the event that that did not work, simply slashing her face with a knife, ending her stage career once and for all. He was also hired to murder the violinist and composer Francoeur on the suspicion that he too was romantically involved with Pélissier. Joinville enlisted the help of two soldiers, Laurent Laure and Louis Glaron, dit Dragon, as well as Pierre La Fouasse, dit Vitry, a former domestic servant of the *chevalier des Ordres du Roi*, Henri de Mornay, marquis de Monchevreuil (1622–1706), promising them one *louis d'or* or twenty-four *livres* each for their cooperation. On the evening of Sunday, March 4, 1731, Joinville and two accomplices armed with batons waited for Francoeur at the doors of the Opéra. As Francoeur was in the company of several colleagues who followed him all the way home, Joinville and his accomplices had to abandon their plot. In the days prior, the Parisian police, in particular the administrator René Hérault (1691–1740) as *lieutenant général de police*, had been tipped off to the whole dubious scheme by the man the illiterate Joinville had enlisted to transcribe his correspondence with Dulis, and the authorities promptly hauled Joinville into jail. His trial took place the following month and involved convictions for him as well as for Dulis *in absentia*. An appeal before the *parlement de Paris* took place at the beginning of May, in which Joinville claimed he had planned not to disfigure Pélissier but to ruin her

⁷⁴ See the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra, qui condamne cent une Propositions extraites de deux Ecrits intitulés: Reflexions sur les vrais principes de l'Harmonie, & Lettre sur l'origine & les progrès de l'Académie Royale de Musique* (Cytheropolis: n.p., 1754), 16.

reputation in public. He was nevertheless denied his appeal and sentenced not only to torture on the rack but to having his legs and arms broken on the scaffold in the place de Grève, the site of the majority of public executions in early Paris and presently the site of the place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville on the right bank. Dulis, for his part, was faced with increasing financial penalties, while the small group Joinville had bribed into cooperation emerged unscathed. Joinville was executed several days after his unsuccessful appeal, while Dulis was burned in effigy, having already escaped to England to avoid further scandal. As Barbier reported, the trial and execution served as a reminder to foreigners of what justice awaited them in Paris if they dared to pursue illegal activities there.

Au surplus, c'est néanmoins un exemple nécessaire, pour les étrangers surtout, qui, sortant du pays, croiroient pouvoir se venger impunément d'un quelqu'un à qui ils en voudroient. Mais, au demeurant, voilà un homme bien sot avec son bien de s'être ainsi déshonoré pour une p..... en quelque endroit qu'il aille à présent.⁷⁵

Moreover, it is nevertheless a necessary example especially for foreigners who, by leaving the country, believe they can exact revenge with impunity on whomever they wish. But, moreover, behold a man who was so utterly foolish with his property as to have been dishonored by a bitch in whatever spot he ended up.

While Pélissier herself walked away from the affair without bodily injury, her days as the favorite of the Parisian public were numbered, as it was not even four weeks after the execution of Joinville before she found herself frolicking, naked, in the company of several other *filles de l'Opéra* and the administration of the Opéra one evening in the magasin de l'Opéra on the rue Saint-Nicaise, where the open windows afforded the public a full view of her debauchery. An epigram that had circulated earlier on the subject of her affair with Dulis, sung to the tune of the *air de tous les capucins du monde* ("air of all the Capuchins in the world"), alluded to the thieving quality of actresses in general and Pélissier in particular and was a testament to the challenges the Parisian public had encountered in their struggle to accept her controversial relationship with Dulis, who was variously described as *circoncis*, *juif puant*, and *israélite* in satirical verses.

Pelissier, Marseille a des Chaînes
 Bien moins funestes que les tiennes:
 Sous tes Fers on est accablé,
 Sans que jamais rien tranquillise:

⁷⁵ See Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763)*, II, 157.

Quand on les porte, on est volé,
On est roué, quand on les brise.⁷⁶

Pélissier, Marseille has Chains
Much less fatal than yours:
Under your Irons people are overwhelmed,
Without anything to reassure us:
When one wears them, one is spirited away,
We are broken on the wheel when we damage them.

As the chronicles of Barbier attest, after lavishing gifts on Pélissier, Dulis sought the return of a sizable quantity of his diamonds and placed a sum of money in the hands of Jean-Baptiste Languet de Gergy (1674–1750), the curé of Saint-Sulpice, to bring the stubborn Pélissier to some kind of justice. The curé and his wealthy benefactor never got to the bottom of the matter.⁷⁷

Over thirty satirical songs in the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* record the ridiculous details of this predicament with a tint of anti-Semitism that was characteristic of satires as well as common journalism and other texts at this time in the eighteenth century, including the writings of Voltaire.⁷⁸ Many of these vignettes played up references to the wealth and poor judgment of Dulis. One *chanson* sung to the tune of the *air Au généreux Roland* (“To the generous Roland”), a reference to the livret of the Lullian lyric tragedy *Roland* (1685) in which the character Ziliante declares to Angélique, *Au généreux Roland je dois ma délivrance* (“I owe my deliverance to the generous Roland”), mocked the rapacious Pélissier, who had secured such riches from Dulis that she felt her success was assured, although she was not immune to lingering jealousy of Le Maure and Sallé.

Au généreux du Lis je dois mon opulence;

⁷⁶ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.^e XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 360.

⁷⁷ See Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763)*, II, 141.

⁷⁸ See Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews: The Origins of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), Ronald Schechter, “Rationalizing the Enlightenment: Postmodernism and Theories of Anti-Semitism,” in *Postmodernism and the Enlightenment: New Perspectives in Eighteenth-Century French Intellectual History*, ed. Daniel Gordon (New York: Routledge, 2001), 93–116, and idem, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715–1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

Par ses bijoux la teste m'a tourné,
 Il vient encore d'orner mon insolence,
 D'un Bracelet qu'il m'avoit destiné.
 Je fais tout enrager, et le pauvre pécore
 M'ouvre ses Tresors chaque jour;
 J'embrace ce Nigaud d'un feu qui le dévore,
 Je me crains plus la Sallé, la le Maure,
 Il me redit cent fois pour prouver son amour,
 Triomphez ma belle Reine,
 Triomphez de l'Opéra;
 Faites sentir à ces gens là.
 Vôte mépris, mon pouvoir, vôte haine,
 Triomphez ma belle Reine
 Triomphez de ces gens là.⁷⁹

I owe my wealth to the generous Dulis;
 My head was turned by his jewels,
 He has just once again crowned my insolence
 With a Bracelet destined for me.
 I enrage everyone, and the poor blockhead
 Reveals his Treasures to me every day;
 I embrace this Simpleton with a fire that devours him,
 I fear Sallé, Le Maure yet more,
 He repeated a hundred times to prove his love,
 Triumph, my beautiful Queen,
 Vanquish the Opéra;
 Make these people feel.
 Your scorn, my power, your hatred,
 Triumph, my beautiful Queen
 Defeat these people.

Above and beyond its mockery of Dulis as a blockheaded simpleton, this verse played up its conflicted allegiance to Pélissier, who despite her association with jealousy, greed, and outright theft, is cast as a beautiful queen capable of leveling the Opéra and vanquishing its audiences. It was not the first instance of anxiety over the dangerous and destructive power of one of the most popular female performers at the Opéra, and it would not be the last, as Pélissier herself would be implicated in a lengthy condemnation of the Opéra only six years after the appearance of this verse, in a satire

⁷⁹ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.º XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 159.

by the abbé Simon-Joseph Pellegrin (1663–1745) that was rife with rancor and spared only Le Maure in its powerful censure of performers.⁸⁰

One satirical verse about the Dulis affair went so far as to blur the boundaries of the gender of Pélissier to such an extent that her hunger for power and financial standing were cast a kind of perverse masculinity, greeted with mocking celebration in a description of her circumcision.

Le vingtième jour de Janvier,	The twentieth day of January,
La Pelissier fut Circoncise,	Pélissier was Circumcised,
Elle trompa son Chevalier,	She deceived her Knight,
Le vingtième jour de Janvier,	The twentieth day of January,
Elle fit un tour de son métier,	She made a tour of his business,
Contre sa Foy et son Eglise,	Against her Faith and her Church,
Le vingtième jour de Janvier	The twentieth day of January
La Pelissier fut Circoncise. ⁸¹	Pélissier was Circumcised.

This account was recorded in the earliest months of the affair when satirists wasted no time drawing attention to the escalating level of suspicion with which the public looked upon the clash between Christianity and Judaism in this relationship; nor did anyone have any real sympathy for an avaricious, bold, and masculine *fille de l'Opéra*. An additional verse written from the perspective of Dulis himself detailed his regrets about having become entangled with Pélissier, whose greed weighed heavily on him. Sung to the tune of the *air Cela m'est bien dur* ("That is really hard for me"), the *chanson* played up the cruelty and brutality of Pélissier, all the while painting Dulis as a sensitive and benevolent patron.

Que je regrette mes largesses,	I regret my financial generosity,
C'est bien cher payé des Chansons;	It is truly costly to pay for Songs;
Quand je te donnois des richesses,	When I gave you riches,
Falloit il faire moins de façons?	Was it necessary to do so unceremoniously?
Tu les prenois de si bon coeur,	You received them so heartily,
Cruelle,	Brute,
Quand je me rapelle,	When I remember
Que tu tiens mon or le plus pur;	That you retain my purest gold;
Cela m'est bien dur. ⁸²	It is truly hard for me.

⁸⁰ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 53.

⁸¹ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.° XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 61.

This was not the only positive characterization of Dulis at the expense of his songbird. A separate verse appearing a full year earlier had turned to animorphism, casting Pélissier as a foul parakeet, her alleged lover Francoeur as a lame parrot, and Dulis much more favorably as a benevolent pelican, a bird whose capacity for selflessness and sacrifice had been celebrated in medieval bestiaries and early modern heraldry.

Pour conserver son Luxe et son désir honteux
 Elle faisoit un infame partage
 Des fruits de son libertinage,
 Avec un Perroquet boiteux;
 Mais leur coupable intelligence
 Ne soulageois que faiblement,
 Les noirs sourcis de l'indigence,
 Qui de leur lâche assortiment
 Faisoit le digne châtiment
 A la Péruche misérable
 Un Pélican charitable,
 Vint un jour offrir son apuy.
 Il fit pour la sauver de l'affreux précipice,
 Où l'entraînoit son penchant pour le vice
 Tout ce qui dépendoit de lui;
 Ses soins et ses bienfaits du néant la tirèrent,
 D'un gouffre de malheurs ses dons l'a préserverent;
 Mais tant de générosité
 N'obtinrent pour toute récompense
 Que l'arcins soutenus d'une horrible impudence,
 Que noirs trahisons, et qu'infidélité.
 De cette extrême lascheté
 L'illustre Pélican s'offense;
 Un Moineau franc lui dit, ce seroit un prodige
 Si pareille Péruche avoit quelque équité,
 Du Tigre le plus barbare
 On adoucit les fureurs;
 Mais d'une Coquette avare
 Rien ne corrige les moeurs.
 Ouvre les yeux, et dans ma Fable
 Ingrate Pelissier, coeur bas, ame sans foy;
 Reconnois de du Lys le Portrait véritable
 C'est le Pélican secourable,
 Qui se sacrifia sans peine, et sans effroy,
 Pour assouvir ton luxe insatiable.
 Quant à la Péruche, dis moy,

⁸² See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1732 jusqu'en 1735. Vol.^e XVIII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12633, folio 147.

Si sa figure détestable
Peut ressembler à quelqu'autre qu'à toy.⁸³

To maintain her Luxury and shameful desire
She generated an infamous share
From the fruits of her debauchery,
With a lame Parrot;
But their culpable intelligence
Only feebly brought relief
From the black eyebrows of indigence,
Which from their loose assortment
Rendered the worthy punishment
Of the miserable Parakeet.
A charitable Pelican
Came one day to offer his Support.
To save her, he braved the frightful precipice
Where her penchant for vice was enchained.
Everything depended on him;
His care and benefits elicited nothing from her,
His gifts preserved her from an abyss of misfortunes,
But such generosity
Obtained no reward
But instances of theft bolstered by a horrible impudence,
But black betrayals and infidelity.
At this extreme cowardice,
The illustrious Pelican takes offense.
A frank Sparrow said to him, it would be a miracle
If such a Parakeet had some equity.
We soften the furies
Of the most barbaric Tiger;
But in the case of a stingy Coquette
Nothing can correct morals.
Open your eyes, and in my Fable
Ungrateful Pélissier, base heart, soul without faith;
Recognize the true Portrait of Dulis
This is the helpful Pelican
Who sacrificed himself without difficulty, and without dread
To satisfy your insatiable luxury.
As for the Parakeet, tell me
If her detestable countenance
May resemble anyone other than you.

As a miserable Parakeet communing with the lame Parrot Francoeur, Pélissier was prey to the most dehumanizing of insults, not an association with immorality or thievery or any other malice, but the monstrous condition of having become a vile bird, and not just any bird, but an imitative one whose

⁸³ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.º XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 358.

babble could begin as early as a month after its birth. Pélissier would be associated with imitation as an artifice in the months and years after the appearance of this verse, always with a tint of negativity and always in contrast to what were perceived as the more sincere and eloquent performances of Le Maure. It is unclear from the context of this verse or its marginalia just who played the role of the frank Sparrow who counseled Dulis on the mock indigence of Pélissier, whose madness rivaled that of a tiger. Mocked as a stingy coquette whose morals were beyond repair, Pélissier ranked well below the otherwise persecuted and reviled Dulis in this verse. She was gifted or rather cursed with *Un coeur ouvert au vice avec pleine licence / Emprisonné pour pénitence / Dans le plus villain corps qu'ait connu l'Univers* ("A heart susceptible to vice with full license / Imprisoned for penitence / In the most vile body the Universe has known").⁸⁴ As the anonymous author of this colorful verse concluded, the characterization of Pélissier as a disgraceful, feathered monstrosity was *un Portrait si juste et si fidelle / Qu'on pourroit égaler la copie au modele* ("a Portrait so just and so faithful / That one could equate the copy with the model"). Dulis seems to have been excused his breeding and his unpopular religious views altogether, heralded as a helpful Pelican who never thought twice before sacrificing sizable quantities of his fortune to Pélissier. He was a patron whose unsung celebration of her talents and financial support of her career saved her from a *gouffre de malheurs*, an abyss of misfortunes.

Another of these subversive *chansons* sung to the tune of the *air Joconde* takes the form of a plea to Jean-Joseph Languet de Gergy (1677–1753), the theologian and bishop of Soissons who would go on to become a member of the Académie française in 1721 and archbishop of Sens in 1730. His biographical study of Marguerite Marie Alacoque (1647–1690), who would not be canonized until 1920, *La Vie de la vénérable Mère Marguerite-Marie, religieuse de la Visitation Sainte Marie du monastère de Paray-le-Monial en Charolais, morte en odeur de sainteté en 1690* (1729), was viciously

⁸⁴ Ibid., 357.

attacked by the Jansenists for its focus on the devotion of Alacoque to the Sacred Heart.⁸⁵ Languet de Gergy had earlier in the century sided with the proponents of the papal bull *Unigenitus* (1713), issued by Clement XI (1649–1721) as a condemnation of French Jansenism. Perhaps most notably, his brother Jean-Baptiste, the curé of Saint-Sulpice, had been entrusted by Dulis with a considerable sum of money and charged with getting to the bottom of the greed, reckless spending, and alleged theft of Pélissier. For this satirical *chanson* to address Jean-Joseph was both a nod to the affair in which Pélissier was swept up with Dulis and the curé and a veiled reference to the embattled tenets of Jansenism, a heretical faith under attack in Paris in these decades in a manner strangely resonant with critiques of female performers at the Opéra.

Pélissier disoit à Soissons,
Grave auteur Alacoque:
Un riche Juif baise Manon,
Et tout Paris s'en moque;
S'il en arrive un Cupidon,
Prélat, daigne m'instruire,
Faut-il baptiser le poupon,
Ou bien le Circoncire?⁸⁶

Pélissier said to the bishop of Soissons,
Grave author of Alacoque:
A rich Jew kisses Manon,
And all of Paris makes fun of it;
If a Cupid arrives there,
Prelate, deign to teach me,
Is it necessary to baptize the little baby,
Or better yet, to Circumcise him?

Yet another *chanson* on the same popular *air* turned the maintenance of Pélissier by a Dutch Portuguese Jew into a scandal fit for all of the most salacious gossips in town.

Il est vray que pour mes appas
Un Circoncis soupire,
Et que j'ay reçu maint ducats
Pour finir son Martire;
Qu'elle horreur! quelqu'un me dira,
Qu'un Juif vous entretienne!
Il est Juif tant qu'il vous plaira,
Mais la somme est Chrétienne.⁸⁷

It is true that for my charms
A Circumcised man sighs,
And that I accepted many ducats
To cement his Martyrdom;
Such horror! someone will say to me,
That a Jew maintains you!
He is Jewish so much that he will please you,
But the sum is Christian.

⁸⁵ See Jean-Joseph Languet de Gergy, *La Vie de la vénérable Mère Marguerite-Marie, religieuse de la Visitation Sainte Marie du monastère de Paray-le-Monial en Charolais, morte en odeur de sainteté en 1690*, nouv. éd., ed. Léon Gauthey (Paris: Librairie Poussielgue Frères, 1890).

⁸⁶ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.º XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 50.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

A related *chanson* in the same manuscript collection brought Francoeur into the mix for the same kind of greed that briefly cost Pélissier her place at the Opéra.

Un Circoncis pour me baiser,	To kiss me, a Circumcised man
M'offre mainte Pistolle;	Offers me numerous Pistoles;
Si j'allois le lui refuser,	If I were going to refuse it to him,
Ce seroit être folle;	That would be foolish;
Allons Francoeur,	Come on, Francoeur,
Point de rigueur,	No rigor,
Il faut que je me rende.	I must go.
Hé bien Manon,	Well then, Manon,
Rendez-vous donc;	Go if you must;
Mais partageons l'offrande. ⁸⁸	But let us split the offering.

As research by Sarah Nelson has shown, the pistole was a Spanish gold coin worth two escudos and was among the foreign currencies that continued to circulate in France despite efforts over the course of the seventeenth century to establish French currency as the exclusive means of exchange in the kingdom.⁸⁹ In the fourth decade of the seventeenth century, reforms generated the *louis d'or*, the gold coin bearing the image of Louis XIII (1601–1643), as the French equivalent of the pistole. One *louis d'or* was initially worth ten *livres* and its value subsequently rose to the equivalent of twenty-four *livres* in the second decade of the eighteenth century.

Here as in other subversive *chansons*, Pélissier is linked directly to Manon Lescaut, the hapless heroine of *L'histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (1731) by the abbé Antoine François Prévost (1697–1763), a short novel banned upon its publication in France but circulated in numerous pirated editions through the middle of the century. As references in the collections of the Maurepas manuscripts attest, Pélissier would continue to be called by the name of her literary analogue into the fourth and fifth decades of the century.⁹⁰ Manon, who capriciously tugs

⁸⁸ Ibid., 51.

⁸⁹ See Hortense Mancini and Marie Mancini, *Memoirs: Hortense Mancini and Marie Mancini*, ed. and trans. Sarah Nelson, Other voices in early modern Europe (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 36.

⁹⁰ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses. Années 1738, 1739, 1740 & 1741. Vol.^e XX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12635, folio 268.

at the heartstrings of the Chevalier des Grieux, is lavishly maintained by him for an eventually impossible sum of money, and when des Grieux is no longer able to keep his mistress as she pleases, she turns to a series of affairs with other men, launching him into fits of doubt and despair. While the rampant anti-Semitism of the satirical Pélissier *chansons* prevents Dulis from being cast as a tragic hero in the same manner as the Chevalier des Grieux, even as he was mockingly called a *chevalier*, the parallels between the two stories are telling. The fickle Manon takes leave of des Grieux at will, on numerous occasions, and always returns to him with profuse yet seemingly insincere apologies; Pélissier returned neither jewels nor money nor good favor to Dulis, who remained at the mercy of the curé of Saint-Sulpice in his pursuit of some form of justice and recompense. Manon and her lover are shipped away from Paris to Louisiana; Pélissier is forced to flee to London after her affair with Dulis leads to her dismissal from the Opéra. Both women were eminently endearing yet ensnared the men in their lives with a good deal of coquetry and charm.

Writers singled out Pélissier for her artifice in the theater with full knowledge that such a ruse in her performances also spoke to the deceptive, ultimately subversive way in which she pursued her affairs beyond the confines of the theater. As in the case of a satirical *trio comique* that circulated at the height of the Dulis affair, Pélissier appears in the midst of these references to Manon as a figure redoubled by artifice, a woman whose significance in the cultural imagination was shot through with doubts that anything native to her was truly natural.⁹¹ Instead she was constantly conceived in theatrical or novelistic terms, viewed, as it were, through the lens of the very media she interpreted as a performer. The Parisian public was keenly aware of the fact that by witnessing Pélissier in all her glory and infamy it was privy to a particular kind of theater, a public, social theater about institutionalized, dramatic theater that could shed light on aspects of the pastime considered problematic or immoral. By playing up parallels between Pélissier and her fictional analogue and by mocking the artifices of a woman who aspired to the status of star performer both

⁹¹ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.º XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 162.

on stage and off, the public could in effect continue to attend the Opéra, or attend to one of its infamous heroines, long after the staged performances themselves had drawn to a close. Moving from the spectacle of the Académie royale de musique to that of satire and public opinion, Pélissier appeared on the stage of Parisian public life as an object of fascination and repulsion.

Sincerity

Whereas Pélissier was singled out for her reliance on artifice and artificiality, Le Maure, celebrated by Voltaire for her voice, elicited sometimes contrasting, sometimes almost parallel responses from her audiences, who described in her performances an intense encounter with the ineffable *je-ne-sais-quoi* that we might best interpret as a response to her mastery, clarity, and sincerity. In a collection of poetry by Gabriel-Charles de Lattaignant (1697–1779), one entry dedicated to *Mademoiselle Le Maure, célèbre Actrice de l'Opéra pour le chant, retirée depuis plusieurs années* details the intoxicating nature of an encounter with Le Maure in the theater.

Quand par les yeux & par la voix Le Maure nous enchante,
Elle nous rappelle à la fois
De Venus & Canente,
Cette Sirène enchanteresse,
Quand je l'entends,
Quand je la voi,
M'excite un certain je ne sai qu'est-ce
Qui cause un certain je-ne-sai-quoi.

Ah! que de plaisirs à la fois,
Vous voir & vous entendre!
C'est tout au plus lorsque je bois
Et même au fort de mon yvresse,
C'est à vous seule que je dois
L'excès d'un certain je ne sçai qu'est-ce:
L'excès d'un certain je ne sçai-quoi.⁹²

When Le Maure enchants us with her eyes & voice,
She reminds us at the same time
Of Venus & Canent,
This enchanting Siren,
When I hear her,
When I see her,
A certain something thrills me
Which causes a certain I know not what.

⁹² See Gabriel-Charles de Lattaignant, *Poésies de Monsieur l'abbé de l'Attaignant*, 4 vols. (London and Paris: Duchesne, 1757), III, 138.

Ah! for the pleasures of seeing & hearing
 You at the same time!
 It reaches its height when I drink
 And even in the depths of my intoxication,
 It is to you alone that I owe
 The excess of a certain something:
 The excess of a certain I know not what.

Here the comparison of Le Maure with Canent, known in the writings of Ovid for her striking voice, goes a step further than parallels between Le Maure and Venus, the goddess of love and beauty; the enchanting qualities of her voice demanded a more detailed, vocal comparison. Lattaignant struggles to find words for what thrills him as he hears the voice of Le Maure and ultimately suggests that her striking execution rendered listeners helpless in the face of musical performance as an experience of the sublime *je-ne-sais-quoi* that defied description in words. This poem describes enchantment, thrill, and intoxication, which amount to a kind of astonishment in the face of virtuosic vocality, not astonishment as great surprise or shock but as wonderment and awe. It is also significant that Lattaignant praises Le Maure as a siren, conjuring up the same fraught celebration of pleasure, charm, and seduction that appeared in descriptions of Pélissier.

The correspondence of Destouches in the third decade of the eighteenth century overflowed with many of the praises heaped on the vocality and intensity of Le Maure elsewhere in the critical literature and was unique at the same time for calling attention to several of her perceived faults. In January 1726 he spoke of the soprano for the first time in a letter to the prince de Monaco, Antoine Grimaldi (1661–1731), highlighting the talents of the *seconde actrice de l'Opéra* who was *de petite stature, mais elle a la plus grande voix, la plus nette articulation, et les plus belles cadences qu'on puisse entendre. Une chose lui manque, c'est la legereté de gosier, et le débit du récitatif* (“small in stature but she has the most powerful voice, the cleanest articulation, and the most beautiful trills one could hear. She lacks only one thing, namely a flexibility in the throat and a flowing recitative”).⁹³ In a subsequent letter dated February 1728 Destouches singles out Le Maure for a

⁹³ See André Tessier, “Correspondance d’André Cardinal des Touches et du Prince Antoine 1er de Monaco (Suite),” *La revue musicale* 8 (1927), 108.

certain unsavory tendency to let her phrasing languish and for her growing reputation as a fickle performer in the theater, where she was prone to outbursts and liable to back out of her commitments at will; he nevertheless acknowledges what audiences so greatly esteemed: her vocal strength and beauty, her masterful articulation, and her magnificent cadential ornamentation.

La Demoiselle Le Maure tant vantée et tant désirée du public reparut jeudi dernier sur le theatre qu'elle avoit quitté depuis quelques années. On me reprochoit de n'avoir pas assez d'empressement à la reprendre. Deux choses me retenoient, son caractere tres difficile, et la mediocrité de son talent. Je convenois de la force, de la beauté, et de l'étendue de sa voix; je luy accordois une belle articulation, et des cadences magnifiques. Mais a ces grandes qualitez se joignoit une lenteur qui m'étoit insupportable, et comme notre déclamation se combine autant, et comporte la même variété que la déclamation naturelle, je sentoie qu'elle n'étoit pas propre a tous les genres, et que deux monologues lents qu'elle chanteroit avec succes ne feroient jamais la réussite d'un opéra, si elle languissoit dans le reste.⁹⁴

The Demoiselle Le Maure so vaunted and desired by the public reappeared last Thursday on the stage she had abandoned for several years. People reproached me for lacking sufficient enthusiasm to reappoint her. Two things held me back, her most unaccommodating character and the mediocrity of her talent. I recognized the strength, beauty, and range of her voice; I granted her a beautiful articulation and magnificent ornaments. But to these great qualities is joined a slowness that was unbearable to me, and as our declamation includes the same variety as spoken declamation, I felt she was not suitable for all genres, and two slow monologues she sang well would never render an entire opera successful if she languished in the rest.

As research by David Tunley has shown, although Le Maure was unabashedly avaricious and demanding in the theater as well as lacking in the beauty and charm associated with performers like Pélissier, such lead was turned into gold by the alchemy of her voice and her genius for moving audiences.⁹⁵ Her return to the Opéra in March 1740 after a number of administrative spats and her own notorious exits and retirements was the great sensation of that particular spring. It coincided with a fire in the Louvre that prompted popular poets to pen commemorative verses connecting the two apparent auguries.

Les dieux annoncent aux humains
Les grands événemens par des signes certains;
Le jour qu'on vit naître Alexandre
Le temple d'Ephèse brûla;

⁹⁴ See Tessier, "Correspondance d'André Cardinal des Touches et du Prince Antoine 1er de Monaco (Fin)," *La revue musicale* 8 (1927), 152.

⁹⁵ See David Tunley, *The Eighteenth-Century French Cantata*, 2d ed. (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1997), 8.

Le Louvre fut réduit en cendre
Le jour qu'on vit rentrer Le Maure à l'Opéra.⁹⁶

The gods announce great events
To humans by certain signs;
The day Alexander was born
The temple of Ephesus caught fire;
The Louvre was reduced to ashes
The day Le Maure returned to the Opéra.

The perceived connection between her talents and a kind of divinity or otherworldly significance was so strong that the poet and journalist Pierre-Louis d'Aquin de Chateau-Lyon (1720–1796) was moved to remark in the middle of the century that Le Maure softened even the hardest hearts, that her performances plunged audiences into a rapturous state and all but proved that she was connected in a meaningful way to divine providence.

Imaginez-vous ce que l'étendue de la voix a de plus surprenant, ce que les charmes d'un gosier, tel qu'il n'en fut jamais, ont de plus séduisant; en un mot le miracle de la nature, & vous nommerez Mlle *Le Maure*, dont la réputation a volé par toute l'Europe. Dès qu'elle commençoit à chanter, tout disparoissoit aux yeux du Spectateur, il ne voyoit plus qu'elle. Le plaisir de l'entendre plongeoit dans une douce yvresse, qui finissoit ordinairement par des cris & des applaudissemens qui approchoient du transport. En effet, cette première Chanteuse de l'univers developpant sur le Théâtre son ame toute entiere, sembloit être inspirée par le Dieu des Concerts.⁹⁷

Imagine a voice with the most astonishing range and with such ravishing beauty as has never been heard before; in a word a miracle of nature, & you will name Mlle Le Maure, whose reputation has spread throughout Europe. As soon as she begins to sing, the world dissolves before the eyes of the Spectator and he is aware only of her. The pleasure of hearing her plunges him into a sweet intoxication that concludes with cries & almost delirious acclamation. In effect by bearing the entirety of her soul on the Stage this first Singer of the universe seems to be inspired by the God who presides over our Concerts.

The connection to immortality and divinity was one writers would resume in descriptions of Le Maure in the last two decades of her life.

The dichotomy between sincerity and artifice in discussions of Pélissier appears also in *Le Temple du goût* (1733) of Voltaire, in which Le Maure is praised for authenticity in religious terms.

The reference strayed somewhat from the subject of the rest of the poem, which was a critical

⁹⁶ See Charles-Philippe d'Albert de Luynes, *Mémoires du duc de Luynes sur la cour de Louis XV* (1735–1758), 17 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1860), III, 168.

⁹⁷ See the *SIECLE LITTERAIRE DE LOUIS XV. OU LETTRES SUR LES HOMMES CELEBRES* (Amsterdam and Paris: Duchesne, 1754), 169.

reevaluation of French literature featuring an underworld inhabited by contemporary commentators and philosophers as well as a purgatory in which Antoine Houdar de La Motte (1672–1731), Jean-Baptiste Rousseau (1671–1741), and Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757) were suspended.⁹⁸ Those fortunate enough to have reached the *temple du goût* itself, a pilgrimage to which consumes Voltaire for the duration of the poem, include Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), François Rabelais (1494–1553), Clément Marot (1496–1544), and Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), while admission to paradise is reserved only for the best of the best in the eyes of Voltaire: the theologian and poet François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon (1651–1715), the theologian Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), the dramatists Pierre Corneille (1606–1684) and Jean Racine (1639–1699), whom he references alongside Le Maure and the great Racinian interpreter Lecouvreur, the fabulist Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695), and finally Boileau, Molière, and Quinault. As for Le Maure, she is characterized as a priestess or oracle reigning at her altars and communicating with her devout audiences.

Le More à ses Autels chantoit.
 Pelissier près d'elle exprimait
 De Lulli toute la tendresse.
 Pleine de grace & de molesse,
 Sallé le Temple parcouroit,
 D'un pas guidé par la justesse.
 Legere & forte en sa souplesse,
 La vive Camargo sautoit
 A ces sons brillans d'allegresse,
 Et de Rebel, & de Mouret.
 Le Couvreur plus loin récitait,
 Avec cette grace divine
 Dont autrefois elle ajoutait
 De nouveaux charmes à Racine.⁹⁹

Le Maure sang at her Altars.
 Pélissier, next to her, expressed
 All the tenderness of Lully.
 Full of grace & passivity,
 Sallé traversed the Temple
 With a step guided by justice.
 Light & formidably agile,
 The lively Camargo leaped
 To these brilliant sounds of joy
 And of Rebel and Mouret.
 Lecouvreur, further, recited
 With that divine grace
 With which she added
 New charms to Racine.

That Voltaire singles out Le Maure for piety and Pélissier for her expressions of tenderness is a subtle comparison of these two performers, one espousing faith and devotion, the other a softness, warmth, and charm that could, yet apparently did not, collapse into a kind of coquetry. This reading

⁹⁸ See René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950*, 8 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), I, 35.

⁹⁹ See Voltaire, *Le Temple du goût. Par M. de Voltaire. Edition véritable, donnée par l'Auteur* (Amsterdam: Etienne Ledet, 1733), 23.

of tenderness relegated Pélissier to the compassionate and sympathetic realm of tragic heroines in the Lullian tradition while Le Maure thwarted a long tradition of ecclesiastical hostility toward the theater and its performers by appearing here as a religious herself. As a complication of the position Aïssé had taken on these two performers, in which she acknowledged the justness and nobility of Pélissier and focused in particular on the sensual and powerful characteristics of the voice of Le Maure, this contemporaneous comparison by Voltaire is perhaps less an exercise in contrasting Le Maure and Pélissier than it is an exploration of the discursive space in which one oppositional polemic about two noted female performers could be contested and blurred.

While the critical discourse in these years inspired partisan scuffles replete with references to *mauriens* and *pélissiens* that would seem to suggest a fierce rivalry between these women and a strong public acknowledgment that they differed significantly on stage, by the time devotees of the petite, homely, yet enchanting Le Maure set pen to paper, they seemed unable to avoid borrowing and nuancing terminology at play in descriptions of Pélissier. Descriptions of the talents of one performer folded into those of the other such that Le Maure emerges from this verse as a pious phenomenon, a priestess singing at her altars at once with great love and ingenuity, and yet she is not immune to association with seduction along the lines we would customarily expect in characterizations of the provocative siren Pélissier. At the same time there remained subtle distinctions between these two performers, with Le Maure absorbing the better share of references to enchantment and religion, and Pélissier, when she was not associated with the workings of artifice, representing temptation and seduction.

Whatever the allegiances of this Voltaire verse and whatever the public ultimately perceived in its generous placement of Pélissier alongside Le Maure at her altars, it was, like so many other accounts of the *filles de l'Opéra*, not what could be considered a definitive text. These remarks on Le Maure and Pélissier as well as the concluding nod to Lecouvreur reinvigorating Racine were among the variants existing only in the first and one subsequent edition of *Le Temple du goût*. One unauthorized edition published contemporaneously with the first edition strayed significantly from the verse reproduced above, going so far as to omit any reference to Le Maure and Pélissier, Sallé

and Camargo.¹⁰⁰ What was perhaps most significant about the authoritative first edition was its characterization of Le Maure, who would be described in religious terms from this time well into the fourth and fifth decades of the century. In the passage that introduces his original description of these *filles de l'Opéra*, Voltaire sets the scene by explaining he has finally reached his destination with his travel companion, the royal minister and cardinal André-Hercule de Fleury (1653–1743), with whom he had been engaged in a number of misadventures and conversations about the arts, poetry, and musical taste along the way.

Le Cardinal répondit à Lucrece dans la Langue de ce Poëte. Tous les Poëtes de l'Antiquité qui l'écouterent, le prirent pour un ancien Romain: mais il ne s'agit ici que des François. Enfin, après ces retardemens agréables, au milieu des Beaux-Arts, des Muses, des Plaisirs mêmes, nous arrivames jusqu'à l'Autel & jusqu'au Trône du Dieu du Goût.

Je vis ce Dieu, qu'en-vain j'implore;
 Ce Dieu charmant, que l'on ignore
 Quand on cherche à le définir;
 Ce Dieu qu'on ne sais point servir,
 Quand avec scrupule on l'adore;
 Que La Fontaine fait sentir,
 Et que Vadius cherche encore.
 Il se plaisoit à consulter
 Ces Graces simples & naïves,
 Dont la France doit se vanter;
 Ces Graces piquantes & vives,
 Que les Nations attentives
 Voulurent souvent imiter;
 Qui de l'Art ne sont point captives;
 Qui regnoient jadis à la Cour,
 Et que la Nature & l'Amour
 Avoient fait naitre sur nos rives.
 Il est toujours environné
 De leur Troupe aimable & legere:
 C'est avec elles qu'il veut plaire.
 Elles-mêmes l'ont couronné
 D'un Diadème, qu'au Parnasse
 Composa jadis Apollon,
 Des Lauriers du divin Maron,
 Du Lierre & du Myrte d'Horace,
 Et des Roses d'Anacréon.¹⁰¹

The Cardinal replied to Lucretius in the Language of this Poet. All the Poets of Antiquity

¹⁰⁰ See Voltaire, *Le Temple de l'amitié et le Temple du goût, pièces de M. de Voltaire* (Rouen: Hierome, 1733), 46.

¹⁰¹ See Voltaire, *Le Temple du goût. Par M. de Voltaire*, 22.

who listened to him took him for an ancient Roman: not only Frenchmen. At last, after this pleasant dallying, in the midst of the Fine Arts, the Muses, the very Pleasures, we arrived before the Altar & the Throne of the God of Taste.

I saw that God, whom I implore in vain;
This charming God, whom people do not fully grasp
When trying to define him;
The God we know not how to serve
Though we love him scrupulously;
The God La Fontaine perceives,
And Vadius still searches for.
It pleased him to consult
These simple & naïve Graces
That France must boast of;
These provocative & lively Graces,
Whom attentive Nations
Often wanted to imitate;
Who are never captive to Art;
Who once reigned at Court,
And whom Nature & Love
Gave birth to on our shores.
He is always surrounded
By their amiable & mild Troupe:
It is with them that he seeks to please.
They themselves have crowned him
With a Diadem that Apollo
Once fashioned at Parnassus
From the Laurels of the divine Virgil,
The Ivy & Myrtle of Horace,
The Roses of Anacreon.

This description of the Graces sets up the reference to the *filles de l'Opéra* that is omitted in subsequent editions in favor of a more detailed portrait of the god of taste, from whom, one might presume, a number of these women derived their charms. He is portrayed as a deity in whom wisdom and ingenuity reigned, a figure whose bearing was as sympathetic as the tenderness Pélissier cultivated.

Sur son front regne la Sagesse,
Son air est tendre, ingénieux.
Les Amours ont mis dans ses yeux
Le Sentiment & la Finesse.¹⁰²

Wisdom reigns on his brow,
His air is tender, ingenious,
Love has lodged in his eyes
Sentiment & Finesse.

Elements of the detailed description of the god of taste and his entourage would subsequently factor into characterizations of Le Maure, particularly the idea that she possessed an enchanting voice and

¹⁰² Ibid.

a bearing that could not be fully grasped or defined as well as the fact that her admiring public loved her scrupulously. As a figure who carried on the legacy of the Graces at times in stark contrast to Pélissier and other rival *filles de l'Opéra*, Le Maure was also a woman *qui de l'Art n'est point captive*, a performer never confined to or at the mercy of the calculating and artful properties of Art.

Several decades after Voltaire, the novelist and fabulist Claude-Joseph Dorat (1734–1780) would speak to the saintliness of Le Maure in the third canto of his didactic poem *La déclamation théâtrale* (1766).

La céleste Le Maure, honneur de notre scène,
Asservissoit Euterpe aux lois de Melpomène.
Elle phrasoit son chant, sans jamais le charger,
Ce qui languissoit trop, elle osoit l'abréger.
Ce long récitatif, où l'auditeur sommeille,
Fixoit l'esprit alors, en caressant l'oreille;
Et le drame lyrique, aujourd'hui si traînant,
Avec légèreté couroit au dénouement.¹⁰³

The celestial Le Maure, the honor of our stage,
Presided over Euterpe according to the laws of Melpomene.
She phrased her singing without ever forcing it,
Whatever languished too much, she dared to shorten.
This protracted recitative, during which the listener slumbers,
Thus secures the soul by caressing the ear;
And lyric drama, these days withering away,
Lightly unfolds all the way to the denouement.

Celestial, honorable, mistress of the muses of music and tragedy, and free from recourse to strain, Le Maure is praised here in terms quite different from those that swirled around Pélissier. She is pure and sincere where Pélissier could appear artful and forced; she represents an honor and appropriateness that writers and audiences alike feared losing in the newer, more artificial style of Pélissier. The burden fell to Pélissier and to innovative dancers like La Camargo to redeem technique, novelty, and artifice in the face of their popular characterization as fundamentally immoral deceptions. Their task in a sense was the same one the *précieuses* had faced when their elaborate and intellectual expressions for simple concepts met with criticism from the likes of the abbé Jean-Baptiste Morvan de Bellegarde (1648–1734), who claimed these women had tried to

¹⁰³ See Claude-Joseph Dorat, *Collection complète des oeuvres de M. Dorat*, 5 vols. (Neuchatel: Imprimerie de la Société Typographique, 1775), IV, 95.

distinguish themselves by various eccentricities and ostentatious gestures, all the while indulging in the bizarre and extraordinary at the expense of nature, order, and good taste.¹⁰⁴

The correspondence of Charles de Caylus (1704–1754), the bishop of Auxerre who made his diocese a center of Jansenism, further clarifies the popular juxtaposition of Le Maure and sincerity, Pélissier and artifice, going so far as to call the performances of Pélissier little more than a prepared mask that she presented to the public.

Mlle. Le Maure est devine; chante comme il est impossible de concevoir qu'elle même ait chanté ou puisse chanter mieux; joue avec une vérité et une justesse qui fait tomber le masque apprêté de la Pellissier; enfin, rien à désirer.¹⁰⁵

Mademoiselle Le Maure is divine; she sings as though it is impossible to conceive that she has even sung or could sing better; she acts with an honesty and propriety that prompts the prepared mask of Pélissier to fall to pieces; at last, there is nothing left to desire.

The characterization was not far from references Aïssé had made to a blinding surplus of pride in Pélissier, whom she claimed was anything but honest in real life or on stage in the theater. Aïssé wrote only one year after her initial description of the early successes of Pélissier and Le Maure that *La Pellissier est guérie: elle étoit devenue folle, les uns disent de sa prodigieuse réussite, les autres de ce qu'on l'avait soupçonné de galanterie, faisant profession d'être sage* ("Pélissier has recovered: she had gone insane, some say from her prodigious success, others from what people suspected was gallantry, or her professing to be intelligent").¹⁰⁶ The suspicion with which Pélissier was greeted in the Aïssé letters only intensified several years later, when the characterization of Le Maure as honest, natural, and sincere was implied in the dismissal of her rival as not just eccentric but entirely bizarre and unnatural. In the midst of an account of a revival of the lyric tragedy *Callirhoé* (1712) of Destouches, Aïssé describes the sparks that flew between Pélissier and Charles-Augustin

¹⁰⁴ See Jean-Baptiste Morvan de Bellegarde, *REFLEXIONS SUR LE RIDICULE, ET SUR LES MOYENS DE L'EVITER. OU SONT REPRESENTEZ les differens Caracteres & les Moeurs des Personnes de ce Siecle*, 10e éd. (Amsterdam: Henri Schelte, 1712), 60.

¹⁰⁵ See Henry Medley, Charles de Caylus, Georgiana Susan Copley Du Cane, and John Knox Laughton, *Report on the Manuscripts of Lady Du Cane, Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty* (London: Ben Johnson, 1905), 282.

¹⁰⁶ See Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, 60.

de Ferriol d'Argental (1700–1788), the *conseiller au parlement de Paris* who was apparently not fazed by the fact that he had fallen for the more unstable, artful, and affected of the two most popular female performers at the Opéra.

On joue à l'Opéra Callirhoé, qui ne réussit pas, quoique cet opéra soit intéressant et joli; mais le grand air, à présent, est de n'aller que le vendredi à l'Opéra; et d'ailleurs, comme tout est esprit de parti, les partisans de la Le Maure sont en plus grand nombre à présent que ceux de la Pellissier. M. d'Argental est amoureux de cette dernière; il est aimé, et il s'en cache beaucoup. Il croit que je l'ignore, et je n'ai garde de lui en parler. Elle en est folle: elle est tout aussi impertinente que la Lecouvreur; mais elle est sotte. C'est un furieux ridicule à un homme sage et en charge que d'être toujours attaché à une comédienne. Tous les partisans de la Le Maure trouvent la Pellissier outrée et peu naturelle. Ils disent que c'est M. d'Argental et ses amis qui la gâtent. Cela m'afflige; mais, connoissant son abandon pour ce qu'il aime, je me console de cela parce qu'il s'en cache, et que, par conséquent, il vit plus avec le monde pour dépayser.¹⁰⁷

They are producing *Callirhoé* at the Opéra, which is failing, although this opera is interesting and pretty; but the big deal now is to go to the Opéra only on Friday; and besides, since everything is partisanship, supporters of Le Maure are now more numerous than those of Pélissier. M. d'Argental is in love with the latter; he is loved, and makes a big secret of it. He thinks I do not know, and I do not care to talk to him about it. She is crazy about him: she is entirely as cheeky as Lecouvreur; but she is foolish. It is a fierce mockery of a wise and responsible man to be forever attached to an actress. All the adherents of Le Maure find Pélissier bizarre and scarcely natural. They say it is M. d'Argental and his friends who spoil her. This grieves me; but, knowing his indulgence in what he likes, I console myself about it because he is deceiving himself, and by consequence, he misguidedly lives it up with people.

In these characterizations of Pélissier as masked, bizarre, and unnatural we can recognize a subtle parallel to a satire of Rameau that circulated in the fourth decade of the century in the midst of debates between *lullistes* and *ramistes* and appeared in the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* as a *Marsyas allegorie, ou le nouveau Cariselli* authored by the poet Pierre-Charles Roy (1683–1764). As research by Graham Sadler has shown, the whole poem as the alleged brainchild of Quinault is introduced by an obscure reference to Cariselli, an Italian musician who had traveled to France to offer his services to Louis XIV (1638–1715) with the intention of supplanting Lully, who as legend had it had greeted Cariselli with a performance of the trio *Bon di Cariselli* that ridiculed his stammer and prompted his immediate departure.¹⁰⁸ The incident formed the basis of the comedic

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 138.

¹⁰⁸ See Graham Sadler, "Patrons and Pasquinades: Rameau in the 1730s," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 113/2 (1988), 327. See also John Powell, *Music and Theatre in France, 1600–1680*, Oxford Monographs on Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 39.

entrée Cariselli in the ballet *Fragments de Monsieur de Lully* (1702) by Campra, a work whose revival in 1728 would have been fresh in the minds of readers of this satirical poem only several years later.¹⁰⁹ The satire takes as its starting point the musical contest between Apollo and the satyr Marsyas and goes on to describe the descendant of Marsyas, the child of Envy, as well as the vision the fury Megaera has of their offspring, the modern Marsyas, that is to say Rameau.

Il naîtra de vous un garçon.
 Il vivra pour vanger son pere,
 Pour contrecarrer la Raison,
 Pour faire aux Muses double outrage.
 Car outre sa rauque Chanson,
 D'écrire, il lui prendra la rage.
 J'entends, je vois l'Antropophage
 Col d'Autruche, sourcil froncé,
 Cuire jaune, et de poil herissé,
 Nez creux, vray masque de Satire,
 Bouche pour mordre, et non pour rire,
 Teste pointu, et cour Menton,
 Jambes seches comme Ericton.
 Le frénétique s'associe
 Tous les ignares impudens,
 Par qui le clinquant s'apprécie,
 Jeunes Rimailleurs, vieux pédans
 Turbulante Démocratie,
 Du faux gout sectateurs ardens;
 C'est du bruit seul qu'il se soucie,
 Toute Musique radoucie
 Ace fou, fait griner les dents
 Plus que la Lime et la Scie.
 Si dans les Concerts discordans
 Il reclame envain l'Ausonie
 Qui le condamne ou le renie,
 Je vais venir à son secours
 Vive les Marsias modernes,
 Et les Iroquois qu'il gouverne.
 Tremblez Quinault, tremblez Lully,
 Il va vous plonger dans l'oubly,
 Et si son mérite apocrise
 Tombe par un juste revers,
 Nous l'occuperons aux Enfers,
 La Lire jurant sous sa griffe,
 L'aigreur de ses barbares airs,

A boy will be born to you.
 He will live to avenge his father,
 To stymie Reason,
 To make a double outrage to the Muses.
 For in addition to his raucous Song,
 He will have a mania for writing.
 I hear, I see the Cannibal
 Neck of an Ostrich, wrinkled eyes,
 Jaundiced, spiky-haired,
 Crooked nose, the true mask of Satire,
 Mouth for biting and not for laughing,
 Pointed head, and short Chin,
 Legs dried up like Erichonius.
 The maniac associates himself with
 All impudent ignoramus
 Who appreciate trivialities,
 Young Rhymesters, old pedants
 Unruly Democracy,
 Ardent partisans of false taste;
 He is concerned only with noise,
 All calmer Music
 Makes this fool grind his teeth
 More than the Rasp and Saw.
 If in these discordant Concerts
 He clamors in vain for Italy
 Which condemns or disavows him,
 I will come to his aid.
 Long live the modern Marsyas,
 And the Iroquois he governs.
 Tremble Quinault, tremble Lully,
 He will plunge you into oblivion,
 And if his apocryphal ability
 Falls by a just reversal of fortune,
 We shall occupy him in Hell,
 The lyre will play underneath his claw,
 The sourness of his barbarous airs

¹⁰⁹ See the *FRAGMENTS DE MONSIEUR DE LULLY, Ecuyer, Conseiller-Secretaire du Roy, Maison, Couronne de France & de ses Finances; Et Sur-Intendant de la Musique de Sa Majesté. BALLET, REPRESENTÉ, POUR LA PREMIERE FOIS, PAR L'ACADEMIE ROYALE DE MUSIQUE, Le Dimanche dixième jour de Septembre 1702* (Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1702).

Comblera les tourmens divers
D'Ixion, Tantale et Sisiphe.¹¹⁰

Will increase the various torments
Of Ixion, Tantalus, and Sisyphus.

In the midst of its monstrous characterization of Rameau as the modern Marsyas, this allegory plays up references to the partially human and partially serpentine Erichthonius, related to Cecrops, the king of Athens. It also alludes to the mask of satire, the ultimate mixed or hybrid genre. Mismatched information organized into a textual or visual assemblage was the province of satire, which the English poet and pamphleteer Joseph Trapp (1679–1747) called a Miscellaneous Poem full of Variety of Matter.¹¹¹ As research by Barbara Stafford has shown, like the critical dictionaries of Bayle or the compilations of the *encyclopédistes*, satire demanded that its readers pursue a multiplicity of intersecting paths to connect various pieces of data for which there was no known or established order.¹¹² As the archetypal mixed genre it was unlike the linear writing of annals; it put contrasting units of information into play with each other, never suggesting to the reader what precisely to deduce.

The connection to Pélissier may not be immediately clear, but the prepared mask with which she confronted her audiences in performances bears some resemblance to the mask of satire, for both masks represented a threat to the intelligibility and good working order of opera as genre. In the fourth decade of the century as Rameau made his lyric debut and debates raged about his significance as a successor to Lully, fears of the unintelligibility of opera as genre dogged critics, who looked to composers as well as to performers to cement the characteristics of lyric tragedy and *opéra-ballet* that would make these genres most comprehensible and palatable to the public. In a discussion of unintelligibility, genre, and the reception of the *opéra-ballet Les Indes galantes*, Charles Dill has described genre at this time in the French eighteenth century as rhetorical, as a

¹¹⁰ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folia 143–145.

¹¹¹ See Joseph Trapp, *Lectures on Poetry Read in the Schools of Natural Philosophy at Oxford* (London: Hitch and Davis, 1742), 220.

¹¹² See Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 176.

channel through which artists and audiences communicated and as the mark of authority that allowed new artists to claim merit while also allowing audiences to judge those claims. As he has argued, composers select generic traits in order to make their creations comprehensible and to guide and assist audiences in their responses, much as a rhetorician chooses tropes and figures of speech in order to render ideas convincingly. A composition like *Les Indes galantes* was the site of a negotiation between Rameau and his audience; it was a gambit by the composer, ultimately accepted or rejected outright by audiences.¹¹³ The prepared mask of Pélissier concealed the effort involved in bringing her performances to light and posed a threat to the audiences who stood to make sense of her interpretive work in the reception of lyric tragedy and *opéra-ballet*. Like the mask of the hybrid genre of satire, her prepared mask of performance and execution distracted from transparency and order, from everything critics idealized in the solemnity and grandeur of traditional lyric tragedy. It was an artifice designed to mislead.

Le Maure, by contrast, was the subject of an anonymous poem that circulated in the *Mercur de France* in the fifth decade of the century. It praised her honor and fortitude and ventured to call her yet more popular than Rameau, who was enjoying a wave of positive reception following the Parisian premieres of his lyric tragedies, *Hippolyte et Aricie*, *Castor et Pollux*, and *Dardanus*, and the two works of *opéra-ballet*, *Les Indes galantes* and *Les fêtes d'Hébé, ou Les talents lyriques*. The comparison to the polarizing figure of Rameau is significant not only as a measure of how popular Le Maure had become, on a par even with one of the most noted composers in Paris, but of how popular associations between Rameau and the revolutionary remained in the decade following the premiere of his first major staged work.

Ce n'est point une Mortelle
 Qui forme de si doux chants,
 C'est Vénus; elle rappelle
 Et rassemble ses enfants.
 Je les vois voler près d'elle,
 Pour mieux entendre ses chants.
 De *Rameau*, belle *Le Maure*,

It is not a Mortal
 Who forms such sweet songs,
 It is Venus; she calls back
 And gathers her children.
 I see them fly to her,
 To better hear her songs.
 With *Rameau*, beautiful *Le Maure*,

¹¹³ See Charles Dill, *Monstrous Opera: Rameau and the Tragic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 11.

Vous partagez tout l'honneur,
 On l'admire, on vous adore:
 De l'esprit l'art est vainqueur:
 Un pouvoir plus doux encore,
 Vous fait triompher de coeur.
 J'admiraïs *Rameau* par lui-même,
 Quand son art ne m'offroit que lui:
 Mais, belle *Le Maure*, aujourd'hui,
 C'est pour toi seule que je l'aime.¹¹⁴

You divide up all honor,
 People admire him, people adore you:
 Art is victorious over the spirit:
 With a power yet more sweet,
 You overcome the heart.
 I admired *Rameau* by himself,
 When his art offered me only himself:
 But, beautiful *Le Maure*, today,
 Thanks to you alone, I love him.

As a document that hints at the complex relationship between composer and performer, this verse plays up the admiration Rameau secured from his audiences but confirms that the greater victory belongs to Le Maure, who wins not just admiration but adoration and love. Her immortal and beautiful performances trump the art, that is to say the compositions, of Rameau, which offer a portrait of the composer that remains cold and lifeless without the animation and realization brought to his works by the interpretation of the performer. There is a sense in which this verse advances the idea that Le Maure is transparent to Rameau, yet at the same time he could only be made lovable by the efforts of a fully present performer. It also opposes art or artifice and the spirit or even the soul, suggesting at the same time that Le Maure is so masterful a performer that she need not rely on the trappings of artifice. She triumphs over the hearts of her listeners with a powerful sweetness that earned her all the honor and admiration in Paris that was not already claimed by Rameau.

An epigram written on the occasion of her performance in the 1741 revival of the Lullian lyric tragedy *Proserpine* (1680) focuses less on Le Maure as a popular performer or even as a revolutionary in her own right than on the charged relationship she maintained with her listeners who hastened to echo back to her the tender accents of her voice. The epigram relied on the verbatim repetition of language that had come into play in at least one separate verse on Pélissier, a supplication to the god of song as the source of her powers that referenced the *tendres accens* of his lyre.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ See the *Mercure de France, dédié au roy. Decembre 1742* (Paris: Guillaume Cavelier, 1742), 2589.

¹¹⁵ See Gregoir, *Des gloires de l'Opéra et la musique à Paris*, I, 163.

Elle répand le trouble dans nos sens
 Nos coeurs sont les échos qui s'empressent de rendre
 La tendresse de ses accens
 Ses flambeaux versent moins de terreur et de flâmes,
 N'en répand du fond de nos âmes; etc.¹¹⁶

She spreads trouble in our direction
 Our hearts are echoes that hasten to return
 The tenderness of her accents
 Her torches brim less with terror and flames,
 Without spreading to the depth of our souls; etc.

A separate ode to Le Maure heaps praises on her striking voice and ornamentation, making much of the natural graces that add to the beauty of her performances and render Ulysses overcome with pleasure on account of her singing.

Ma Muse pour toi s'intéresse,
 Dans le zèle ardent qui me presse,
Le Maure reçois mon encens.
 Chez toi les grâces naturelles,
 Ajoutent des beautés nouvelles.
 À la beauté de tes accens.

My Muse is interested in you,
 In the burning ardor that presses me,
Le Maure, accept my offering.
 In you, natural graces
 Add new loveliness
 To the beauty of your accents.

Plus puissante qu'une sirène,
 Il n'est rien que ta voix n'entraîne,
 Et! qui pourroit te résister?
 En vain du plaisir de t'entendre,
 Ulise eut voulu se déffendre,
 Ton chant auroit sçu l'arrêter.

More powerful than a siren,
 There is nothing your voice does not draw away,
 And! who could resist you?
 In vain from the pleasure of hearing you,
 Ulysses had wanted to defend himself,
 Your singing would have stopped him.

C'est peu de ta voix éclatante,
 Ta cadence vive et brillante,
 Me rend encore plus étonné.
 Non, je ne sçai rien qui t'égale,
 Tu n'as qu'une foible rivale,
 Dans l'aimable soeur de Progné.¹¹⁷

Even a little of your striking voice,
 Your lively and brilliant cadence,
 Renders me again more astonished.
 No, I know no thing that equals you,
 You have only a feeble rival
 In the lovable sister of Procne.

According to this account, the charms of Le Maure are irresistible even to mythological heroes and the soprano knows no rivals on the stage. Praised as more powerful than the sirens, those ancient creatures who overpowered men with their cries, she is compared here to Philomela, the piteous sister of Procne and the woman raped, stripped of her tongue, and transformed into a melodious nightingale known for her voice. Le Maure is thus something of an amalgamation of the seductive

¹¹⁶ Ibid., I, 159.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., I, 126.

properties of the sirens as threats to reason and order and the delicate, damaged, yet equally overpowering beauty of Philomela. Also notable here is the praise for her *grâces naturelles*, the natural graces that lent her performances such depth and loveliness. Readers who pondered this text carefully would immediately have noticed the antithesis of the artifice of Pélissier, cast as an unnatural charm or ruse. At the same time the celebration of the lively, brilliant, and astonishing cadential ornamentations of Le Maure was surely a nod to one element of technique and thus a measure of artifice in her performances, even if accolades about her natural graces are what otherwise drive this verse.

Monstrosity

While references to ease and what came naturally were at the forefront of critical accounts of Le Maure, particular attention was also paid to what lay on the opposite end of the spectrum from nature, namely the aberrant and monstrous. The specter of monstrosity that Somerset-Ward has described as having haunted a number of satirical characterizations of the operatic soprano since the seventeenth century is tied in an oblique way to broader cultural fascinations and to concerns about the hybridity and malformation of the operatic genre itself in the French eighteenth century. Monsters at this time in early modern history represented the failure of reason and logic. Far from the sly phantasms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the monsters of the French eighteenth century, as exemplified in definitions in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, were largely the focus of teratology; they were traced to congenital defects, to the so-called monstrous birth. Thus we read in *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* that a monster is an *Animal qui a une conformation contraire à l'ordre de la nature* ("an Animal that has a conformation contrary to the order of nature"). The *Encyclopédie* extended this definition.

Animal qui naît avec une conformation contraire à l'ordre de la nature, c'est-à-dire avec une structure de parties très-différentes de celles qui caractérisent l'espece des animaux dont il sort. Il y a bien de sortes de *monstres* par rapport à leurs structures. S'il n'y avoit qu'une différence légère & superficielle, si l'objet ne frappoit pas avec étonnement, on ne donneroit pas le nom de *monstre* à l'animal où elle se trouveroit.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ See *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 2 vols. (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694), II, 83. See also Diderot and d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, X, 671.

An Animal born with a conformation contrary to the order of nature, that is to say, with a structure of parts very different from those that characterize the species of animals from which it departs. There are even several kinds of *monsters* according to the arrangement of their structures. One would not give the name *monster* to an animal if there were only a light & superficial difference, if the object did not astonish.

This was a clear acknowledgment of the root of the word *monstre* in the Latin *monstrare*, referring not only to revelation and indication but to denunciation and indictment. As research by Dan Sperber has shown, part of the terror of the monster in the age of the *encyclopédistes* was the fact that it was a taxonomic aberration. A fantastic animal or a monstrous hybrid did not fill an empty slot in existing taxonomies but eluded categorization altogether.¹¹⁹ So deeply ingrained in the cultural imagination was the astonishment inspired by monstrosity that even in the eighteenth century writers invoked Horace, who at the beginning of the *Ars poetica* had introduced a meditation on the need for stylistic simplicity, propriety, and the Aristotelian unities with the startling figure of a monstrous hybrid.

Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam iungere si velit, et varias inducere plumas undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne, spectatum admissi risum teneatis, amici? credite, Pisones, isti tabulae fore librum persimilem, cuius, velut aegri somnia, vanae fingentur species, ut nec pes nec caput uni reddatur formae.¹²⁰

If a painter were willing to join the neck of a horse to a human head and spread on feathers of all colors, with different parts of the body brought in from anywhere and everywhere, so that what starts out above as a beautiful woman ends up horribly as a black fish, friends, if you were admitted to the spectacle, could you hold back your laughter? Believe me, Pisos, these pictures would be like a book whose idle fancies are shaped like the dreams of a sick man, rendering neither head nor foot in a single shape.

For Horace, the creative freedom known as poetic license should never be carried so far as to allow the mingling of the savage with the tame, the serpent with birds, lambs, or tigers. While his references were not to monsters of the teratological variety but to the grotesque chimerical beings fashioned by artists, Horace was nevertheless upheld by later generations as an important source of the correlation between formal or structural deviation and monstrosity. Later French writers

¹¹⁹ See Dan Sperber, "Pourquoi les animaux parfaits, les hybrides et les monstres sont-ils bons à penser symboliquement?," *L'Homme* 15/2 (1975), 7.

¹²⁰ See Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars poetica*, trans. Henry Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 450. Translation mine.

invoked monstrosity whenever they sensed a particular work had lost sight of the Aristotelian unity of action; monstrosity also became the label to which they turned when logic, symmetry, and natural order could no longer be found, when reason and common sense were confounded and thwarted, when, as one recent writer has explained, the imagination would stir up dread on purpose for its own sake as well as for mental stimulation.¹²¹ The perceived tension between the distracting, monstrous appearance and behavior of the *prima donna* and her surprising, even ethereal voice is arguably almost as old as the institution of opera itself and encompasses the reception of operatic sopranos both male and female.¹²² In Paris in the early eighteenth century this tension was elaborated in the critical reception of the *filles de l'Opéra*, almost all of whom proved unable to escape the trope of monstrosity and several of whom were lucky enough to be singled out for the striking beauty of their voices.

As much as it traded in juxtapositions of the aberrant and the genuine, the synthetic and the sincere, the language that swirled around Le Maure and Pélissier was bound up with concerns about what was natural and what was not, that is to say what bordered on the monstrous. This constitutes an intriguing discourse about musical performance and technique that emerges at the very same time the merits of the operatic genre itself were debated. As research by Dill has shown, lyric tragedy at this time was threatened by changing tastes, the increasing popularity of danced numbers and *divertissements*, and French royal indifference.¹²³ As we know from the correspondence of Destouches, such threats compromised the tradition of lyric tragedy extending back to the Lullian

¹²¹ See Marina Warner, *Monsters of Our Own Making: The Peculiar Pleasures of Fear* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 4.

¹²² On the distinction between the mannerisms of operatic sopranos and the otherworldly, objectified qualities of their voices, see Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), *En travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, ed. Corinne Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek, SIC 1 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), and Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006).

¹²³ See Dill, *Monstrous Opera*, 31.

seventeenth century and encompassing Lullian revivals into the eighteenth century. Destouches complains in a letter from 1729 that the taste and nobility once associated with lyric tragedy no longer make an impression on French audiences.

L'Opera de *Thezée* est sur la scène depuis le 29 de novembre. Il est vêtu et décoré magnifiquement. On ne peut rien ajouter à la beauté de l'exécution, et je doute que dans aucun temps elle ait été aussi parfaite. Thévenard y fait Egée avec applaudissement, quoyque sa voix soit presque éteinte. Mlle Antier joue le rôle de Medée a la grande manière. Tribou, et Mlle Péliissier, sans avoir une grande voix, font pleurer l'auditoire aux scenes d'Eglé et de Thezée. On n'a pas plus de talent, qu'en ont ces deux acteurs. Malgré l'éloge unanime qu'on donne à l'opéra, les representations depuis quinze jours sont extrêmement foibles. Il n'y a plus de gout; les choses nobles ne font plus d'impression. Les dames qui sont la boussole des spectacles ne donnent aucun signe de sensibilité aux beautés touchantes. Les graces de la musique sont perduës; on ne connoit que celles de la danse qui ne sont pas, a beaucoup pres, suffisantes pour nous soutenir. *Alceste* reussit mediocrement, l'hiver dernier, et seroit tombé sans le secours d'un pas de deux qui attira tout Paris. Le pis du pis est qu'il n'y a point d'esperance que le gout se relève, a moins que le Roy n'en prenne pour l'Opera.¹²⁴

Thezée has been performed since 29 November. It is costumed and decorated magnificently. Nothing could be added to the beauty of the performance, and I doubt that it was as perfect at any other time. Thévenard performs Egée to acclamation, although his voice was nearly worn out. Mademoiselle Antier plays the role of Medée in the grand manner. Tribou, and Mademoiselle Péliissier, without having a large voice, make the audience weep in the scenes of Eglé and Thezée. No one has as much talent as these two actors. Despite the unanimous praise heaped on the opera, reception of the performers has been extremely feeble for the past fifteen days. There is no longer any taste; the noble things no longer make an impression. Women, who are the compass for productions, give no sign of sensibility to touching beauties. The charms of the music are lost; only those of the dance are really known, and they are not sufficient to sustain us. *Alceste* succeeded modestly last winter and would have disappeared without the help of a *pas de deux* that drew all of Paris. The worst of the worst is that there is no hope that taste will be renewed unless the King takes an interest in the Opéra.

The correspondence of Destouches paints only part of the picture. The dire situation of the operatic genre in the early eighteenth century was not only a consequence of changes in taste and the increasing insensitivity of the French public to celebrations of pomp and nobility in the *tragédie en musique*; both lyric tragedy and *opéra-ballet* were lambasted as monstrous genres at this time. The abbé Pierre de Villiers (1648–1728), who had written on a range of topics from female falsehood to the uses of satire, stated in a poem that *Les Opera ne sont qu'un fatras monstrueux* (“Operas are only a monstrous jumble”), that staged works no longer espoused any enlightened aspirations to *bon*

¹²⁴ See Tessier, “Correspondance d’André Cardinal des Touches et du Prince Antoine 1er de Monaco (Suite),” *La revue musicale* 8 (1927), 115.

sens & du Vrai, to common sense and truth; elsewhere he bemoaned their monstrous heroes, in whose unconvincing declamation *molesse* or feebleness reigned.¹²⁵ The poet Antoine-Louis Le Brun (1680–1743) looked upon the livret rather than the operatic genre itself as a monstrosity.

Ce Poëme, à proprement parler, est un monstre en fait de Poësie. Il n'a ni la contrainte de la Tragédie, ni la liberté de l'Epopée. On ne court pas risque de pécher contre les regles, puis qu'il n'en a point, & que la moindre sujétion est incompatible avec ce merveilleux qui en fait le principal caractere. Il n'est bon qu'autant qu'il produit de quoy contenter & surprendre les yeux & les oreilles, qu'il doit tenir presque toujours dans l'enchantement. C'est cette même exemption de regles & de loix, qui fait l'embarras de ceux qui composent de ces Poëmes, & qui ne tenant qu'une route incertaine, s'égarent souvent dans les espaces de leur imagination. C'est ce qui est cause que tant d'Auteurs ont crû y exceller, que si peu y ont réussi, & que les plus grands Maîtres y ont échoué.¹²⁶

This Livret, properly speaking, is a Poetic monstrosity. It has neither the constraints of Tragedy nor the freedom of Epic. Nobody is afraid to break its rules because there are none, & because the most insignificant conformity is incompatible with this supernatural element that is its principal characteristic. It is good only to the extent that it pleases & surprises the eyes & ears, which it must hold in a state of enchantment almost all the time. It is this very exemption from rules & laws that gives people who write these Poems so much trouble, & with no clear guidelines, they often stray into the wide open spaces of their imagination. This is why so many Authors thought they would excel in them, why so few have succeeded, & why even the greatest Masters have failed.

In the midst of popular perceptions that the authors of livrets had failed miserably or that their task was doomed from the start to be little more than a monstrous flight from convention, propriety, and probability, one female commentator spoke on behalf of those who felt the appearance of monstrous beasts and demons in lyric tragedies was increasingly becoming little more than buffoonery even as audiences maintained that the operatic genre itself was a mutant or an aberration.

Je vois avec douleur qu'une des beautés du Théâtre Lyrique est négligée & tombe de jour en jour dans un dépérissement très-condamnab; en bonne foi c'est une chose honteuse pour un siècle éclairé comme l'est celui-ci. Quoi! quand on employe des *Monstres* dans une Tragédie, ils sont si chéfits, si gauches, que cela fait pitié. J'étois à une représentation de Persée au Théâtre de la Cour; il faut en convenir & je l'ai dit à toute notre Province; les *Persées* se sont extrêmement perfectionnés, mais par un contraste incroyable les monstres n'ont plus rien d'intéressant, rien de ce qui les caractérise, rien de ce qui causoit si heureusement chés les Anciens cette vive impression que nous appellons *la peau de poule*. On me répondra peut-être que ce dépérissement sur lequel je me récrie, est assés indifférent; que les monstres

¹²⁵ See the *Poesies de D* V****, nouv. éd. (Paris: Jacques Collombat, 1728), 297.

¹²⁶ See Antoine-Louis Le Brun, *THÉÂTRE LYRIQUE: AVEC UNE PRÉFACE, OU L'ON TRAITE du Poëme de l'Opéra. Et la Réponse à une Epître satyrique contre ce Spectacle* (Paris: Pierre Ribou, 1712), 12.

n'attirent plus l'attention du public, qui les regarde comme un tour de gobelet; je soutiens qu'on ne voit jamais de monstre sans émotion.¹²⁷

I note with sadness that one of the beauties of the Lyric Theater is neglected & falls day by day into a highly regrettable decline; this is quite frankly a shameful thing for an enlightened century like ours. What! when one uses *Monsters* in a Tragedy, they are so puny, so clumsy, that they inspire pity. I was at a performance of *Persée* at the Court Theater; it has to be admitted & I have said as much to our whole Province; the *Persées* are much improved, and yet by an incredible contrast, the monsters no longer arouse any interest, they have nothing to characterize them, nothing that used to generate among our Ancestors that lively impression we call *goose flesh*. One might perhaps reply to me that this decline to which I take exception is quite immaterial; that monsters no longer attract the attention of the public, who regard them as mere sleight of hand; yet I maintain that one never sees a monster without experiencing emotion.

Concerned that the monstrous amalgamation of poetry and musical accompaniments known as lyric tragedy not sacrifice its indulgence in *le merveilleux*, that index of the marvelous that encompassed heaven, hell, divinities, furies, monsters, and the stage machinery that magically brought them to life, this *dame de qualité de Bourgogne* could not necessarily have her cake and eat it too.¹²⁸

Whatever the grotesque appeal of its fabricated monsters and prodigies, the operatic genre itself was freighted with a great deal of cultural suspicion; it was by turns an object of prestige and a deviation or aberration.

The poet and parliamentarian Jean de Serré de Rieux (1668–1747) employed the metaphor of monstrosity in a protracted condemnation of Italian opera published as a series of poems in *Apollon, ou l'origine des spectacles en musique*, a revolutionary document that turned its back on the considerably more favorable light in which Serré de Rieux had previously looked upon Italian repertoires. The composer and theorist Sébastien de Brossard (1655–1730) claimed the very same man had been known as a *Grand amateur, surtout de la musique italienne* (“Great lover, above all of

¹²⁷ See the *MERCURE DE FRANCE, DÉDIÉ AU ROI. AVRIL 1747* (Paris: Pissot, 1747), 103.

¹²⁸ See Aubrey Garlington, Jr., “*Le Merveilleux* and Operatic Reform in 18th-Century French Opera,” *The Musical Quarterly* 49/4 (1963), 484. See also Downing Thomas, *Aesthetics of Opera in the Ancien Régime, 1647–1785*, Cambridge Studies in Opera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 103, Tili Boon Cuillé, “Marvelous Machines: Revitalizing Enlightenment Opera,” *The Opera Quarterly* 27/1 (2011), 67, David Buch, *Magic Flutes & Enchanted Forests: The Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Musical Theater* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 34, and Dean Mace, “Literature and music,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume IV: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 720.

Italian music").¹²⁹ Serré de Rieux recoiled at what he called the monstrous bodies of tragic heroines and furthermore bemoaned the fact that *Les regles de la Scène au caprice immolées par des traits monstrueux s'y trouvent violées* ("capriciously immolated, the rules of the Scene find themselves violated by monstrous traits"), finally exclaiming *fuyez loin de nous, monstres de l'Italie* ("flee far from us, monsters of Italy").¹³⁰ He also complained that Italian repertories were plagued by an inclination to madness and excess, that everything about them tended not toward *bon sens* or common sense but toward extremity, filled with *De Sons impétueux un bizarre chaos, qui sans toucher le coeur en trouble le repos* ("A bizarre chaos of impetuous Sounds, which without touching the heart disturbs composure").¹³¹ In the midst of such condemnations he could barely summon kind words for the music of Lully. A little over one decade later, Pierre-Charles Roy, who had flexed his satirical muscles to the full in an elaborate lampoon of Rameau, complained of the tedium of French opera and of its monstrous sketches.

Les chefs-d'oeuvres de *Quinault*, les pièces de quelques-uns de ses successeurs, qui, en le suivant de loin, n'ont pas perdu de vue cet unique modèle, tous ces tableaux cédoient la place à de monstrueux croquis, à des extravagances lyriques, condamnées même par les justes admirateurs de la Musique, appliquée à des fonds si misérables. On ne se soucioit plus de Poésie: on se contentoit de chant & de cabrioles. Point d'action, nul tissu d'intrigue, ni scènes, ni caractères. Une rapsodie de Chansons déplacées, des Divertissemens arrivés par hazard, & toujours hors d'oeuvre, des Féeries, ressource commune aux imaginations stériles & dénuées de littérature, des ambigus de delire & de fadeur, quelquefois des farces obscènes & presque indignes du défunt Opéra Comique: Voilà ce que fournissoient au Public les Directeurs.¹³²

The masterpieces of *Quinault*, the plays of some of his successors, who in following him from afar have not lost sight of this unique model, all these tableaux gave way to monstrous sketches, to lyrical extravagances condemned even by true admirers of Music when applied

¹²⁹ See Sébastien de Brossard, *La collection Sébastien de Brossard, 1655–1730: catalogue (Département de la musique, Rés. Vm.⁸ 20)*, ed. Yolande de Brossard (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1994), 57.

¹³⁰ See Jean de Serré de Rieux, *Les Dons des enfans de Latone: La Musique et La Chasse du cerf, poèmes dédiés au roy* (Paris: Pierre Prault, 1734), 104. See also James Anthony, *French Baroque Music from Beaujoyeulx to Rameau*, rev. ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 110.

¹³¹ See Serré de Rieux, *Les Dons des enfans de Latone*, 63.

¹³² See Élie-Catherine Fréron, *LETTRES SUR QUELQUES ECRITS DE CE TEMS*, nouv. éd., 13 vols. (London and Paris: Duchesne, 1752), II, 8.

to such miserable resources. One no longer cared for Poetry: people made do with song & dance. No action whatsoever, not a stitch of plot, neither scenes nor characters. A rhapsody of displaced Songs, random *Divertissements*, & always a teaser, some Enchantments, a resource common to imaginations sterile & devoid of literature, ambiguities of blandness & delirium, occasionally some jokes at once obscene & nearly unworthy of the defunct Opéra Comique: Behold what the Directors have offered the Public.

Two authors of reform treatises in the middle of the century extended and amplified the association between opera and monstrosity. The editorial preface to the *Lettres à madame la marquise de P... sur l'opéra* (1741) of the abbé Gabriel Bonnot de Mably (1709–1785) observes that *L'Opera fut traité de monstre, de folie Italienne; à peine voulut-on lui permettre d'être un Concert agréable* (“Opera was treated as a monster, an instance of Italian madness; it was scarcely allowed to be a pleasant Concert”) and in the body of the letters we learn that *L'Opera est un monstre qui n'a ni proportion ni vrai-semblance* (“Opera is a monster that has neither proportion nor probability”).¹³³ This was the most conservative of misgivings, directed not only at the disproportionate nature of the genre as a whole but at the fact that staged works no longer emphasized the dramaturgical ideals outlined in the writings of Boileau.¹³⁴ As research by Geoffrey Burgess has shown, a growing dissatisfaction with dramas that were based on an increasingly deep rift between the portrayal of *caractère* and *personnage* challenged the basis of the *vraisemblance* of the *tragédie en musique*, in which verisimilitude or probability paradoxically came to be associated with more extraordinary elements, with fairies, magicians, and spectacular encounters.¹³⁵

When Mably subsequently asserts that lyric poetry has degenerated since the time of Quinault, he acknowledges that the operatic genre is still a young one with room for improvement, most notably through adherence to the unities of time, place, and action.¹³⁶ This was an unsurprising recommendation in the context of a call for reform; what was far more progressive was the manner

¹³³ See Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, *Lettres à madame la marquise de P... sur l'opéra* (Paris: Didot, 1741), 3.

¹³⁴ See Boileau, *L'art poétique de Boileau* (Paris: Delalain, 1815), 18.

¹³⁵ See Geoffrey Burgess, “Ritual in the *tragédie en musique* from Lully’s *Cadmus et Hermione* (1673) to Rameau’s *Zoroastre* (1749),” Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1998, 87.

¹³⁶ See Mably, *Lettres à madame la marquise de P... sur l'opéra*, 19.

in which Mably acknowledged the significance of the musical setting of the poetic livret, which had been called into question in the critical discourse for its monstrous intrusion into the literary content of the genre. He described music as making *une impression plus vive & plus durable que la déclamation. Elle imite ces sons antérieurs à tout langage, & que la nature avoit donnés elle-même aux hommes pour être les signes de leur tristesse & de leur joye* (“a livelier & more lasting impression than declamation. It imitates sounds that exist prior to all language, & which nature herself gives men as the signs of their sadness & joy”).¹³⁷ While music won favor, other elements struggled to attain a similar significance, and Mably singled out dance as having suffered in the move from lyric tragedy, in which it retained an important dramatic function, to the *opéra-ballet* whose minimal plots trivialized any such function. His concluding letter touched on an aspect of the perception of the genre that also implicated performers and performance. He complained that *Le grand mal, c’est que les trois quarts des François qui fréquentent l’Opera, sont de vrais Allemands, & n’en ont point d’idée. Ils n’ont que des oreilles, & au lieu de penser que l’Opera est l’imitation d’une action, ils ne le regardent que comme un Concert: c’est-là ce qui gâte tout à la fois les Musiciens & les Acteurs toujours jaloux d’attirer les applaudissemens de la multitude* (“The great evil is that three quarters of the French who frequent the Opéra are in truth Germans & have no idea about it. They have only ears for it, & instead of thinking of Opera as an imitation of action, they only regard it as a Concert; this is what spoils the Musicians & the Actors, always jealous of drawing the applause of the multitude”).¹³⁸ The monstrosity of the operatic genre as Mably understood it was both a matter of imbalance, of the discrete components of the livret and its musical accompaniment not adhering to a predictable scheme in which one was dominant, and of a shift in the public perception of the genre, whose action or drama was less and less its focal point and whose performers were increasingly regarded as responsible for its success even as they were suspect for their pride and prominence.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 74.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 137.

Toussaint Rémond de Saint-Mard (1682–1757) likewise remarked that *l'Opéra est un Spectacle monstrueux* (“Opera is a monstrous Spectacle”), further demanding to know more about *quel monstre qu’une Tragédie mise en Musique d’un bout à l’autre* (“what kind of monster is a Tragedy set to Music from one end to the other”), about how and why opera was a deformed version of true drama.¹³⁹ For Rémond de Saint-Mard one of the keys to improving the genre was to seek out opportunities for its poetry and musical accompaniments to cohere more effectively, ideally by combining the roles of poet and composer in a single person. He admits he longs to discover *que le Poète & le Musicien se trouvassent réunis dans la même personne* (“that the Poet & the Musician find themselves united in the same person”) and furthermore describes a symbiosis he sees as crucial to the survival of the genre.

On verroit ce qu’on voit si rarement & ce qu’on devoit toujours voir; on verroit la Poésie & la Musique se sacrifier l’une à l’autre selon leurs besoins réciproques. Le Poète seroit toujours d’accord avec le Musicien: nulle vanité, nulle jalousie à craindre, & de cette union mutuelle sortiroit à tout moment une plénitude & une continuité de beau, qui seroit bien nécessaire à l’Opéra, pour couvrir une partie des défauts dont vous vous plaignez.¹⁴⁰

We would see what we see so rarely & what we always ought to see; we would see Poetry & Music sacrifice themselves one to the other according to their respective needs. The Poet would always agree with the Musician: no vanity, no jealousy to fear, & from this mutual union would emerge at every moment an abundance & continuity of beauty, which would be very necessary to Opera, to mask some of the defects of which you complain.

The fantasy of the united poet and composer would haunt French writing on opera and genre decades later in the century, when the article on *opéra* in the *Dictionnaire de musique* (1768) of Rousseau spoke of the challenges involved in setting the poetic livret to music, an acoustic phenomenon that by its very nature resisted or disdained poetry and language, instead taking on an expressive language all its own.

Après avoir essayé & senti ses forces, la Musique en état de marcher seule, commence à dédaigner la Poésie qu’elle doit accompagner, & croit en valoir mieux en tirant d’elle-même les beautés qu’elle partageoit avec sa compagne. Elle se propose encore, il est vrai, de rendre les idées & les sentimens du Poète; mais elle prend, en quelque sorte, un autre langage, &, quoique l’objet soit le même, le Poète & le Musicien, trop séparés dans leur travail, en offrent

¹³⁹ See Toussaint Rémond de Saint-Mard, *Réflexions sur l’opéra* (The Hague: Jean Neaulme, 1741), 12.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 42.

à la fois deux images ressemblantes, mais distinctes, qui se nuisent mutuellement. L'esprit forcé de se partager, choisit & se fixe à une image plutôt qu'à l'autre. Alors le Musicien, s'il a plus d'art que le Poète, l'efface & le fait oublier.

After testing & feeling its forces, Music, being strong enough to walk alone, begins to disdain the Poetry it must accompany, & believes it would be better to draw from itself the beauties it was sharing with its companion. It still proposes, it is true, to render the ideas & feelings of the Poet; but in a certain sense it takes on another language, & while the object may still be the same, the Poet & the Musician, too set apart in their work, offer at once two similar yet distinct images, which undermine one another. The mind, forced to divide its attention, chooses & attaches itself to one image rather than the other. Then the Musician, if he has more art than the Poet, effaces him & consigns him to oblivion.¹⁴¹

As in the Mably letters, there is a marked insistence on the balance between music and poetry in lyric tragedy as well as an acknowledgment that the paradigm established by Lully and Quinault was significant yet in need of reform. Rémond de Saint-Mard also complains about two pressing subjects in contemporary musical practices, namely the pride and exaggeration of performers, who in their exertion rendered livret text unintelligible, and the related popularity of the *opéra-ballet*, which flaunted sensuality and as a genre remained insubstantial, marked only by *une petite intrigue, peu de récitatif, des Ariettes, beaucoup de danses* (“a little intrigue, a little recitative, some *Ariettes*, a lot of dances”).¹⁴² As research by Dill has shown, Mably and Rémond de Saint-Mard maintained that opera was not by nature a monster; instead it had evolved into one because its components had come to lack balance and proportion.¹⁴³ While the path to clearing up such a degeneration lay in the rejection of the increasing autonomy of the performer as well as the dismissal of lighter genres like the *opéra-ballet*, these reform treatises searched in vain among dramaturgical ideals from the seventeenth century for the materials to implement true generic change.

Links between monstrosity and genre were by no means limited to these reform treatises. An anonymous meditation in the *Observations sur les écrits modernes* called lyric tragedies *monstres dramatiques, qui font horreur & pitié, & où il n'y a ni bon sens, ni mœurs* (“dramatic monsters that

¹⁴¹ See Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris: Duchesne, 1768), 346.

¹⁴² See Rémond de Saint-Mard, *Réflexions sur l'opéra*, 95.

¹⁴³ See Dill, “The Reception of Rameau’s *Castor et Pollux* in 1737 and 1754,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1989, 99.

stir up horror & pity, & in which there is neither good sense nor morality”), resuming comments from a decade earlier when Serré de Rieux had lambasted Italian repertories for their lack of *bon sens*.¹⁴⁴ A contemporaneous commentary in the *Jugemens sur quelques ouvrages nouveaux*, on theories of the dramatic unities, claimed that *Un Opera est toujours un mauvais Poëme, & le plus bel Ouvrage de ce genre n'est qu'un monstre* (“An Opera is always a horrible Poem, & the most attractive Work in this genre is only a monster”).¹⁴⁵ Later in the century Pococurante explained to the title character in *Candide* that *J'aimerais peut-être mieux l'opéra, si on n'avait pas trouvé le secret d'en faire un monstre qui me revolte* (“I might like opera better if people had not discovered the secret of making it into a monster that revolts me”).¹⁴⁶ In a letter to the poet, translator, and abbé Melchiorre Cesarotti (1730–1808), even Voltaire himself referred to *le beau monstre de l'opéra* (“the beautiful monster that is opera”), which he claimed was responsible for driving true tragedy into hiding.¹⁴⁷ Inspired by such beastly creatures as the *monstre furieux* or raging sea monster of *Hippolyte et Aricie*, writers let the appearance of the fantastic and the gruesome in contemporary staged works drive their less teratological and rather more metaphorical generic attacks on these works as well as on their composers.¹⁴⁸ The distance was not great between the depiction of the operatic genre as monstrous and the characterization of its performers as animals, monsters, or hybrids.

What these allusions to monstrosity revealed were fears that the operatic genre itself was a hybrid, an unwieldy animal, an exception to the rule; they also signaled that something

¹⁴⁴ See the *Observations sur les écrits modernes*, 34 vols. (Paris: Chaubert, 1742), XXIX, 297. See also Serré de Rieux, *Les Dons des enfans de Latone*, 104.

¹⁴⁵ See the *Jugemens sur quelques ouvrages nouveaux*, 11 vols. (Avignon: Pierre Girou, 1744), I, 263.

¹⁴⁶ See Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. Louis Moland, 52 vols. (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1883–1885), XXI, 202.

¹⁴⁷ See Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat Condorcet, and Jacques Joseph Marie Decroix, 70 vols. (Kehl: Imprimerie de la Société Littéraire-Typographique, 1784), LVIX, 261.

¹⁴⁸ See Thomas, *Aesthetics of Opera in the Ancien Régime*, 155.

fundamentally disquieting happened when words were joined with, or rather obscured by, musical accompaniments. In conservative French critical thought, operatic livrets lost a measure of their poetic brilliance in their transformation into fully fashioned staged works set to music, and the criticism of operatic works constantly traded in tensions between new genres like the *opéra-ballet* and older, conservative critical values from the seventeenth century and the ancient world, between new dramatic roles for music and the traditional primacy of poetry. At the beginning of the eighteenth century commentators still treated music as a secondary art incapable of the insights afforded by spoken tragedy and the plastic arts. This attitude stemmed from both contemporary and historical, even ancient notions about the basic irrationality of music. For the Swiss theologian and philosopher Jean-Pierre de Crousaz (1663–1750), music was an extreme case among the fine arts, its features so diverse and responses to it so contradictory that it defied reason.¹⁴⁹

Il y a peu de sujets surquoi les Hommes soient plus partagez que sur celui de la Musique. S'il y en a qu'elle enchante, il s'en trouve aussi qui ne la peuvent souffrir; elle calme l'inquietude des uns, elle en fait naître dans les autres; on en voit chez qui elle répand l'allegresse, & on en voit qu'elle rend sombres & reveurs. Parmi ceux qui l'aiment, quelle diversité de goûts ne se rencontre-t-il pas? Le Peuple veut des Vaudevilles & des airs à danser; mais pour ce qui est des ouvertures, des Chacones & d'autres airs de cette force, il n'y aperçoit que du bruit. Les Nations mêmes se trouvent partagées sur la préférence, qu'on doit donner aux différentes especes de Musique. Si nos principes nous conduisent à découvrir du réel au milieu de tant de diversités, qui tiennent, ce semble, de la bizarrerie, ce sera une nouvelle preuve de leur justesse.¹⁵⁰

There are few subjects on which Men are more divided than that of Music. If there are some whom it enchants, there are also those who cannot stand it; it calms anxiety in some, while causing it in others; one sees some in whom it creates liveliness, & others whom it renders somber & pensive. Among those who love it, what diversity of taste is not encountered? People want Vaudevilles & airs for dancing, but perceive only noise in overtures, Chaconnes & other airs with this degree of vigor. Nations find themselves divided on the preference that ought to be given to different species of music. If our principles allow us to discover reality in the midst of so much diversity, which, it seems, holds to such whimsy, this will be a new proof of their accuracy.

Crousaz touches on a kind of abundant musical diversity that had unsettled writers on French opera even before the eighteenth century. Saint-Évremond preferred spoken tragedy to its musical

¹⁴⁹ See Dill, "Music, Beauty, and the Paradox of Rationalism," in *French Musical Thought, 1600–1800*, ed. Georgia Cowart, Studies in Music 105 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 204.

¹⁵⁰ See Jean-Pierre de Crousaz, *Traité du beau* (Amsterdam: François l'Honoré, 1715), 171.

counterpart and believed that singing a drama from beginning to end was in extremely bad taste. It violated the theatrical principle of *vraisemblance* or verisimilitude by demanding that composers produce musical settings of both elevated and trivial passages of text.¹⁵¹ The presence of song in opera also prevented audiences from concentrating on the nuances of the poetic text itself, something Saint-Évremond bemoaned in his discourse on operas at the end of the seventeenth century.

L'esprit ne pouvant concevoir un Héros qui chante, s'attache à celui qui fait chanter, et on ne sauroit nier qu'aux représentations du Palais Royal, on ne songe cent fois plus à Baptiste, qu'à Thésée ni à Cadmus.¹⁵²

The intellect, being incapable of conceiving a Hero who sings, seizes on the one who makes him sing, and that Baptiste is a hundred times more likely to be thought of than Thésée or Cadmus would be denied only at productions at the Palais-Royal.

Concerned that Lully and perhaps more precisely, his music, was a hundred times more likely to make an impression on audiences than the characters Thésée or Cadmus, Saint-Évremond lamented the essentially debilitating effect of music on poetry. Language lost its ability to convey meaning when composers added music to it and this structural problem in early modern French opera was not lost on commentators even in the middle of the eighteenth century in the wake of Mably and Rémond de Saint-Mard. The structural model of lyric tragedy Quinault had helped to develop in the last quarter of the seventeenth century stressed not singing so much as *scènes* of dialogue stretched over long periods of each act so that text, dialogue, and dramatic action were focal points and material that was explicitly musical, like dance, instrumental music, and virtuosic arias was relegated to discrete passages called *fêtes* or *divertissements*. Instrumental music was also considered insignificant in French aesthetic consciousness, in fact literally meaningless because without words it lacked content; the demanding nature of instrumental music was summed up early in the eighteenth century by the infamous rhetorical question of the poet and Cartesianist Fontenelle: *Sonate, que me veux-tu?* ("Sonata, what do you ask of me?").¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ See Burgess, "Ritual in the *tragédie en musique*," 82.

¹⁵² See Saint-Évremond, "Sur les opéra," 87.

¹⁵³ The aside is recorded in Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique*, 452. There is an extensive secondary literature on this aspect of French aesthetics. On tensions related to the reception of Italian

Little was praised in the lyric genre aside from the poetry upon which it was based. Such was the case in the meditations of the minister and biographer Évrard Titon du Tillet (1677–1762), in whose *Le Parnasse françois* (1732) we read that Quinault, whose poetry for spoken tragedies had been dismissed as too tender and sentimental, too reliant on prevailing *galant* aesthetics, struck a much more successful balance in his poetry for lyric tragedies.

On admire la beauté & les graces de son genie, & le tour heureux & naturel de son stile: personne n'a sçu s'exprimer avec plus de justesse, de netteté & de precision que lui. Il a bien fait connoître que notre Langue avoit les mêmes beautez & les mêmes avantages que les Langues Grecque & Latine, & qu'elle étoit capable d'exprimer les pensées les plus nobles & les plus sublimes d'une maniere vive & très-concise.¹⁵⁴

People admire the beauty & grace of his genius & the happy & natural turn of his style: no one expressed himself with more accuracy, clarity, & precision than he did. He successfully showed that our Language had the same beauties & advantages as Greek & Latin, & that it was capable of expressing the most noble & sublime thoughts in a lively & concise manner.

From the praises heaped on him in the *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise* (1704) of the magistrate Jean-Laurent Le Cerf de La Viéville de Freneuse (1674–1707),

repertoires in France, see Paul-Marie Masson, “Musique italienne et musique française: La première querelle,” *Rivista musicale italiana* 19 (1912), 519–545, idem, “La musique italienne en France pendant le premier tiers du XVIII^e siècle,” in *Mélanges de philologie, d'histoire et de littérature offerts à Henri Hauvette* (Paris: Les Presses françaises, 1934), 353–365, Georgia Cowart, *The Origins of Modern Musical Criticism: French and Italian Music, 1600–1750*, Studies in Musicology 38 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), and Jean Duron, “Aspects de la présence italienne dans la musique française de la fin du XVII^e siècle,” in *Le concert des Muses: promenade musicale dans le baroque français*, ed. Jean Lionnet (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997), 97–115. On taste formation and the resistance to instrumental repertoires, see Lionel de La Laurencie, *Le goût musical en France* (Paris: Joanin, 1905), and Georges Snyders, *Le goût musical en France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Vrin, 1968). On Fontenelle and his legacy, see Maria Rika Maniates, “‘Sonate, que me veux-tu?’: The Enigma of French Musical Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century,” *Current Musicology* 9 (1969), 117–140, and Beverly Jerold, “Fontenelle’s Famous Question and Performance Standards of the Day,” *College Music Symposium* 43 (2003), 150–160. On broader philosophical implications of these tensions in musical aesthetics and epistemology, see John Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), and Belinda Cannone, *Philosophies de la musique, 1752–1789*, Théorie et critique à l’âge classique 4 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1990). On these issues as they pertain to French opera, see Catherine Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français, de Corneille à Rousseau*, Collection Voies de l’histoire (Paris: Minerve, 1991). See also Gloria Flaherty, *Opera in the Development of German Critical Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), and Bellamy Hosler, *Changing Aesthetic Views of Instrumental Music in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, Studies in Musicology 42 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981).

¹⁵⁴ See Évrard Titon du Tillet, *LE PARNASSE FRANÇOIS, DEDIE AU ROI* (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1732), 408.

Quinault came to be viewed as an outstanding French poet as long as he was judged according to the genre in which he excelled, not spoken tragedy but the *tragédie en musique*.¹⁵⁵ Later in the century d'Alembert admitted in an elegy that livret poetry was a secondary genre outshined by its musical settings and yet still recognized that Quinault excelled in it.

La Poésie lyrique exige donc une certaine mollesse dans les idées, dans les images, dans les expressions, dans la mesure & la cadence des vers, dans leur rythme & dans leur mélange; elle exige même dans l'arrangement des syllabes une heureuse combinaison de longues & de breves, nécessaire pour que le chant ne soit pas forcé de s'assuettir à une marche trop lente ou trop rapide.¹⁵⁶

Lyric poetry requires a certain suavity in its ideas, in its images, in its expression, in the measure & the cadence of its verses, in their rhythm & in their variety; it requires even in the arrangement of syllables a happy combination of long & short, necessary so that the song is not too slow or too rapid for a long period.

The sensual beauties d'Alembert attributes to livret poetry ultimately illustrate the secondary status of the genre. Features like pliancy, rhythm, variety, and tempo could do no more than entertain because appealed to the senses rather than to Aristotelian or Cartesian *ratio* or reason; they remained subordinate to musical considerations and could neither edify the public nor elevate the genre. The fact that livret poetry had to attend to the practicalities of its musical setting rendered it second in significance to spoken language. Indeed the spirit of dissatisfaction with sung rather than spoken language stretched back to the French seventeenth century, when Corneille dismissed words that were sung as impossible for audiences to understand.

Vous y trouverez cet ordre gardé dans les changements de théâtre, que chaque acte, aussi bien que le prologue, a sa décoration particulière, et du moins une machine volante, avec un concert de musique que je n'ai employé qu'à satisfaire les oreilles des spectateurs, tandis que leurs yeux sont arrêtés à voir descendre ou remonter une machine ou s'attachent à quelque chose qui les empêche de prêter attention à ce que pourraient dire les acteurs, comme fait le combat de Persée contre le monstre. Mais je me suis bien gardé de faire rien chanter qui fût nécessaire à l'intelligence de la pièce, parce que communément les paroles qui se chantent étant mal entendues des auditeurs, pour la confusion qu'y apporte la diversité des voix qui

¹⁵⁵ See Jean-Laurent Le Cerf de La Viéville de Freneuse, *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise, où, en examinant en détail les avantages des Spectacles, & le mérite des Compositeurs des deux nations* (Brussels: François Foppens, 1704), 163.

¹⁵⁶ See d'Alembert, "Éloge de La Motte," in *Histoire des membres de l'Académie française morts depuis 1700, jusqu'en 1771, pour servir de suite aux Éloges imprimés et lus dans les séances publiques de cette compagnie, par M. d'Alembert*, 6 vols. (Amsterdam and Paris: Moutard, 1787), I, 240.

les prononcent ensemble, elles auraient fait une grande obscurité dans le corps de l'ouvrage.¹⁵⁷

You will find this order preserved in the theatrical changes, such that every act, as well as the prologue, has its particular decoration, and at least a flying machine, with a concert of music that I used only to satisfy the ears of the audience, while their eyes are arrested, seeing a machine ascend and descend or attach itself to something that prevents them from paying attention to what the actors might say, as in the case of the fight of Persée against the monster. But I am careful not to render anything sung that is necessary for the comprehension of the play, because commonly the words that are sung are poorly understood by listeners for the confusion sown by a diversity of voices who pronounce them together; they have cast a shadow over the body of the work.

The reform treatises of Mably and Rémond de Saint-Mard arose in the context of this critical reevaluation of the role of language in lyric tragedy. Both writers admired Quinault with reservations. Rémond de Saint-Mard felt the best verses of Quinault could stand with those of any other poet even while satisfying musical demands, and he singled out *Enfin, il est en ma puissance*, the beloved monologue from the second act of the Lullian lyric tragedy *Armide* (1686), writing that *Quand je vous dirai que la Scene que je viens de citer, prise séparément & en elle-même, est une chose admirable, qu'elle a tout ce qu'il faut pour produire en chant un effet merveilleux, je vous défie, vous & qui que ce soit, de me le disputer, & ne dites pas qu'elle seroit plus belle dans une déclamation simple: je dis hardiment que cela n'est pas possible, & je le soutiendrai devant toute la Terre* ("When I tell you that the scene I have just cited, considered separately & in itself, is an admirable thing, that it has everything necessary to produce in song a marvelous effect, I defy you, you & anyone, to dispute me, and not to say that it would be more beautiful in a simple declamation: I say boldly that this is not possible, and I will argue as much before the entire Earth").¹⁵⁸ At the same time Rémond de Saint-Mard professed a marked ambivalence toward the livrets of Quinault, expressing reservations about their subject matter and attributing their failings to the collaborative nature of producing lyric tragedy, in which poetry had to submit to its musical setting; in doing so he echoed sentiments expressed by Mably, who had gone so far as to claim that *Tous les poètes*

¹⁵⁷ See Pierre Corneille, *Théâtre complet*, ed. Alain Niderst, 3 vols., Publications de l'Université de Rouen 105 (Mont Saint-Aignan: Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 1984), II, 507.

¹⁵⁸ See Rémond de Saint-Mard, *Réflexions sur l'opéra*, 9.

Lyriques ont constamment fait tout ce qu'il falloit pour se faire siffler, & la différence de leur succès n'est dûë qu'aux talens du Musicien plus ou moins habile qu'ils se sont associé ("All Lyric poets have consistently done everything necessary to inspire whistling from the audience, & the difference of their success is due only to talents of the more or less skillful Musician with whom they are associated").¹⁵⁹ Rémond de Saint-Mard claimed the livrets of Quinault were *tous beaux à les prendre par détail; mais j'ai quelquefois eu le malheur de m'y ennuyer* ("all beautiful taken in detail; but I have sometimes had the misfortune of being bored by them").¹⁶⁰ As research by Downing Thomas has shown, the sentiment was related in every sense to misgivings about Quinault stretching back to the seventeenth century, when the abbé Adrien Baillet (1649–1706) remarked on the *tendresse* or sentimentality of his plays and insinuated that his poetic success owed everything to the tastes of sentimental women.¹⁶¹ Mably meanwhile praised the poet, arguing that he still was not fully appreciated, that *Quinault a été enfin vengé des traits que Despréaux à lancés sur lui; on pense aujourd'hui que c'est un Poète distingué, mais parce que personne ne nous a donné une poétique propre à justifier l'Opera, bien des gens qui le loüent, ne le regardent encore que comme un homme d'esprit qui a réussi dans un genre extravagant* ("Quinault has been avenged for the arrows Despréaux launched at him; people today think he is a distinguished Poet, but because no one has given us a poetics proper to justifying Opera, even people who praise him still regard him only as an intellectual who succeeded in an extravagant genre").¹⁶² The demands of these reform treatises and in particular their call for a poetics of opera rely on the ongoing critical tendency to treat opera according to the established principles of poetry and spoken tragedy rather than those of musical performance.

¹⁵⁹ See Mably, *Lettres à madame la marquise de P... sur l'opéra*, viii.

¹⁶⁰ See Rémond de Saint-Mard, *Réflexions sur l'opéra*, 30.

¹⁶¹ See Thomas, *Aesthetics of Opera in the Ancien Régime*, 36.

¹⁶² See Mably, *Lettres à madame la marquise de P... sur l'opéra*, 13.

In the two decades before the reform treatises of Mably and Rémond de Saint-Mard would appear, the criticism of Pélissier in particular bristled with references to monstrosity and artifice, which in their own way were nods not only to perceptions of what was natural or artificial in musical performance but to the longer tradition of distrust in the operatic genre that characterized French writing from late in the seventeenth century until after the Revolution. This basic distrust of the genre itself thus trickled down to the *filles de l'Opéra* as its performers. Those who worried over what was unnatural or monstrous about the genre were also among those concerned about what made for its effective realization in performance and particularly about the questionable morality of female singers and dancers. The abbé Pellegrin produced one of the fiercest literary attacks on opera in the fourth decade of the eighteenth century, a satire that lamented the eclipse of lyric tragedy by the lighter genre of *opéra-ballet* as well as the state of the *filles de l'Opéra*, who recklessly cavorted with patrons and lovers and worked into old age when they became toothless monstrosities and grandmothers impersonating nymphs, no longer pleasing to behold on stage.¹⁶³ Pellegrin lambasted those who performed as well as the genre itself as monstrously unnatural, even as he continued to produce staged works collaboratively as a librettist.

Commentators were ill at ease with elements of pretense and concealment in the pantomimes of Pélissier to such an extent that their attention to the technical details of her performances fed off their growing uncertainties about the integrity of the operatic genre. This made attention to more intriguing aspects of the mechanics and metaphysics of musical performance something of a genuine structural paradox in French opera criticism at this time; writers questioned the genre itself yet at the same time delved deep into considerations of what made its performers effective in the theater and memorable as technicians, as more than naïve, sentimental actresses or dancers. The discourse that swirled around Le Maure and Pélissier constitutes a significant early modern meditation on the nuances of musical performance and technique and is a measure of how

¹⁶³ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 55.

deeply ingrained the fascination with art and artifice, and the enchantment and intoxication of witnessing the operatic voice in action, had become even at a time when the value of the basic structural principals of opera was up for debate. At the same time the perceived monstrosity of performers, a consequence of misgivings about the operatic genre itself, was perhaps less related to the demonization of artifice and the unnatural than to perceptions that a great deal of hybridity and diversity characterized their performances as well as their cultural symbolism. Tied as they were to seductive sirens or immortal angels, these women were regarded as spiritual beings yet also as intensely physical entities, at once tender and alluring and polished and calculating. They were hybrids, prey to some of the same polyvalent terminology Alain Viala has described in the context of *galant* aesthetics, in which the *galant homme* was perfectly polite but the *homme galant* was *un polisson*, a scamp.¹⁶⁴ The overtones of descriptions of the female analogue to the *homme galant* were even more damning. It is not altogether inappropriate to assume that the perceived hybridity of lyric tragedy, which Thomas has highlighted as a blend of the high concerns of the tragic with the amorous focus of the pastoral, was also responsible to some extent for the perceived hybridity of its female performers.¹⁶⁵

Scrutinized for sincere or seductive theatrical performances, Le Maure and Pélissier bore the brunt of much more than the gender bias or social stigmatization that dogged a number of other *filles de l'Opéra* in the third and fourth decades of the eighteenth century. Their popularity was such that they were singled out time and again as models of ideal and at times controversial archetypes of performance; at the same time they became potent symbols of failure and change in the critical discourse about the evolution of the operatic genre, a genre the public struggled to regard as coherent and logical in the same sense as its antecedents in spoken tragedy. The increasing popularity of *opéra-ballet* ushered in the rise not only of opera as entertainment rather than literary

¹⁶⁴ See Paul Pellisson, *L'esthétique galante: discours sur les oeuvres de Monsieur Sarasin et autres textes*, ed. Alain Viala, Collection des rééditions de textes du XVIIe siècle (Toulouse: Société de littératures classiques, 1989), 30.

¹⁶⁵ See Thomas, *Aesthetics of Opera in the Ancien Régime*, 87.

solemnity and didacticism but of performers who boasted intimate knowledge of their dangerously enchanting effects on their audiences and thus threatened to upset the formal and aesthetic hierarchy that had always been native to the genre in France. The idea that the most popular *filles de l'Opéra* in Paris at this time were embroiled in the thievery and sexual scandal but even more disturbingly were encroaching on the administration of the Opéra and on highly regarded composers like Rameau was a source of great and palpable anxiety in the public imagination. It was also an indication that female performers were gaining the upper hand as agents of change in the very genres they performed. Instead of simply attracting the attention of the Parisian public through their misadventures, these women offered it a means of focusing its anxieties about the continued viability of the Opéra. While their personal disasters, physical appearance, and sporadic retreats into retirement were the proximate cause for the banal fascination these women attracted, the roots of this fascination extended back to the origins of French opera, to traditional beliefs that music could do no more than entertain and that what made French culture truly great was literary rather than musical in nature. By challenging the critical convictions of the very public they fascinated, Le Maure and Pélissier placed performance and genre at the forefront of concerns about women in the theater that had all too often limited themselves to questions of morality or physicality.

Chapter Four

Sacrilege

For all its references to craft and craftiness, the critical language in which singers like Marie Pélissier (1707–1749) found themselves caught was not only concerned with performance; it also roamed through issues in contemporary political and religious thought. A number of commentators voiced disenchantment with the *filles de l'Opéra* in musical and theatrical terms yet subsequently saw their specialized language expand to absorb references to problematic priests and parliamentarians or marginalized agnostics and heretics. Such seemingly unrelated subjects complicated musical discourse even as they often enriched the lay understanding of women on stage. One controversial actress could be glossed in some of the same terms as a controversial cleric. The Parisian audiences who struggled to make sense of the power and significance of the performing arts sometimes hewed to more traditional interpretive models from aesthetics or philosophy and at other times embraced diverse topics and references. When a poet wished to clarify the status of celebrated or censured demoiselles on stage, he or she relied on an entirely different critical vocabulary than did the financier or fop; where one would allude to mores another might refer to a bird or bauble. The situation grew yet more complex when commentators mingled concerns about contrasting and even antagonistic institutions like the Académie royale de musique and the Gallican church. This was unsurprising in a certain sense, since discussions of women in French theater had almost always explored sophisticated models of performance alongside concerns about the *filles de l'Opéra* as a broader societal presence. These women were connected in meaningful ways to political and ethical debates and never necessarily limited to the musical sphere when it came to questions of influence and relevance. At the same time references to religious institutions or theologies revealed a number of value judgments and reconsiderations at play in contemporary musical and generic critiques. When the *filles de l'Opéra* confronted politicians, poets, bishops, and religious in the critical discourse and in real life they interacted in startling ways with the court of public opinion and with a

number of critical concerns about musical genre, morality, mastery, and the institutional and administrative profile of the Opéra.

The relationship between the literature on the *filles de l'Opéra* and that on the church at this time in France was colored by the ecclesiastical ban imposed on actors who plied their trade at the Comédie-Française. Actors could receive absolution but they did not qualify for the last sacraments and were not eligible for burial in consecrated ground. At the heart of this constant threat of excommunication were deeply ingrained views about the questionable nature of the sensuality and pleasure driving the theatrical experience.¹ Conservative commentators worried over the moral dilemma facing actors who could only succeed in representing violent or lustful passions by recollecting those they had felt themselves, thoughts and actions for which they ought to have sought absolution and subsequently renounced or sublimated. Among the writings of the bishop and theologian Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), we find those in the acting profession called into question for precisely this kind of quandary in which the portrayal of passionate emotion conflicted with Christian obligations.

Je vous prie, que fait un acteur, lors qu'il veut jouër naturellement une passion, que de rappeler autant qu'il peut, celles qu'il a ressenties, & que s'il estoit chrétien, il auroit tellement noyées dans les larmes de la penitence qu'elles ne reviendroient jamais à son esprit, ou n'y reviendroient qu'avec horreur: au lieu que pour les exprimer il faut qu'elles luy reviennent avec tous leurs agrémens empoisonnez & toutes leurs graces trompeuses?²

I ask you, what does an actor do when he wants to portray a passion naturally, to recall as much as he can those he has felt, & if he were a Christian, he would have drowned in the tears of penitence to such an extent that they would never return to his mind, or if so only with horror: rather than expressing them is it not essential for these tears to return to him with all their poisonous amenities & all their misleading graces?

As research by Laurent Thirouin has shown, an additional critical topos that drew together ecclesiastical and aesthetic concerns was the Augustinian rejection of theater in the seventeenth century on the grounds that mimesis or representation was contaminated and contagious, an

¹ See John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, 2 vols., The Oxford History of the Christian Church, ed. Henry and Owen Chadwick (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), II, 315.

² See Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *Maximes et réflexions sur la comédie* (Paris: Jean Anisson, 1694), 15.

assertion that stretched back to Platonic thought and persisted in texts of Bossuet and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) that lambasted theatrical amusements as evil and ultimately useless, incapable of effecting any real change in public sentiments or morals.³ When discourses on official heresies began to intersect with commentaries on actresses in the early eighteenth century, the connection between religion and acting grew more tenuous, involving a kind of subtextual suggestion of analogy between the ways people wrote about ecclesiastical concerns and the ways they wrote about the theater.

Commentators from well beyond the sphere of the performing arts mingled together references to popular cultural, social, and religious anxieties. One notable example from late in the eighteenth century is the *Catéchisme libertin à l'usage des filles de joie et des jeunes demoiselles qui se destinent à embrasser cette profession* (1792) of the salonist Anne-Josèphe Théroigne de Méricourt (1762–1817), a text that delved deep into references to real and fabricated saints in an effort to construct a litany that unfortunate whores and trollops could recite to cultivate piety. The litany appeals to a saintly Manon as a *modèle des impudiques* or model of impudence and to the pity of the royal mistresses Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, marquise de Pompadour (1721–1764) and Jeanne Bécu, comtesse du Barry (1743–1793). It finally calls upon the *filles de l'Opéra* themselves, demanding that all those *danseuses qui avez si bien gigoté et remué le croupion* (“dancers who have so triumphantly wiggled and shimmied their rumps”) show mercy toward common prostitutes by lending them a measure of their elasticity.⁴ At the height of the Revolution in the last decade of the century, the pressure for women in the performing arts to wise up, get religion, and shed the stigma of their profession was as acute as it was for those plying their trade as sex workers in the streets of Paris. The references to hagiography and faith in texts like those of Théroigne de Méricourt were a

³ See Laurent Thirouin, *L'Aveuglement salutaire: le réquisitoire contre le théâtre dans la France classique*, *Lumière classique* 17 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997), 123. See also Bossuet, *Maximes et réflexions sur la comédie*, 10, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, ed. Marc Buffat, Collection Garnier Flammarion (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), 96.

⁴ See Anne-Josèphe Théroigne de Méricourt, *Catéchisme libertin à l'usage des filles de joie et des jeunes demoiselles qui se destinent à embrasser cette profession* (Paris: Gourdan, 1792), 41.

reminder of the long legacy of injecting religious and ecclesiastical references into meditations on women and morality. They were also related to the tradition of couching texts on grooming, comportment, and *galanterie* in catechetical terms. In the middle of the seventeenth century the anonymous *Catechisme des courtisans ou Les questions de la cour, et autres galanteries* (1668) extended and amplified the original *Catéchisme des courtisans de la cour de Mazarin* (1649) upon which it was based by the addition of an *Autre catéchisme à l'usage de la Cour Ecclésiastique de France contre le jansénisme* and a short text on *La passion de Mr. Fouquet*.⁵ As texts that referenced the chilly reception of Jansenism and the equally strained relationship between the financial minister Nicolas Fouquet (1615–1680) and the French monarch, these supplements waxed catechetical yet at the same time played up their allegiances to the vogue for presenting primers on etiquette or *politesse* in the voice of religious authority and to the tradition of satirical *Mazarinades* that targeted the cardinal and diplomat Giulio Raimondo Mazzarino or Jules Mazarin (1602–1661).⁶ As research by Adrian Velicu has shown, when catechisms or catechetical impulses shifted registers, moving from the domain of religion and theology to that of education, political loyalty, and sociability, they gave rise to a number of unresolved intellectual tensions that eventually factored in such tumultuous events as the Revolution. When politics imposed its goals on education or when radical pedagogies borrowed methods from religion and theological habits of mind, the boundaries between these fields tended to dissolve.⁷ We could say the same of discourses about music, its performance, and its performers. As research by Charles Dill has shown, when commentators in the French eighteenth century turned to musical topics they did so with a keen sense of right and wrong,

⁵ See the *Catechisme des courtisans ou Les questions de la cour, et autres galanteries* (Cologne: n.p., 1668). See also the *Catéchisme des courtisans de la cour de Mazarin* (Paris: n.p., 1649).

⁶ On the tradition of the *Mazarinades* and libelous literature in France, see Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2010), 40, and idem, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 201. See also Jeffery Merrick, “The Cardinal and the Queen: Sexual and Political Disorders in the Mazarinades,” *French Historical Studies* 18/3 (1994), 668.

⁷ See Adrian Velicu, *Civic Catechisms and Reason in the French Revolution* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 2.

so much so that they constantly rehearsed and reiterated polemical disputes and ideological first principles in didactic frameworks.⁸

At issue in the criticism of the *filles de l'Opéra* was not only the fact that religious authorities attacked the theater and its performers with great venom, but the fact that discussions of opera borrowed a number of their rhetorical and polemical structures from religious discourse. As the critical discourse on French opera and the performing arts emerged in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it remained a register independent of political power and the constraints of academies, and as such, it sought new expressive and rhetorical forms, borrowing from the dialogic structure of the theater, the rhymed verse that appeared in contemporary gazettes and periodicals, political address, and the epistolary arts. During the *querelle de Bérénice* in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the abbé de Villars, Nicolas-Pierre-Henri de Montfaucon (1635–1673), published *La Critique de Bérénice* (1671) as an attack on the Racinian tragedy of the same name that had premiered at the Hôtel de Bourgogne the previous autumn as well as on *Tite et Bérénice* (1670) of Pierre Corneille (1606–1684).⁹ Only a few months later, the abbé de Saint-Ussans, Pierre de Saint-Glas, published a response in defense of Racine, who had himself published the offending tragedy in five acts with an extended preface that addressed the attack of the abbé de Villars.¹⁰ Several years later an anonymous work appeared in Utrecht under the title *Tite et Titus, ou Critique sur les Bérénices, comédie* only two years before the appearance of *Apollon vendeur de Mithridate, ou Apollon charlatan* by the Jansenist lawyer and satirical author Jean Barbier d'Aucour (1641–

⁸ See Charles Dill, “Rameau avec Lacan,” *Acta musicologica* 80/1 (2008), 36, and idem, “Ideological Noises: Opera Criticism in Early Eighteenth-Century France,” in *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries*, ed. Roberta Marvin and Downing Thomas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 67.

⁹ See Nicolas de Montfaucon de Villars, *La Critique de Bérénice* (Paris: Bilaine, Le Petit, et Michallet, 1671).

¹⁰ See Pierre de Saint-Glas, *Billéts galants, et amoureux en vers, Par M. de Saint Ussans. Enrichis de Figures en Taille douce* (Paris and Lyon: Horace Molin, 1696), 5. See also Jean Racine, *Bérénice, tragédie par M. Racine* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1671).

1694), a satire that viciously attacked Racine.¹¹ Like those related to the earlier *querelle de l'École des femmes* on perceived immorality and impiety in the comedy *L'École des femmes* (1662) of Molière, these publications rehearsed their opposition to staged works using the language and structure of dramatic works themselves, constructed as they were either as plays, as in the case of *Tite et Titus*, or as dialogues between scholars.¹² The critical discourse on opera and its performers that followed these polemical discussions of tragic theater was in large part an outgrowth of moralizing arguments in contemporary religious discourse. At the same time the inheritance of aesthetic criticism from theological tracts and debates was not without paradoxes, from the tension between ecclesiastical authority and performers on stage to the fact that a number of members of the clergy were themselves implicated in affairs with the *filles de l'Opéra*.

One of the major issues connecting French opera criticism to religion was the nature of grace, conceived not only as a theological concept, a divine gift or a benefit earned through good behavior, but as an aesthetic ideal tied to the perception and appreciation of the female performing body on stage. As the performing arts increasingly came to be regarded as autonomous in the eighteenth century, the concept of grace was secularized, gradually losing its transcendent and theological aura to become an organ of aesthetic efficacy and critical fascination. This manifested in the literature on the *filles de l'Opéra* in several ways, when women were singled out as models of finesse and physical gracefulness and when what was moving about the operatic genre itself was praised, when, to give just one example, the abbé Simon-Joseph Pellegrin (1663–1745) spoke of the power of the graces to move and touch an audience, of the alignment of grace with what was simple and natural rather than strange or astonishing, and of grace as the foundation and end goal of every genre, especially

¹¹ See *Tite et Titus, ou Critique sur les Bérénices, comédie* (Utrecht: Jean Ribbuis, 1673). See also Racine, *Oeuvres de Racine*, nouv. éd., 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Jean-Frédéric Bernard, 1722), and François Parfaict and Claude Parfaict, *Histoire du théâtre françois depuis son origine jusqu'à présent, avec la vie des plus célèbres Poètes Dramatiques, un Catalogue exact de leurs Pièces, & des Notes Historiques & Critiques*, 15 vols. (Paris: Le Mercier et Saillant, 1747), X, 222.

¹² See Bossuet, *Maximes et réflexions sur la comédie*, 8, and Armand de Bourbon, prince de Conti, *Traité de la comédie et des spectacles: selon la tradition de l'église, tirée des conciles & des saints peres* (Paris: Louis Billaine, 1669).

the operatic genre.¹³ As research by David Holt has shown, the aesthetic fascination with grace stretched back years before the eighteenth century to the writings of the Italian artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), in whose texts the term grace was synonymous with beauty and elegance, tied to theological connotations of the fulfillment of the soul, and viewed as a necessary component of great art as well as a quality that could not be taught.¹⁴ When the scholar and translator Nicolas Faret (1596–1646) subsequently spoke of the connotations of *sprezzatura* in the writings of Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529), he translated the term itself as *négligence*, although as Don Fader has pointed out, the word Faret and a number of other French writers preferred for this idea was grace, something anyone not fortunate enough to have been granted by nature had to seek out among ideal models.¹⁵ Faret went on to describe the antithesis of the *honnête homme* in salon culture at this time as the pedant or savant, the gentleman lacking courtly manners and grace.

Late in the eighteenth century the painter Antoine de Marcenay de Ghuy (1724–1811) believed the perception of grace as a rarefied aesthetic quality was a matter of what he called the exercise of sentiment, by which one could discern what made something beautiful and what the deeper basis of beauty and expressivity truly was.

Si l'on veut examiner les ouvrages, que malgré l'excellence des proportions, la grace n'accompagne pas, on s'appcevra bientôt, que l'Artiste, plus attentive à la beauté des formes, qu'à faire sentir l'*expression du moment*; ce rapport exact entre la pensée & les signes représentatifs qu'il auroit dû caractériser, a négligé maladroitement la partie la plus essentielle de son art, ce qui répand sur l'ouvrage une froide imitation de la nature, & découvre au premier coup d'oeil que le feu de Prométhée ne l'anime point. Il n'appartient qu'au Génie de rassembler les rayons de ce feu vivifiant, d'en diriger les sublimes influences.¹⁶

¹³ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.^e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 51.

¹⁴ See David Kenneth Holt, *The Search for Aesthetic Meaning in the Visual Arts: The Need for the Aesthetic Tradition in Contemporary Art Theory and Education* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 29.

¹⁵ See Nicolas Faret, *L'Honnête homme ou l'art de plaire à la court*, ed. Maurice Magendie (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1925), 19. See also Don Fader, "The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic: Taste, Rhetoric, and *Politesse* in the 17th-Century French Reception of Italian Music," *The Journal of Musicology* 20/1 (2003), 11.

¹⁶ See Antoine de Marcenay de Ghuy, *Essai sur la beauté* (Paris: D'Houry, 1770), 30.

If one wants to examine works that are not accompanied by grace in spite of the excellence of their proportions, one soon realizes that the Artist was more interested in the beauty of forms than in making the *expression of the moment* apparent; this exact relationship between thought & the representative signs he would have had to characterize has awkwardly neglected the most essential part of his art, that which spreads over the work a cold imitation of nature, & reveals at first glance the fact that the fire of Prometheus scarcely animates him. It belongs only to Genius to marshal these invigorating rays of light, to direct these sublime influences.

This concept of grace dovetails with a notion of genius that would have been abundantly familiar at this time in the century. As research by Meyer Abrams has shown, a number of ideas associated with nature and genius posed problems in the historical theorization of what he has called poetic inspiration and poetic grace, particularly when the latter evolved from its roots in Italian humanism to attach itself to the *je-ne-sais-quoi* ("I know not what") in French thought before the eighteenth century.¹⁷ As the Jesuit essayist Dominique Bouhours (1628–1702) noted in an extended discussion of *le ie ne scay qvoy*, the quality of grace we locate in natural objects and works of art is an incomprehensible and inexplicable mystery, an aesthetic ideal thoroughly overtaken by its roots in theological thought. Bouhours went on to equate this concept of aesthetic grace with divine mercy and with what he called *vn je ne scay quoy surnaturel, qu'on ne peut ni expliquer, ni comprendre* ("a supernatural I know not what, that one can neither explain nor comprehend").¹⁸ These meditations on grace as an ineffable and astonishing element of aesthetic appreciation also appeared in the discourse on the *filles de l'Opéra*. Well attuned to the politics of reputation among these women, the author Toussaint Rémond de Saint-Mard (1682–1757) compared the qualities of the noted Lullian soprano Marie Le Rochois (1658–1728) with those of his favorite, Françoise Journet (1675–1722).

Je n'ai jamais vû la Rochois: on dit qu'elle possédoit à un degré éminent la partie que je demande; mais je n'oublierai jamais la Journet: c'étoit une grande fille. Belle à la maniere qu'il faut l'être au Théâtre. Jamais on n'a vû des graces si nobles: jamais rien n'a paru de si touchant à la fois & de si majestueux. L'action de sa voix étoit parfaite: ses yeux qui étoient charmans, alloient s'unissant aux deux plus beaux bras du monde, porter au coeur l'expression

¹⁷ See M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 193.

¹⁸ See Dominique Bouhours, *LES ENTRETIENS D'ARISTE ET D'EUGENE* (Paris: Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1671), 255.

de tout ce qu'elle avoit à peindre.¹⁹

I never saw la Rochois: people said she possessed to a considerable degree the qualities I seek: but I will never forget la Journet: here was a great girl. Beautiful in the way one must be to succeed in the Theater. Never has anyone seen such noble graces: never has anything at once so touching & majestic appeared. The action of her voice was perfect: her eyes, which were charming, worked in tandem with two of the most beautiful arms in the world to transmit to the heart the expression of everything she had to depict.

By tracing the roots of her vocality, her charming eyes, and the movements of her arms to the workings of unprecedented *graces nobles* or noble graces, Rémond de Saint-Mard engaged with the long tradition of describing grace as an element of the ineffable and of genius, majesty, and mastery.

While explorations of the theological and aesthetic nature of grace drove the critical discourse about genius, innovation, and the theory and practice of the plastic arts, we see some of the strongest links between the church and the theater emerge in satirical literature that named specific clerics and bishops together with individual *filles de l'Opéra* and their various ghostwriters, antagonists, and lovers. These were instances in which the discourse on seductive actresses not only encountered but to a great extent fed into ongoing religious crises. Parodies and epigrams in the manuscripts compiled by the comte de Maurepas as well as in chronicles from writers like Edmond-Jean-François Barbier (1689–1771) offered opportunities for commentators to explore discourses of immorality and monstrosity as they related to misgivings about female performers in the theater. These epigrams, chronicles, and purported true accounts were also politicized pieces of rhetoric in which observations about civic and religious leaders came to the fore.²⁰ Such is the case in one of the satirical epistles appearing in the collections of the Maurepas manuscripts in the fourth decade of the century and subsequently in the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la calotte* (1754) of Guillaume Plantavit de La Pause (1685–1760), an anthology of writings attributed to Plantavit de La Pause, known as the abbé de Margon, as well as the journalist and translator Pierre-François

¹⁹ See Toussaint Rémond de Saint-Mard, *Reflexions sur l'opera* (The Hague: Jean Neaulme, 1741), 71.

²⁰ See Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, 188, idem, “The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France,” *Past and Present* 51 (1971), 110, and idem, “Mademoiselle Bonafon and the Private Life of Louis XV: Communication Circuits in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Representations* 87 (2004), 108.

Guyot (1685–1745), known as the abbé Desfontaines, the scholar and priest Jean Aymon (1661–1720), and the poet and translator François Gacon (1667–1725). The appearance of this particular epistle in a collection dating from the middle of the century is an indication of the popularity of its alleged author, the soprano Petitpas (1706–1739). She addresses fellow actresses in the theater, detailing her long list of lovers, among them the bishop of Montpellier, Charles-Joachim Colbert de Croissy (1667–1738) and the collector and dandy Joseph Bonnier de La Mosson (1702–1744), the latter identified in the marginalia of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* as Gilles Bonnier, as he was known among the *filles de l'Opéra*.²¹ Petitpas herself had debuted at the foire Saint-Germain in 1723 and then at the Opéra-Comique de la foire Saint-Laurent. In 1732 she abruptly took leave of the Opéra to travel to England. After her return the following epigram circulated.

L'aimable Petitpas est enfin de retour	The lovable Petitpas has finally returned
Après une absence cruelle,	After a cruel absence, she returns
Elle revient embellir ce séjour,	Rendering this place more attractive,
Charmer Paris qui soupire après elle.	To charm Paris who sighs after her.
Et pourrait-on en être surpris,	And could one be surprised,
Dans la saison où tout se renouvelle,	In the season when everything renews itself
Dans la saison des grâces et des ris,	In the season of graces and laughs,
Doit-on pas revoir Zéphire & Philomèle? ²²	Must we not revisit Zephyr & Philomela?

Petitpas was not the only *fille de l'Opéra* to detail her involvement with bishops and clerics. One entry in *Le portefeuille d'un talon rouge* from later in the century describes the remorse of an actress who had become romantically attached to a bishop after an even more terrifying and ruinous run with a financier.

Une de nos filles d'opéra se confessait avec beaucoup de componction: elle avait ruiné un évêque. *Manger le bien de l'Eglise! s'écria-t-elle; oh! Dieu ne me le pardonnera jamais.* Quand elle vint à un financier qu'elle avait dévoré: *Oh! pour celui-là, je ne saurais m'en confesser:*

²¹ See Guillaume Plantavit de La Pause, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la calotte*, 6 vols. (Aux États calotins: Imprimerie Calotine, 1754), V, 30. The *Épître de Mademoiselle Petitpas aux filles de l'Opéra* is reprinted with a *post scriptum* in Émile Raunié, *Chansonnier historique du XVIIIe siècle*, 10 vols. (Paris: Quantin, 1879–1884), VI, 132–138. For the original, see the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol. e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folia 25–28.

²² See Pierre-Louis d'Aquin de Château-Lyon, *Lettres sur les hommes celebres, dans les Sciences, la Littérature & les Beaux Arts, sous le Regne de Louis XV* (Paris: Duchesne, 1752), 173.

*c'est la meilleure action que j'aie pu faire.*²³

One of our filles d'opéra confessed with a lot of compunction: she had ruined a bishop. *Eat the good of the Church!* she exclaimed; *oh! God will never pardon me.* When it came to a financier whom she had devoured: *Oh! as for that one, I would not know how to confess: that is the best action I could take.*

As she freely admits in the *épître de Mademoiselle Petitpas aux filles de l'Opéra*, a text attributed to her in marginalia in the Maurepas manuscripts although quite possibly authored by a male ghostwriter, not even a regular regimen of romantic intrigue with high ecclesiastics and politicians could keep the fickle Petitpas from succumbing to boredom. The first portion of the letter outlines her relationships with men whose identities remain difficult to trace today; she claims one was named Midi and another was known as the sieur Saint-Rome. She then proceeds to detail her affairs with Bonnier de La Mosson and the composer André Cardinal Destouches (1672–1749), two men who had met when the composer traveled in Languedoc; it was an acquaintance Petitpas found ceaselessly amusing. Bonnier de La Mosson, whom Petitpas shamelessly calls a lackluster lover, had inherited the position of *trésorier des états* of Languedoc after the death of his father Joseph Bonnier (1676–1726). As research by Katie Scott has shown, the younger Bonnier de La Mosson was one of the most remarkable art collectors and scientific amateurs of the first half of the eighteenth century.²⁴ The figures Petitpas references in her letter to the *filles de l'Opéra* traveled in regions connected by administration if not close proximity, all presently encompassed by the five *départements* of the Languedoc-Roussillon region of southern France. In the eighteenth century the intendance of Languedoc encompassed Montpellier and Toulouse, sites of the bishoprics of Colbert de Croissy and René-François de Beauvau du Rivau (1664–1739). Petitpas was also acquainted with the château de La Mosson, the construction of which began under the elder Bonnier between 1723 and his death, shortly before Petitpas debuted at the Opéra in January 1727. Tended by the younger Bonnier de La Mosson after 1726, the château de La Mosson was situated on the banks of the

²³ See the *Gazette anecdotique du règne de Louis XVI: portefeuille d'un talon-rouge* (Paris: Édouard Rouveyre, 1881), 46.

²⁴ See Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 166.

Mosson between Montpellier and Juvignac.²⁵ Throughout the letter Petitpas was explicit about her clandestine affairs among the clergy; alluding to Colbert de Croissy of Montpellier, she also spoke of intrigue among the prelates of Narbonne as well as the infamous Jean-Baptiste Languet de Gergy (1674–1750), the curé of Saint-Sulpice, and the *plus beau Prélat* Beauvau du Rivau, the bishop of Bayonne and later archbishop of Tournai, Narbonne, and Toulouse.

Arrivés à Montpellier,
L'Évesque, qui de rien s'offense,
Après nous s'est mis à crier,
Voulant nous excommunier;
Mais à ce rigide langage
Nous reconnûmes aisément
Un hérétique, un Apellant;
Qui ne scait pas le bel usage
Des Evesques de nôtre tems,
Si benins, si peu turbulens;
En attendant qu'il fût plus sage,
A Narbonne, ville ou village,
Comme il vous plaira l'appeller,
Nous allâmes nous consoler
Avec maints Prélats pacifiques,
Dont les moeurs sont très-Catholiques:
Là sous les yeux du grand *Beauvau*,
Prélat autrefois le plus beau.
Bientôt après ce lieu d'azile
Devenu pour nous moins tranquille;
Nous décampâmes nuitamment
Par ma foy cette vie errante
A la fin ennuye et tourmente,
Et je ne vois pas le moment,
Ou d'un voyage détestable
Parachevant le triste cours
Je reverrai la ville aimable
Séjour des ris et des amours,
Où le Curé de Saint Sulpice,
Tout occupé de sa bâtisse,
Sçait comme on mene les brebis
De l'Archevesque de Paris.²⁶

Arriving in Montpellier,
The Bishop, impossible to offend,
Is moved to tears by us
Set on excommunicating us;
But in this rigid discourse
We can easily recognize
A heretic, an Appellant,
Who knows not the good usage
Of Bishops in our day,
So benign and scarcely boisterous;
Waiting for him to act morally,
In Narbonne, city or town,
Whichever you wish to call it,
We console ourselves
With numerous Prelates
Whose morals are so Catholic:
There under the watchful *Beauvau*,
Once a most handsome Prelate.
Soon thereafter, this refuge
Became less tranquil for us;
We decamped at night
On my word this wandering lifestyle
Is at once boring and tormenting,
And I do not see the point
When this detestable voyage
Will complete its sad course.
I shall return to that friendly City
Of amusements and love,
Where the Curé of Saint-Sulpice,
Ever busy with his edifice,
Knows how people lead the sheep
Of the Archbishop of Paris.

Above and beyond its references to romantic affairs between the *filles de l'Opéra* and minor prelates, this letter goes so far as to suggest that Charles-Gaspard-Guillaume de Vintimille du Luc (1655–

²⁵ See Raunié, *Chansonnier historique du XVIIIe siècle*, VI, 134.

²⁶ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 28.

1746) as archbishop of Paris was not above blame. One clue about the extent to which this satirical letter acknowledged contemporary religious crises is its reference to the discourse of *un hérétique*, *un Apellant*, Colbert de Croissy, whose adherence to Jansenism and publications on the deleterious effects of the Jesuits in France met with papal condemnation.²⁷ As an *appelant*, Colbert de Croissy along with several other bishops appealed to a general council to decide the fate of the papal bull *Unigenitus* (1713) in France, a document whose dismissal of Jansenism was cast into doubt when the faculties of universities in and outside of Paris reversed their original acceptance of its tenets and Roman authority over the Gallican church lurched and floundered in the final years of the reign of Louis XIV (1638–1715).

The sexual exploits of Petitpas and her colleagues and their connection to the activities and politics of members of the church hierarchy find an analogue in the reminiscences of the marquis Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d'Argens (1704–1771), in which discourses of disenchantment with the clergy were at times swept up into the criticism of women in the theater. In the tenth letter of his *Lettres morales et critiques* the marquis describes a waking dream in which the vices of Paris reverse themselves, turning contemptible holy men into saints and the *filles de l'Opéra* into chaste virgins.

Lorsque Paris les verra sensés, les Jesuites mettront *Jansenius* au nombre des Saints de leur Ordre, les Cordeliers deviendront pieux, les Capucins propres, les Mathurins savans, les Procureurs honnêtes gens, les Filles de l'Opera chastes, & les Médecins bon Chrétiens.²⁸

When Paris comes to its senses, Jesuits will apply the name *Jansenius* to a number of the Saints of their Order, Franciscans will become pious, the Capuchin friars clean, Mathurins knowledgeable, Prosecutors honest men, the Filles de l'Opéra chaste, & Doctors good Christians.

The Mathurins, the least widely known of the religious orders mentioned here, belonged to the Ordre de la très Sainte Trinité pour la redemption des captifs or the Ordre de la Sainte Trinité for short. Founded in 1194 by Jean de Matha (1160–1213), the community was consecrated by Innocent III

²⁷ See Charles-Joachim Colbert de Croissy, *Lettre de Mgr l'évêque de Montpellier au Roy, dans laquelle il expose à sa Majesté l'état déplorable ou les Jésuites ont réduit l'Eglise de France et le caractère de ceux que ces Pères ne cessent de persécuter* (Paris: n.p., 1728).

²⁸ See Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d'Argens, *Lettres morales et critiques sur les differens états et les diverses occupations des hommes* (Amsterdam: Michel Charles Le Cene, 1737), 94.

(1160–1216) through the papal bull *Operante divine dispositionis* (1198) and members of the order were called Trinitaires or Mathurins after the church of Saint-Mathurin in Paris.²⁹ The paradoxical dimension of such a text was not lost on readers at the time, who were well aware that attacks on those in the acting profession had long come from religious authorities and particularly from Jansenists. At the same time the critical discourse itself began to shift and evolve in the eighteenth century; the censure of acting and actors became an opportunity to interrogate religious authority and a manifestation of the sometimes surprising parallels that were drawn between those in the theater and those accused of heretical views and religious factionism.

The discussion of specific bishops and clerics in the literature on the *filles de l'Opéra* in addition to the condemnation of whole religious orders reflected the considerable amount of religious unrest in France between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Following a spate of ideological disagreements about the nature of grace and free will, the Jansenists succeeded twice in expelling the community of Jesuits from France, first at the end of the sixteenth century and again in the middle of the eighteenth.³⁰ As research by Dale Van Kley has shown, through their critique of Jesuit confessors to the French monarch and the morally questionable practice of casuistry, the Jansenists were largely responsible for the gradual desacralization of the monarchy that led to regicide before and after the Revolution.³¹ Eventually decried by the papacy as heretical in the second decade of the eighteenth century, Jansenism was not the only voice of religious dissent in early modern France, as writings on free will and divine providence by the Jesuit theologian Luis de

²⁹ See Suzanne Moreau-Rendu, *Les captifs libérés: les Trinitaires et Saint-Mathurin de Paris* (Paris: Nouvelles éditions latines, 1974), 69.

³⁰ See Dale Van Kley, *Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757–1765* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 98.

³¹ See Merrick, *The Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the eighteenth century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 38, Van Kley, *The Damiens Affair and the unraveling of the Ancien Regime, 1750–1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 50, idem, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution from Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 164, Jens Ivo Engels, “Dénigrer, espérer, assumer la réalité. Le roi de France perçu par ses sujets, 1680–1750,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 50/3 (2003), 96–126, and idem, “Beyond Sacral Monarchy: A New Look at the Image of the Early Modern French Monarchy,” *French History* 15/2 (2001), 139–158.

Molina (1535–1600) encouraged the flowering of Molinism to the chagrin of the Jansenists and the Dominicans. Unease about the *filles de l'Opéra* to whom even members of the clergy succumbed evolved into comparisons between the dramatic or generic disorder fueled by actresses at the Opéra and the social and political disorder brought about by theological tensions between Jansenists and Jesuits.

Jansenism became the lens through which stigmatized actresses were scrutinized even as Jansenism itself was denounced as a degradation of true religion. We see this critical perspective emerge with full force in an elaborate parody of the bull *Unigenitus* and blossom more fully in a revision and republication of the same parody in the middle of the eighteenth century, yet what we also encounter in both of these texts is a form of aesthetic criticism grounded in the rhetorical framework of theological debate and moralization. The introductory benediction, negative tone, and itemized propositions of these two texts satirize the gloomy conservatism of *Unigenitus*. For a papal tract disputing Jansenism to have such influence that it drew into its orbit the critique of genres and actresses at the Opéra spoke volumes about the sweep of religious criticism at this time in France, when Jansenism was enjoying its second century in convents and among the clergy of Paris and the provinces. The *filles de l'Opéra* were not heretics in any official sense, but they nevertheless threatened the prestige and power of the Opéra as well as a separate critical culture associated with the theater in which a conservative reverence for didacticism and moralizing was its own kind of religion or creed. Many Parisians viewed the escapades of the *filles de l'Opéra* beyond the theater and their involvement in the success of lighter genres like the *opéra-ballet* as elements of feminine exhibition, danger, innovation, and physicality that spelled disaster for lyric tragedy. These women were thus seen in something of the same light as heretics or a heretical faith, as a force that threatened to destroy what was held as sacred or as a group of individuals moving against the grain. A number of satires took the *filles de l'Opéra* to task with the predictable ire with which critics had always approached women in French theater; other texts attacked them with new venom and vigor, tapping into the rigorism and conservatism that characterized the bull *Unigenitus*.

Compelling connections between the discourse on the *filles de l'Opéra* and ecclesiastical politics appear in an elaborate satire by the abbé Pellegrin, writing as Pancrace, in the collections of the *Chansonnier Maurepas* for the year 1736; at various other times in the century the satire was linked to François-Antoine Chevrier (1721–1762) and Jean-Baptiste Rousseau (1671–1741).³² The pseudonym is in all likelihood a reference to the character Pancrace, the Aristotelian philosopher in *Le mariage forcé* (1664) of Molière. As an itemized list of grievances against the Opéra and its actresses, the satire begins on a note that few in the eighteenth century would have mistaken for anything but a parody of the papal bull *Unigenitus* promulgated by Clement XI (1649–1721). As an

³² See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.^e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folia 49–61. While the authorial attribution to Pellegrin in the marginalia of the Maurepas manuscript remains somewhat ambiguous, elsewhere in the same manuscript collection we find the names Pancrace and Pellegrin linked, for instance in the *Lettre Pastorale / de Mgr Pancrace Pellegrin Patriarche / de l'Opéra, aux Fideles de son Diocèse / des deux Sexes*, in the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.^e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 65, where Pellegrin is described as *Pancrace Prestre*, as well as in the brief *Egnime sur l'Abé Pelegrin*, in the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses. Années 1738, 1739, 1740 & 1741. Vol.^e XX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12635, folio 230. The *Egnime* reads *P.P.P.P.P.P.P.P.P.P.P.*, followed by the explanation *Polidor, Pietre Piece, Par Paul Pancrace Pelegrin, Petit Poète, Pauvre Prestre Puant* (“*Polidor, Rocky Piece, By Paul Pancrace Pellegrin, Minor Poet, Poor Smelly Preacher*”). Albert Du Casse has recorded a variant version of the same enigmatic epigram, *Pélopée, pièce pitoyable, par Pellegrin, poète, pauvre prêtre provençal* (“*Pélopée, pitiable piece, by Pellegrin, poet, poor Provençal preacher*”). See Du Casse, *Histoire anecdotique de l'ancien théâtre en France: Théâtre-Français, Opéra, Opéra-Comique, Théâtre-Italien, Vaudeville, Théâtres forains, etc.*, 2 vols. (Paris: Dentu, 1864), I, 262. Pellegrin is referenced elsewhere in the Maurepas manuscript collection as the *Prestre d'Opéra*, for instance in the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1729 à 1731. Vol.^e XVII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12632, folio 429. *Polidor* (1724) and *Pélopée* (1733) were two tragedies with Greek and Roman settings that Pellegrin had composed alongside the comedies *Le Père intéressé, ou la Fausse inconstance* (1720), *Le nouveau monde* (1722), *Le divorce de l'Amour et de la Raison* (1723), *Le Pastor fido* (1726), *L'inconstant, ou les trois épreuves* (1727), and *L'École de l'hymen, ou l'amante de son mari* (1737), the majority of which were produced at the Comédie-Française. See Antoine de Lérès, *Dictionnaire portatif historique et littéraire des théâtres, contenant l'origine des différens théâtres de Paris*, 2de éd. (Paris: Jombert, 1763), 653. See also Alexander Baillie Cochrane, *The Théâtre Français in the Reign of Louis XV* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1879).

attack on the writings of the Jansenist theologian and member of the Société de l'Oratoire de Jésus et de Marie Immaculée, Pasquier Quesnel (1634–1719), *Unigenitus* condemned as heretical more than one hundred propositions from his *Le Nouveau Testament en françois: avec des reflexions morales sur chaque verset, pour en rendre la lecture plus utile, & la meditation plus aisée*. The bull fiercely attacked the publication for mingling biblical translations with Jansenist commentary for further reflection, calling it a collection of impious restatements of the tenets of Jansenius, the name by which the younger Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638) was known.³³ As bishop of Ypres, Jansen was instrumental in founding Jansenism, which was associated with the convents of Port-Royal des Champs and Port-Royal de Paris and vigorously criticized by French Jesuits and Molinists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The satire begins with a dedication to the faithful, as Pellegrin writes *Pancrace par la permission divine, Archevesque de Cithéropolis, et Patriarche de l'Opera à tous les fideles de l'un et de l'autre Sexe. Salut et Bénédiction* (“Pancrace by divine permission, Archbishop of Cytheropolis, and Patriarch of the Opéra to all the faithful of one or the other Gender. Salutations and Blessings”).³⁴ The French translation of the Latin *Unigenitus* by the abbé and curé of Saint-Pierre-le-Vieil in Laon, Nicolas Gudver, begins *Clement Evêque, Serviteur des Serviteurs de Dieu. A tous les Fideles Chrétiens, Salut & Benediction Apostolique* (“The Bishop Clement, Servant of the Servants of God. To all Faithful Christians, Salutations & Apostolic Blessings”).³⁵ The Pellegrin parody goes on to enumerate the failings of actresses at the Opéra,

³³ See Pasquier Quesnel, *Nouveau Testament en françois: avec des reflexions morales sur chaque verset, pour en rendre la lecture plus utile, & la meditation plus aisée*, nouv. éd., 4 vols. (Paris: André Pralard, 1693), and idem, *Abrégé de la morale de l'Evangile, ou Pensées chrétiennes sur le texte des quatres evangelistes: Pour en rendre la lecture & la meditation plus facile à ceux qui commencent à s'y appliquer*, 2de éd. (Paris: André Pralard, 1674).

³⁴ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.^e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 49.

³⁵ See Nicolas Gudver, *La Constitution Unigenitus, avec des remarques et des notes, augmentée du système des jésuites opposé à la doctrine des propositions du père Quesnel, et d'un parallèle de ce système avec celui des Pélagiens* (Paris: n.p., 1733), 1.

emphasizing the quest for immortality of a number of women who did not have the common sense or courtesy to retire before reaching a certain age.

41. Il n'est pas nécessaire d'être jeune, et jolie pour faire fortune à l'Opéra. 42. Le manège et les talens y peuvent tenir lieu de beauté. 43. On ne peut juger de l'âge des Actrices que par le Baptistère. 44. Il ne devrait point être permis de rester à l'Opéra passé cinquante ans. 45. N'est il pas ridicule, à cet âge, de vouloir représenter Venus?. 46. On sait bien que les Déeses ne vieillissent point; mais encore faut il qu'elles aient des dents. 47. Il est encore plus ridicule de vouloir danser, quand on est grand mere.³⁶

41. It is not necessary to be young and beautiful to make a fortune at the Opéra. 42. Intrigue and talents can take the place of beauty. 43. One cannot judge the age of Actresses except by the Baptistry. 44. Actresses should not be allowed to remain at the Opéra past the age of fifty. 45. Is it not ridiculous, at this age, to want to play the role of Venus?. 46. One knows well enough that Goddesses do not age; but it is still necessary for them to have teeth. 47. It is even more ridiculous to want to dance when one is a grandmother.

The Pancrace parody did not settle for a simple condemnation of the *filles de l'Opéra* as aged monstrosities. Pellegrin was also wary of actresses in the early stages of their careers, some so replete with vigor and vitality that they found themselves on more than one occasion bursting with life, pregnant and forced to take leave of the Opéra.

Beyond its indictment of old actresses, the satire figures the problematic intersection of political, religious, and aesthetic thought in the French eighteenth century. Presenting itself as an itemized list of theatrical grievances on a par with the propositions of *Unigenitus*, the satire implied that its author occupied a polemical position analogous to the conservative perspective of the original bull. Just as *Unigenitus* was designed to shield institutions of Roman Catholicism in France from the ideological encroachments of Jansenism, the Pancrace satire argued for the traditional institutional role of opera in French society, for solemnity and conservatism in the face of newer developments in the genre of *opéra-ballet*. Pancrace criticized the declining quality of tragic livrets and the increasing importance of danced *divertissements* and offered opinions on composers since Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687) as well as on the private lives of female performers. Operatic criticism in these years turned to theological debates and habits of mind in search of its rhetorical framework and in doing so

³⁶ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 55.

revealed to what extent these broader religious and social concerns drove the reception of French opera. These issues became the politicized lens through which commentators gained insight into the generic merits of *tragédie lyrique* and *opéra-ballet* as well as the merits of the *filles de l'Opéra* who performed them.

The initial propositions in the *Panrace* parody decry the elitism of opera and its audiences, claiming the genre ought to have its place among all paying members of the Parisian public, who were free to express their approval or disapproval of staged works through applause or the disdainful hisses and whistles known as *sifflets*. From its initial rallying cry about the universal nature of opera, the *Panrace* parody moves quickly into the territory of aesthetics and poetry, where we learn that Pellegrin, who wrote *cantiques spirituelles* on familiar tunes from operatic works as well as a series of successful livrets with Greek and Roman settings, hankered for the conservative lyric traditions of the seventeenth century in which livret poetry was paramount and instrumental music and dance assumed secondary roles.

1. Le Spectacle de l'Opéra est fait pour tous le monde, et ne doit être interdit pour personne. 2. En deffendre l'entrée à quelqu'un c'est rétablir l'usage de la pénitence publique. 3. Chacun est endroit, pour son argent de juger des paroles, et de la Musique. 4. On ne doit point ôter au public la liberté de huer ou d'applaudir. 5. Ce n'est point assez pour la Musique de flatter l'oreille; il faut encore qu'elle aille au coeur. 6. C'est aux graces qu'il appartient de toucher, car rien ne resiste à leur pouvoir. 7. Sans les graces, point de Salut en aucun genre. 8. Les graces sont plus aimés du simple et du naturel, que de singulier, et du merveilleux. 9. On cherchoit autrefois l'expression et le sentiment, on ne court plus aujourd'huy qu'après le bizarre, et le difficile. 10. Autrefois le récitatif étoit à la mode; on ne se soucie plus a présent que des coeurs et des Simphonies.³⁷

1. The Spectacle of the Opéra is created for everyone, and should not be forbidden to anyone. 2. Forbidding entry to someone is restoring the custom of public penance. 3. Everyone is admitted for a price to judge the words and Music. 4. We must not deprive the public of the freedom to boo or applaud. 5. It is not enough for Music to flatter the ear; it must also penetrate the heart. 6. It belongs to the graces to touch, because nothing resists their power. 7. Without the graces, there is no point to any genre. 8. The graces are more aligned with the simple and natural than with the strange and wonderful. 9. People once sought expression and feeling, today they only chase after the bizarre and difficult. 10. In the past, recitative was fashionable; people care about nothing more at the present time than choruses and Symphonies.

³⁷ Ibid., 51–52.

Pellegrin singles out grace and the graces in more than one instance, connecting his mock ecclesiastical document to the theological and aesthetic understanding of the nature of grace that was swept up into discourses on the performing arts in these years. He equates grace with what is simple and natural rather than bizarre and difficult, further suggesting that it inheres in the recitatives that were in vogue before composers like Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764) and genres like the *opéra-ballet* thrust orchestral accompaniments and ensemble numbers into the limelight. This nostalgia for audiences who sought out expression and feeling in staged works, for connoisseurs who valued the dramatic recitatives of Lullian opera, is somewhat at odds with the fact that Lullian tradition also gave considerable weight to choruses and symphonies and in particular to the danced *divertissements* that concluded operatic acts. As for the bizarre and the difficult, the hallmarks of what Pellegrin considered the state of modern opera, the adjectives would appear with full force only a year after the appearance of the *Panrace* parody, in particular in descriptions of Rameau, who produced the initial version of the lyric tragedy *Castor et Pollux* (1737) at the Opéra in October.

As research by Dill has shown, what were perceived as jarring innovations in the staged works of Rameau were not in fact so disruptive as to have polarized Parisian connoisseurs or more vocal commentators and practitioners like Pellegrin.³⁸ There was no indication in the contemporary literature that Rameau was considered a bad composer, and indeed the number of performances of his works at the Opéra would seem to suggest that he was quite successful.³⁹ The implication in documents like the *Panrace* parody is less that Rameau turned his back on normative operatic practices than that he overturned the paradigm established by Lully and Quinault altogether, namely by inverting the traditional balance between the livret and its subservient musical setting. By prioritizing *divertissements* that most resembled the danced episodes in *opéra-ballet*, Rameau shifted the attention of his audiences away from the recitatives Pellegrin most praises, gaining the

³⁸ See Dill, “The Reception of Rameau’s *Castor et Pollux* in 1737 and 1754,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1989, 73.

³⁹ See Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera 1597–1940*, rev. 3d ed. (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978).

admiration of *ramistes* who appreciated musical expressivity and complexity and provoking the ire of *lullistes* who saw his project as a trivialization of the poetic component of the operatic form.

Pellegrin moves seamlessly from his initial reflections on the audience and the aesthetics of simplicity and naturalness to more detailed comments on exactly how he thought opera and its performers had degenerated.

11. Nous ne voyons plus de grands airs à deux tems: On ne nous donne que des Cotillons et des Tambourins. 12. Les divertissemens ne sont plus remplis que d'Ariettes et de Cotillons. 13. Tous les genres sont dénaturés; et c'est à la Musique Italienne que nous en avons l'obligation. 14. Ce que *Lully* étoit en Musique, *Quinault* l'étoit en Poésie. 15. Ils ont tous deux inventé le genre Lirique et l'ont tout d'un coup porté à sa perfection. 16. On a beau s'écarter de leur goût, il y faudra toujours revenir. 17. De leur tems, la Danse étoit la moindre partie de l'Opéra; s'en est aujourd'huy la principale. 18. La Danse haute ne l'emporte sur la Danse basse, que parcequ'il est aisé d'y réussir. 19. Plus les mouvemens de la Danse sont rapides, moins on en peut remarquer les défauts. 20. Il n'y a point de Danseur à l'Opéra qui sache danser le menuet.⁴⁰

11. We no longer have great *airs* in duple meter: We are given Cotillions and Tambourins. 12. *Divertissemens* are only filled with *Ariettes* and Cotillions. 13. All genres are denatured; and it is to Italian Music that we are now indebted. 14. What *Lully* was in Music, *Quinault* was in Poetry. 15. They both invented the Lyric genre and all at once brought it to its perfection. 16. As much as people have moved away from their taste, they should always return to it. 17. In their time, Dance was the least important part of the Opéra; it is the main part today. 18. *Danse haute* trumps *Danse basse*, that is because it is easy to succeed in it. 19. The more the movements of Dance are rapid, the less people are able to detect flaws. 20. There is no Dancer at the Opéra who knows how to dance the minuet.

The unabashed allegiance of Pellegrin to Lully and especially to Quinault, who deftly arranged the alexandrines of French lyric into dialogues and recitatives, was not an uncommon critical position at this time in the century. The revolutionary premiere of *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733) of Rameau divided the Parisian public into two camps, the *lullistes* who found nothing but discord and confusion in its complex harmonies and the *ramistes*, among them the composer André Campra (1660–1744), who heralded the creativity and versatility of Rameau and his works.⁴¹ We get a good sense of the discord among audiences at this time from a letter of the mathematician, physicist, and lover of Voltaire,

⁴⁰ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folia 52–53.

⁴¹ See Hugues Maret, *Éloge historique de M. Rameau, compositeur de la musique du cabinet du Roy: associé de l'Académie des sciences, arts & belles-lettres de Dijon, lu à la séance publique de l'académie, le 25 août 1765* (Dijon: Causse, 1766), 72.

Gabrielle Émilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, marquise du Châtelet (1706–1749) to the abbé Jacques-François-Paul Aldonce de Sade (1705–1778). The letter reveals her preference for *Issé* (1697), the *pastorale héroïque* of Destouches, above and beyond what was then being staged at the Opéra.

On vous aura sûrement mandé ce que c'est que Rameau et les différentes opinions qui divisent le public sur sa musique. Les uns la trouvent divine et au dessus de Lully, les autres la trouvent fort travaillée, mais point agréable et point diversifiée. Je suis je l'avoue des derniers. J'aime cent fois mieux *Issé* que l'on joue à présent.⁴²

You will surely have heard about Rameau and the different opinions that divide the public regarding his music. Some find it divine and above Lully, others find it overwrought but not at all agreeable and not varied. I confess I am one of the latter. I like *Issé* a hundred times better than what is currently played.

Those who sympathized with the aesthetics and poetics of Lully and Quinault flocked to Lullian revivals at the Opéra and five years after the appearance of the *Panrace* parody in the collections of the Maurepas manuscripts, the philosopher, politician, and abbé Gabriel Bonnot de Mably (1709–1785) and the author Toussaint Rémond de Saint-Mard would publish treatises lauding the livrets of Quinault as ideal French poetry, arguing that emphasis on the primacy of music and musical performance, which had emerged in the Lullian era, had left French opera in dire need of reform.⁴³ The very same year, the Jesuit mathematician and philosopher Yves-Marie André (1675–1764), writing in the *Essai sur le beau* (1741), looked upon Lullian tradition as upon a withering flower and asserted in the same breath that *Nous ne parlons point d'un nouveau musicien qui semble partager tout Paris* (“We shall not speak of a new musician who seems to divide all of Paris”).⁴⁴ The musician was Rameau. Rémond de Saint-Mard and Mably did not mention Rameau by name; they steered clear of the personal attacks that characterized other critical and satirical works about the composer in the decades following the premiere of *Hippolyte et Aricie*. These reformers instead sought a form of opera that differed from the works of Rameau and Lully altogether, one that

⁴² See Voltaire, *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, ed. Theodore Besterman, 135 vols. (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1968), LXXXVI, 436.

⁴³ See Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, *Lettres à madame la marquise de P... sur l'opéra* (Paris: Didot, 1741), 137, and Rémond de Saint-Mard, *Réflexions sur l'opéra*, 95.

⁴⁴ See Yves-Marie André, *Essai sur le beau, par le père André avec un discours préliminaire, et des Réflexions sur le Goût, par M. Formey* (Amsterdam: Schneider, 1767), 70.

treated music as secondary to the livret or as an entity added onto an already complete poetic composition. Rémond de Saint-Mard was convinced that the music of Rameau had so succumbed to the rule of dissonance that it risked forever obscuring the linguistic content of staged works.

L'autre harmonie, qui est celle des Italiens et mauvais goût, et de ceux qui se font honneur de les imiter, est toute différente. Celle-là n'a point de chants dans ces parties, ou les tient trop éloignés du sujet. Avidé de briller, elle court après les dissonances, les prodigue sans ménagement, ne s'attache qu'à piquer l'oreille, lui offre toujours des sons qu'elle n'attendoit pas, et qui par-là précisément sont mauvais; car le fait est vrai en tout genre, tout ce qui est trop éloigné du sujet, tout ce que le sujet pour ainsi dire n'appelle pas est de mauvais goût, parce qu'il est fait pour déplaire.⁴⁵

The other harmony, which belongs to the tasteless Italians and those who like to imitate them, is entirely different. That sort of thing has nothing tuneful about its parts, or else it draws them out too far away from the subject. Eager to shine, it chases after dissonances, lavishes these brutally, never adds to them except to pierce the ear, always offering unexpected sounds that, precisely for this reason, are bad; since it is true of every genre, everything that is too distant from the subject, everything that the subject, so to speak, does not summon, is in bad taste because it is displeasing.

From *ariettes* to choruses and symphonies, music occupied an illogical place in the ontology of lyric tragedy, which writers since the seventeenth century had struggled to conceive as an outgrowth of spoken tragedy. As Dill has pointed out, the fact that Mably and Rémond de Saint-Mard sought out poetically defined operas with supplementary space opened up for music was a move in an entirely new direction in the reconsideration of the generic ideals of French opera.⁴⁶ While Mably affirmed that the poetic livret was the most important feature of opera, he argued it should be judged by standards different from those of spoken tragedy, writing *L'Opera est un Poëme dramatique mis en Musique, & pour qu'il soit bon, il suffit qu'il représente une action intéressante* ("Opera is a dramatic Poem set to Music, & for it to be good, it suffices that it present an interesting action").⁴⁷ Meditations like these ultimately signaled the deep embeddedness of music in language,

⁴⁵ See Rémond de Saint-Mard, *Réflexions sur l'opéra*, 49.

⁴⁶ See Dill, *Monstrous Opera: Rameau and the Tragic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 39.

⁴⁷ See Mably, *Lettres à madame la marquise de P... sur l'opéra*, 39.

even as language itself proved inadequate to the task of describing musical events.⁴⁸ In the *Panrace* satire, Pellegrin foreshadows the spirit of these reform treatises from a unique perspective, that of having been a Rameau collaborator himself. While he produced a half dozen comedic works for the Comédie-Française in the second and third decades of the eighteenth century and was known to have collaborated on a number of productions for the Opéra-Comique, the bulk of his work as an author of livrets was as a tragedian, a writer so in touch with his subjects that he was praised by the journalist Antoine de Lérès (1723–1795) as *un excellent Grammairien & un Auteur très-fécond; à quoi il joignoit beaucoup de bonté, & une grande simplicité de mœurs* (“an excellent Grammarian & a most fecund Author; to which he has joined an abundance of goodness & a great moral simplicity”).⁴⁹ The combination of his authorial focus on tragedy and his allegiance to the legacy of Lully and Quinault indisposed Pellegrin toward any real sympathy with the lighter genre of *opéra-ballet* or its performers.⁵⁰

Pellegrin was nevertheless concerned with more than a return to the staged works of Lully and Quinault. He found particular fault with contemporary practices at the Opéra that placed decorators, painters, and those responsible for rigging and machinery on a par with librettists and composers. He also took aim at actresses whose performances in large part determined the success or failure of staged works and whose manner of rising up through the ranks at the Opéra saw them rely less on natural talent or seniority than on superficiality, youth, beauty, and convenience.

22. Ce n'est pas toujours par le succès d'une pièce qu'il faut juger de son mérite. 23. Il ne faut souvent qu'un Tambourin, où une Décoration pour faire réussir un Opéra. 24. Il y a tel Opéra, où le Décorateur devoit partager avec le Poète et le Musicien. 25. Le succès d'un Opéra dépend souvent de la manière dont il est remis. 26. Ce n'est ny l'ancienneté, ny à la faveur à disposer des Rolles; mais au mérite, et à la Convenance. 27. A mérite égal, c'est a

⁴⁸ See *Opera Remade: 1700–1750*, ed. Dill, The Ashgate Library of Essays in Opera Studies 2 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), xvi.

⁴⁹ See Lérès, *Dictionnaire portatif historique et littéraire des théâtres*, 653.

⁵⁰ See Dill, “Pellegrin, opera and tragedy,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10/3 (1998), 251.

l'Actrice la plus jeune et la plus jolie a avoir la préférence. 28. La crainte d'une disgrâce injuste, ne doit pas l'empêcher de soutenir ses droits.⁵¹

22. It is not always by the success of a piece that one can judge its merit. 23. Often it only takes a Tambourin or a Decoration to make an Opera succeed. 24. There is such an Opera in which the Decorator has to share responsibilities with the Poet and the Musician. 25. The success of an Opera often depends on the manner in which it is delivered. 26. It takes neither seniority nor favor to acquire Roles; but merit, and Convenience. 27. Of equal merit, it falls to the youngest and most beautiful Actress to have the preference. 28. The fear of an unfair disgrace should not prevent her from supporting her rights.

His observations on the vanity of actresses as well as an interesting personal allegiance came to the fore only a third of the way into his lengthy list of propositions.

29. Il n'est pas permis d'être jeune, jolie et sage à l'Opéra. 30. Trop de mérite nuit, on n'efface pas les autres impunément. 31. La Loi de l'Ostracisme s'est renouvelée de nos jours à l'Opéra contre la divine Le Maure. 32. C'est souvent le membre le plus sain qu'on retranche, comme un membre gangrené, capable de gâter les autres. 33. Les Actrices qui font le mieux entendre les paroles, ne sont pas les plus propres à faire réussir les nouveaux Opéra. 34. Ce ne sont pas toujours les plus grandes voix, qui chantent le plus juste. 35. Il n'y a pas d'endroit où l'on se pique moins de chanter juste qu'à l'Opéra. 36. Les Applaudissemens, sous prétexte d'encourager les Acteurs, ne servent souvent qu'à les gâter. 37. On est plus sûr d'être applaudi en jouant bien fort, qu'en jouant fort bien. 38. Il n'y a point d'acteurs qui n'aimassent mieux plaire au grand nombre, qu'aux connoisseurs. 39. Les battemens des mains, sont des applaudissemens bien équivoques, et presque aussi incommodes que les sifflets. 40. Les vrais applaudissemens sont ces momens de silence où l'on entendroit une Souris trotter.⁵²

29. It is not possible to be young, pretty, and wise at the Opéra. 30. Too much merit is harmful, one does not erase others with impunity. 31. The Law of Ostracism has been renewed in our day at the Opéra against the divine Le Maure. 32. It is often the most sane member whom people cut off, like a gangrened appendage capable of spoiling the others. 33. The Actresses who best make the words heard are not the most suitable for the success of new Operas. 34. Those with the biggest voices are not always the ones who sing the best in tune. 35. There is no place where people pride themselves less on singing in tune than at the Opéra. 36. Applause, on the pretext of encouraging Actors, often serves only to spoil them. 37. People are more likely to be applauded by playing loudly than by playing well. 38. There are no actors who do not enjoy pleasing the masses, the connoisseurs. 39. The beating of hands is truly equivocal applause, and is almost as inconvenient as whistling. 40. Real applause consists of those moments of silence in which one can hear a Pin drop.

That Pellegrin sides with *la divine* Catherine Nicole Le Maure (1704–1786), who had been involved in a skirmish in which she was conducted from the Opéra to prison for failure to appear in a role, shows unconventional concern for the plight of one of the most noted actresses at this time in the

⁵¹ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 53.

⁵² Ibid.

eighteenth century.⁵³ The temperamental nature of Le Maure, who was prone to leaving the theater in fits of discontent over her alleged foul treatment there, ultimately did not sway Pellegrin or her other supporters. He recognized in her powerful voice and sensitive, genuine acting style the markers of a performer who brought out the best in French staged works and who incited jealousy and fighting among the ranks of other actresses in the theater. This celebration of the talents of Le Maure was notable for Pellegrin, who seemed above all to desire that the essence of the musical work, and not its performance or performer, shine through. As *le membre le plus sain*, the singer most in charge of her wits, Le Maure bore the brunt of unrest and disdain in the very theater in which she had become a star. The *Panrace* parody skillfully fashions a portrait of a body of actors and actresses at the Opéra who were not so blameless or so victimized; indeed they pandered to meaningless applause, forced their voices and their caricatures on stage, and regularly sang too loudly or out of tune, not only failing to provide pleasure to the audience but obscuring the very staged works they performed. Le Maure represented a last bastion of ideal performance practice; she was a singer who turned the works she performed into truly enjoyable and mesmerizing spectacles, something French operatic practice at this time desperately needed.⁵⁴

With his allegiance to Le Maure presented early in his list of over one hundred propositions, Pellegrin made room to turn his attention to her colleagues. While no other actresses were mentioned by name in the satire, the *filles de l'Opéra* nevertheless bore the brunt of considerable criticism from Pellegrin, who mocked the deceptive manner in which these women passed off illegitimate children as their sisters or nieces, took multiple lovers at a time, and threatened to bring

⁵³ See Antoine-Augustin Bruzen de La Martinière, *Anecdotes ou Lettres secrètes sur divers sujets de Literatures & de Politiques* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1735), 527, and Edmond-Jean-François Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763), ou Journal de Barbier, avocat au parlement de Paris*, 6 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1866), III, 9.

⁵⁴ See Gabriel-Charles de Lattaignant, *Poésies de Monsieur l'abbé de l'Attaignant*, 4 vols. (London and Paris: Duchesne, 1757), III, 138, and Claude Joseph Dorat, *Collection complète des oeuvres de M. Dorat*, 5 vols. (Neuchatel: Imprimerie de la Société Typographique, 1775), IV, 95.

about the demise not so much of themselves but of their lovers, patrons, and audiences.⁵⁵ The ruination of the very public that attended staged works at the Opéra was a real and palpable fear throughout the eighteenth century, expressed in writings that recommended the posting of placards above the doors of the Opéra as well as in diatribes about the criminal and infectious nature of the *filles de l'Opéra* themselves.⁵⁶ Ruin could also befall the repertory of the Opéra, as Pellegrin was quick to point out. The lighter genre of *opéra-ballet*, which grew in prestige and popularity as the eighteenth century progressed, was so replete with danced numbers that writers like Pellegrin who were nostalgic for the days of Lullian tragedy and the solemnity of Quinaultian poetry worried over a generic turn away from grandeur and poetry toward essentially meaningless *divertissements* and flashy physical display. He described how much *Il semble qu'un Opéra pourroit plustost se passer de parolles, que de Danses; moins il y a de paroles dans un Opéra, plus il est seur de réüssir; le grand nombre de pièces nouvelles ne sert qu'à ruiner l'Opéra* ("It seems that an Opera could sooner do without words than without Dances; the fewer words there are in an Opera, the more likely it is to succeed; the large number of new pieces only ruins the Opéra").⁵⁷

The palpable tension between the solemnity and didacticism of Lullian lyric tragedy and the light, entertaining, even frivolous genre of the *opéra-ballet* led Pellegrin to probe the depths of conservative operatic tradition for the keys to the relationship between spoken tragedy and the *tragédie en musique* perfected by Lully and Quinault. Enamored of the *tragédie en musique*, Pellegrin remained convinced that its origins were distinct from that of spoken tragedy in the French classical tradition. He also bowed to the traditional role of actresses, dancers, and stage machinery

⁵⁵ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.^e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folia 55–56.

⁵⁶ See Argens, *Lettres morales et critiques*, 104, and *Le Gazetier cuirassé, ou anecdotes scandaleuses de la Cour de France* (London: n.p., 1777), 126.

⁵⁷ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.^e XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 55.

in opera of the late seventeenth century, claiming the poetics of the Opéra as an institution and cultural symbol made it unique among all other Parisian theaters.

73. L'Opéra est un Poème bien different de la Tragédie; On n'y veut n'y exposition, ni préparation, n'y récits. 74. L'un est un genre d'exemption, & l'autre un genre de contraction. 75. Il faut que l'action d'un Opéra parle aux yeux, et qu'on puisse l'entendre, sans le secours des parolles. 76. Chaque Actrice doit faire un Tableau d'un genre, et d'un caractère différens, et dont le divertissement fait partie. 77. Il suffit dans chaque Acte d'un Monologue, et d'une Scène principale qui finisse par un Duo, et qui soit précédée et suivie d'un divertissement. 78. Enfin la Poétique de l'Opéra est toute diffte. de celle des autres Théâtres. Ce n'est que par l'usage qu'on en peut apprendre la Mécanique.⁵⁸

73. Opera is a Poem wholly different from Tragedy; therein people want no exposition, no preparation, no narratives. 74. One is a genre of exemption, & the other a genre of contraction. 75. The action of an Opera must speak to the eyes, and one must be able to hear it without the assistance of the words. 76. Each Actress must create a Tableau of a genre, and of a different character, in which the *divertissement* plays a part. 77. It suffices in each Act to have a Monologue, and a primary Scene that concludes with a Duo, and that is preceded and followed by a *divertissement*. 78. Finally the Poetics of the Opéra are entirely different from that of other Theaters. It is only by habit that we can acclimate to the Machinery.

The logical conclusion of this foray into the different characteristics of spoken tragedy and *tragédie en musique* was the citation of several specific generic examples. In a short survey of operatic practice between the death of Lully and the time of his writing, Pellegrin held up Campra as the greatest composer of staged works since Lully, all the while dismissing Rameau as overly complicated and discounting Destouches as a composer who had produced only one truly successful staged work.

79. On a veu dans ces dernier tems des Balets qui ont fait grand tort aux anciens Opéras. 80. Outre la variété, on a trouvé le moyen d'introduire le Comique, et jusqu'a l'Allegorie, témoin le Carnaval et la Folie. 81. Il y a tel Acte de l'Europe Galante, et des Festes venitiennes, qui font plus de plaisir, que les plus belles Tragédies. 82. Le Ballet des Elemens peut servir de modele dans le noble, et celui des Festes de Thalie dans le Comique. 83. A l'esgard de la Pastorale, nous n'avons qu'Issé; mais c'est un Chef d'oeuvre dans son genre. 84. A tout prendre, il n'y a point eu depuis *Lully* de plus grand Musicien que *Campra*. 85. Des *Touches* a d'abord été son rival; mais il n'y a que son 1er. Ouvrage qui ait réussi, et il a perdu du goût, a mesure qu'il a acquies du savoir. 86. *Mouret* depuis les Festes de Thalie, n'a rien fait qui en aproche. 87. Il n'y point de Musicien qui ait plus d'harmonie que *Rameau*; mais sa Musique est trop chargée d'accompagnemens, et il donne trop dans le goût Italien. 88. Pour les parolles, il n'y a que la *Mothe*, et *Danchet* qui ayent aproché de *Quinault*.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid., 57–58.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 58–59.

79. Lately we have seen Ballets that have brought great harm to older Operas. 80. Besides the variety, we have found the means to introduce Comedy, and even Allegory, witness *Le Carnaval et la Folie*. 81. There is one such Act of *L'Europe galante*, and *Les fêtes vénitiennes*, that brings more pleasure than the most beautiful Tragedies. 82. The Ballet *Les élémens* can serve as a model of nobility, and *Les fêtes, ou Le triomphe de Thalie* of Comedy. 83. As for the Pastorale, we have only *Issé*; but it is a Masterpiece in its genre. 84. All things considered, not since *Lully* has there been a greater musician than *Campra*. 85. *Destouches* was his rival at first; but only his first Work succeeded, and he lost his sense of taste at the same time that he acquired knowledge. 86. *Mouret*, since *Les fêtes, ou Le triomphe de Thalie*, has produced nothing that approaches it. 87. There is no Musician who has more harmony than *Rameau*; but his Music is too charged with accompaniments, and trades too much in the Italian style. 88. As for words, only *La Motte* and *Danchet* have approached the level of *Quinault*.

In spite of the faint praise for *Les élémens* (1721), the most successful *opéra-ballet* of Destouches, disdain for the emphasis on dance that drove genres like the *opéra-ballet* is palpable here, as is the unenthusiastic admission that this lighter genre threatened to trump lyric tragedy once and for all. Pellegrin moves quickly from the belief that ballet and *opéra-ballet* have ruined the tradition of Lullian lyric tragedy to an examination of several staged works that saw a good deal of success in the years leading up to the appearance of the *Pantrache* satire. He admits that *Le Carnaval et la folie* (1704), the *comédie-ballet* in four acts and a prologue by Destouches, was an entertaining mixture of comedy and allegory, and as Pellegrin would not have needed to mention at the time of his writing, it was a genre that combined spoken dialogue with interludes of music and dancing. An early example of *comédie-ballet* came from none other than Lully; *Les fâcheux* (1661), with words by Molière and choreography by Pierre Beauchamp (1631–1705), was the first of several collaborations among the three men, who would go on to produce *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670), a *comédie-ballet* in five acts. Pellegrin also reluctantly admits the success and generic value of *L'Europe galante* (1697), with a livret by Antoine Houdar de La Motte (1672–1731), and *Les fêtes vénitiennes* (1710), on a livret of Antoine Danchet (1671–1748), two works of *opéra-ballet* by Campra that were pioneering examples in the genre, *L'Europe galante* itself considered the first *opéra-ballet*. It saw revivals at the Opéra into the middle of the eighteenth century, while *Les fêtes vénitiennes* saw repeated performances through the last quarter of the century.

That Pellegrin worried over the ability of these works to overshadow lyric tragedies is a concern that resonated much later than the time of his writing, when the poet and Rameau

collaborator Louis de Cahusac (1706–1759) called *L'Europe galante* the *premier ne nos Ouvrages lyriques qui n'a point ressemblé aux opéras de Quinault* (“the first of our lyric Works that did not resemble the operas of Quinault”).⁶⁰

L'Europe galante est le premier de nos Ouvrages lyriques qui n'a point ressemblé aux opéras de Quinault. Ce Spectacle est une composition originale qui auroit dû combler de gloire le Poète qui l'a imaginée. Ses contemporains ont été injustes. Il a vécu sans jouir. La Postérité le vengera sans doute, et déjà l'envie qui se sert du mérite des morts, pour éclipser celui des vivants, a commencé de nos jours la réputation de ce Poète Philosophe.⁶¹

L'Europe galante is the first of our lyric Works that did not resemble the operas of Quinault. This Show is an original composition that had to have filled with glory the Poet who imagined it. His contemporaries were unjust. He lived without enjoyment. Posterity will no doubt avenge him, and already today the envy that thrives on the merit of predecessors, to eclipse that of the living, has advanced the reputation of this Philosopher Poet.

As for the composers responsible for the declining state of lyric tragedy, Pellegrin singles out Destouches and Rameau as well as Jean-Joseph Mouret (1682–1738), the first of whom found considerable success with his *pastorale héroïque Issé* but in the eyes of Pellegrin remained a composer of rather limited talents despite his work in the genres of *opéra-ballet* and *tragédie en musique*. Rameau fares no better, lambasted as a purveyor of prolix, baroque harmonies in the Italian style. As for Mouret, he composed the initial version of *Les fêtes, ou Le triomphe de Thalie* (1714) on a livret of Joseph de La Font (1686–1725) to include a controversial dramatic conceit that ultimately proved quite successful. In the prologue, Thalie as the muse of comedy triumphs over Melpomène, the muse of tragedy, amid decoration and scenery that represented the stage of the Opéra itself. Following the premiere La Font was immediately tasked with revising portions of the work, adding the new epilogue *La critique des fêtes de Thalie*. In a subsequent printed edition the title was changed to *Les fêtes de Thalie* and a version of the work produced in 1722 included a new opening *La provençale* featuring regional costuming and melodies sung in the Provençal dialect. This revised version would remain popular at the Opéra until the last quarter of the eighteenth century,

⁶⁰ See the *Encyclopédie méthodique: Arts académiques, équitation, escrime, danse, et art de nager* (Paris: Panckoucke, 1786), 339.

⁶¹ See Louis de Cahusac, *La Danse ancienne et moderne, ou Traité historique de la danse*, 3 vols. (The Hague: Jean Neaulme, 1754), III, 108.

although Pellegrin seems to have believed that none of the other works of Mouret, from the lyric tragedy *Pirithoüs* (1723) to the *opéra-ballet* *Le triomphe des sens* (1732) or the *ballet héroïque* *Les grâces* (1735), made much of an impression.

Pellegrin concludes his satirical propositions on a comparative note, drawing parallels between the Opéra, known as the Académie royale de musique, and the Académie française, the institution charged with the perfection and preservation of the French language. Actresses were not exempt from this final analysis. Their performances in the theater were compared to the works produced by the authors associated with the Académie française; they were, after all, the fruits of a considerable amount of creativity, charm, and cunning. While neither Académie fared well in the eyes of Pellegrin, what little hope remained for the future of the Opéra rested in the administrative realm. He thought the institution was in dire need of the ability to govern itself independently, having been under state control since its establishment in the late seventeenth century.⁶²

96. Enfin l'Accadémie de Musique est l'endroit où l'on se pique le moins de la sçavoir. 97. Tant de conformité me fait croire que l'histoire de l'une ne seroit pas moins interressante que celle de l'autre. 98. Les Portraits des Filles de l'Opéra ne figureoit pas mal avec celui des auteurs de l'Accadémie. 99. On pourroit juger de ceux et de celles qui auroient le plus travaillé, par la Liste de leurs ouvrages et de leurs intrigues. 100. Il n'y a pas jusqu'au choix des sujets, ou aux réceptions qui ne pussent soutenir le paralelle. 101. Enfin pour le rendre parfait, il ne manqueroit à l'Académie de Musique, que d'avoir un Sécretaire, et de pouvoir se choisir elle même son Directeur, et son Trésorier.⁶³

96. At the end of the day the Académie de Musique is the place where people pride themselves the least on knowledge. 97. Considerable conformism leads me to believe that the history of one would be no less interesting than that of the other. 98. The Portraits of the Filles de l'Opéra would not mesh badly with those of the authors of the Académie. 99. One could judge the men and women who had accomplished the most by the List of their works and their intrigues. 100. There is no choice of subjects or receptions that could not sustain the parallel. 101. Finally, to make it perfect, the only thing the Académie de Musique is missing is a Secretary, and the power of choosing for itself its Director and Treasurer.

The assertion that there was no choice of subjects that could not sustain the parallel between the Opéra and the Académie française was not simply a rhetorical flourish or a polemical position; it was

⁶² See Philippe Agid and Jean-Claude Tarondeau, *L'Opéra de Paris: gouverner une grande institution culturelle* (Paris: Vuibert, 2006), 64.

⁶³ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 60.

a telling remark about the privileged place of the French language in the creation and reception of French opera.

The *Panocrace* satire placed Pellegrin in a group of conservative writers who believed that language, in the form of poetry, belonged at the heart of the operatic experience, just as the Académie française regarded language as the seat of French culture, legislating on matters of linguistic correctness and rules governing drama in the Aristotelian tradition and going so far as to attempt the establishment of an entire culture based on *éloquence*.⁶⁴ As research by Olivia Bloechl has shown, the mixed reception of the staged works of Rameau hinged on a perception that the complexity of his harmonies threatened to overturn a crucial French aesthetic hierarchy by distracting from the linguistic content of drama.

For French audiences unused to such an abundance of musical presence, the pairing of complex music with dramatic poetry could make the whole seem like gibberish, which everyone knew was the proper form of expression for barbarians or savages (or Italians), but not a nation of rational beings. The transgression of reason in such music had serious symbolic implications, but it could also directly affect susceptible audience members. The effects of operatic unreason—whether it is described as Italianism, effeminacy, monstrosity, or savagery—operated at a physical or spiritual as well as a symbolic level, due to the mechanism of sympathy by which music was thought to move the passions of listeners.⁶⁵

As Dill has explained, the staged works of Rameau maintained the established value of the poetic text in *tragédie lyrique* and yet did so in an artificial manner by also maintaining an overtly musical value that was at odds with contemporary aesthetics.⁶⁶ The same conservative writers who maligned Rameau elaborated theories of operatic expression that regarded music as incapable of bearing formal or theatrical meaning except by correspondence and analogy with language. This was a position articulated much earlier in the eighteenth century in the *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise* (1704) of Jean-Laurent Le Cerf de La Viéville (1674–1707), in

⁶⁴ See Terrence Cave, “Ancients and Moderns: France,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume III: The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 421, and Hugh Davidson, “The rhetorical ideal in France,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume III*, 500.

⁶⁵ See Olivia Bloechl, *Native American Song at the Frontiers of Early Modern Music*, New Perspectives in Music History and Criticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 185.

⁶⁶ See Dill, *Monstrous Opera*, 50.

which we read that successful expression in any opera can be achieved *si le Musicien proportionne vivement, exactement, les tons aux paroles: la chose m'est doublement représentée par la Poésie & par la Musique. Lorsqu'elle n'est qu'indifférente, mon esprit est toujours content de cette convenance: Cela peint, donc cela est bon* ("if the Musician, quickly and exactly, applies proportionate tones to the words: the thing is doubly represented to me by Poetry & Music. When it is only indifferent, my mind is still happy with this convenience: This paints a picture, so it is good").⁶⁷ For Pellegrin the subtleties of the interaction between dramatic livret text and its musical setting were of considerable importance to the future of French opera, even if, as he asserted at the conclusion of his propositions, the audience at the Opéra had become too dumbed down even to appreciate these aesthetics. As for the underlying assumption that there were parallels between the Opéra and the Académie française at almost every conceivable level, Pellegrin neglected to nuance one important distinction, namely that the institution of French opera and its embodiment in the Académie royale de musique was designed not for the court but for the public, the very public referenced in the charter granted to the poet Pierre Perrin (1620–1675) to establish an academy *pour y faire chanter en public* ("to have sung there in public") lyric works in French.⁶⁸ As research by Rebekah Ahrendt has shown, unlike any other academy in France, in which an almost exclusively male body of experts codified language and the arts behind closed doors, the Académie royale de musique presented public performances funded not by the monarch but by proceeds from the sale of tickets.⁶⁹ The Opéra was public through and through.

The *Panrace* satire cites operatic works and librettists that date it somewhat earlier than its appearance in the *Maurepas* volume comprising material from the years 1736 and 1737; in

⁶⁷ See Jean-Laurent Le Cerf de La Viéville de Freneuse, *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise, où, en examinant en détail les avantages des Spectacles, & le mérite des Compositeurs des deux nations* (Brussels: François Foppens, 1704), 170.

⁶⁸ See Victoria Johnson, *Backstage at the Revolution: How the Royal Paris Opera Survived the End of the Old Regime* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 111.

⁶⁹ See Rebekah Ahrendt, "A Second Refuge: French Opera and the Huguenot Migration, c. 1680–c. 1710," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011, 1.

particular the satire cites works of Mouret, Campra, Destouches, and Rameau as well as livrets by Houdar de La Motte and Danchet. It is possible that Pellegrin drafted a number of the over one hundred satirical propositions, with introductory and concluding commentary, as much as a decade before the Parisian premiere of *Hippolyte et Aricie*, for which he produced the livret. The candor and conservatism of the parody, with its references to the value of Lullian and Quinaultian tradition and its disdain for newer, reforming composers like Rameau, place the Pellegrin satire squarely within a niche of traditionalist criticism that in part counts among its proponents the likes of Mably, Rémond de Saint-Mard, and André as well as writers from the turn of the eighteenth century like Le Cerf. The aim of such conservatism was not simply to discount composers like Rameau but to revive and reinvigorate Lullian tradition and perhaps even more to tap into the didacticism of French spoken tragedy that antedated even Lully and Quinault.

Parody

Whatever the original date of the *Panrace* parody, it ultimately lead a remarkable half-life as a refashioned satire published anonymously in 1754, when it was attributed to Chevrier, the satirical poet and secretary to Nicolas-Marie-Séraphin Rioult de Douilly, marquis de Curzay (1706–1766). The attribution of the original *Panrace* satire to Chevrier does not entirely make sense, as Chevrier would have been fifteen or sixteen years old at the time it appeared in print in the fourth decade of the eighteenth century. He more than likely did not produce any critical works of note until after the middle of the century, at the time of the appearance of his observations on the Opéra, the Opéra-Comique, and their productions.⁷⁰ As research by Robert Darnton has shown, in the middle of the century Chevrier was not even thirty years old and yet he had already acquired a reputation as a bold and irreverent liar and a vitriolic satirist, an underground journalist whose flair for espionage was forever colored by his failed forays into law, poetry, and the military.⁷¹ The *Constitution du*

⁷⁰ See *La constitution de l'Opéra* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1736) and the *Observations sur le théâtre, dans lesquelles on examine avec impartialité l'état actuel des spectacles de Paris, par M. de Chevrier* (Paris: Debure, 1755).

⁷¹ See Darnton, "Policing Writers in Paris Circa 1750," 8, and idem, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 155.

patriarche de l'Opéra, as it was newly titled, retained the introductory and concluding comments of the original entry in the *Chansonnier Maurepas* yet reworked upwards of twenty-five propositions from the Pellegrin parody, placing additional emphasis on the tired, trite character of actresses at the Opéra and removing a number of the original propositions that had addressed the declining quality of tragic livrets.⁷² The document reflected at least two additional decades of ferment that had built up among the Parisian public over the state of the *filles de l'Opéra*, some of the most popular of whom, particularly the soprano Marie Péliissier (1707–1749) and the dancer Marie Sallé (1707–1756), died only a few years before and after the publication of the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra*. Of particular note was its amplification of existing concerns about performance standards and the quality of singers on stage.⁷³ The refashioned text also appeared in the wake of a significant

⁷² See the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra, qui condamne cent une Propositions extraites de deux Ecrits intitulés: Reflexions sur les vrais principes de l'Harmonie, & Lettre sur l'origine & les progrès de l'Académie Royale de Musique* (Cytheropolis: n.p., 1754). Of the two other documents referenced in this title, the first may be a paraphrase and truncation of the *Essais sur les Principes de l'Harmonie, où l'on traite de la Théorie de l'Harmonie en général, des Droits respectifs de l'Harmonie, et de la Melodie, de la Basse Fondamentale, et de l'Origine du Mode mineur* (Paris: Prault Fils, 1753) of Jean-Adam Serre (1704–1788), or of the earlier treatises by Rameau, the *Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie* (Paris: Durand-Pissot, 1750) or the *Nouvelles réflexions de M. Rameau sur sa Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie* (Paris: Durand-Pissot, 1752), while the *Lettre sur l'origine & les progrès de l'Académie Royale de Musique* has been attributed to Jean-Baptiste Dupuy d'Emportes. He was the author of *Le Gentilhomme Cultivateur, ou Corps d'Agriculture, tire de l'Anglois de M. Hale & tiré des Auteurs qui ont le mieux écrit sur cet Art, avec figures* (Paris: Simon, 1761), containing a number of observations on the various trees and plants of France. The chevalier Charles de Fieux de Mouhy (1701–1784) describes Dupuy as known in French theater only for the *comédie Le Printemps* (Paris: Jacques Clousier, 1747), a one-act comedy in verse that was never staged. Dupuy is also the author of the *Traité historique & moral du Blason* (Paris: Jombert, 1754), a *Lettre à Monsieur de Voltaire sur la tragédie de Catilina de Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon* (London: n.p., 1748), and the six-volume *Histoire générale du pont-neuf* (London: n.p., 1750). François-Joseph Fétis lists a Dupuy as the author of the *Lettres sur l'origine et les progrès de l'Opéra en France* (The Hague: n.p., 1740), appearing in the sixth volume of the collection *Amusements du coeur et de l'esprit* (Paris: Pissot, 1744). See Fétis, *La musique mis à la portée de tout le monde*, 3e éd. (Paris: Brandus, 1847), 447. See also Charles de Fieux de Mouhy, *Abrégé de l'histoire du théâtre françois, depuis son origine jusqu'à la clôture de l'année 1780*, nouv. éd., 2 vols. (Paris: Jorry, 1780), I, 292.

⁷³ See Jean-Bernard Le Blanc, *Lettres d'un François*, 3 vols. (The Hague: Jean Neaulme, 1745), III, 82, and the reviews of performances of *Les fêtes de Thalie* in the *Mercure de France, dédié au roi. Novembre. 1754* (Paris: Duchesne, 1754), 157, and the *Mercure de France, dédié au roi. Decembre. 1754, second volume* (Paris: Duchesne, 1754), 187. See also David Charlton, *Opera in the Age of Rousseau: Music, Confrontation, Realism*, Cambridge Studies in Opera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 219.

shift in the balance of power at the Opéra, as the *maison du roi* had granted authority over the Académie royale de musique to the city of Paris in August 1749, vesting the direction of the Opéra in the hands of the *prévot des marchands*, a high post in the Hôtel de Ville that had lost most of its power under Louis XIV.⁷⁴ Appearing almost a full decade after the scathing call for operatic and moral reform published by Luigi Riccoboni (1674–1753) as *De la réformation du théâtre* (1743), the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* had ample time to absorb what David Charlton has described as the shocking fundamentalism of Riccoboni.⁷⁵ In proposing a fully regulated theater under state control, Riccoboni reiterated beliefs that had circulated in French discourse decades earlier, including the idea that the primary aim of the theater should be didacticism and that the exploitation of female performers on stage had culminated in the ridiculous and wanton display of their bodies, a development that could only be remedied by banning women from dancing.⁷⁶ The distance was not great between the conservative recommendations of Riccoboni and the intense fascination and contempt with which Chevrier approached the *filles de l'Opéra*.

These developments unfolded contemporaneously with the appearance of a curious volume of satire printed as *Le point de vue de l'Opéra et des courtisanes anciennes et modernes* (1743) and subsequently as *Le Code lyrique ou Règlement pour l'Opéra de Paris, avec des éclairissements historiques* (1743), the latter with annotations by the lawyer and editor Anne-Gabriel Meusnier de Querlon (1702–1780) and a prefatory *Point de vue de l'Opéra: fragment anonyme en forme de découpure* by the diplomat and cardinal François-Joachim de Pierre de Bernis (1715–1794).⁷⁷ As research by Fernand Drujon (1845–1912) has shown, the biting satirical text is rendered in the voice of Momus as an elaborate series of articles on the regulation, taxation, and productivity of the

⁷⁴ See William Weber, “La musique ancienne in the Waning of the Ancien Régime,” *The Journal of Modern History* 56/1 (1984), 75.

⁷⁵ See Charlton, *Opera in the Age of Rousseau*, 169.

⁷⁶ See Louis Riccoboni, *De la réformation du théâtre* (Paris: n.p., 1743), 108.

⁷⁷ See the *REGLEMENT POUR L'OPERA DE PARIS. AVEC DES NOTES HISTORIQUES* (Utopie: Thomas Morus, 1743).

filles de l'Opéra; it is notable for perhaps few reasons other than the fact that its farcical condemnation of these women was taken sufficiently seriously by the novelist Nicolas-Edme Rétif, dit Rétif de La Bretonne (1734–1806) to figure in his plan for theatrical reform published as *La Mimographe, ou idées d'une honnête-femme pour la réformation du théâtre national* (1770).⁷⁸ As a text that followed on the heels of *Le pornographe* (1769), on the reform of prostitutes and prostitution, it regarded the *filles de l'Opéra* as a real and palpable societal threat, delving into details about what genres they were best suited to perform at their beloved Opéra, which Rétif de La Bretonne called *un Spectacle tout-à-fait inutile aux mœurs, dangereux en lui-même, par ses chants, sa morale & sur-tout par ses Actrices* (“a Spectacle altogether morally useless, dangerous in itself, on account of its melodies, its morality, & above all its Actresses”).⁷⁹ Several contemporary women in the theater also felt Meusnier de Querlon and Bernis had thrown down the gauntlet, at least enough to issue their own rejoinder in the form of the *Requête de deux actrices d'Opéra à Momus, avec son ordonnance* (1743), a pamphlet whose caption title describes its *Requête présentée à Momus par les Demoiselles Coupée & Desgranges, actrices de l'Opéra, tant pour elles que pour celles de leurs compagnes qui se trouvent dans le cas de l'article XX. du Code lyrique, ou reglement pour l'Opéra, imprimé au mois de juin 1743* (“Request presented to Momus by the Demoiselles Coupée & Desgranges, actresses of the Opéra, as much for them as for those of their colleagues who find themselves in violation of article XX of the lyrical Code, or rule for the Opéra, printed in the month of June 1743”).⁸⁰ It is unclear from what few contemporary biographical accounts survive whether the leading Rameau soprano Marie-Angélique Coupée (1723–1789) flew in the face of the twentieth article of the code of the Opéra and dealt with a pregnancy in the middle of her career; nor is it any

⁷⁸ See the *Poésies diverses du Cardinal de Bernis, avec une Notice bio-bibliographique par Fernand Drujon*, Petits poètes du XVIIIe siècle (Paris: Quantin, 1882), 234.

⁷⁹ See *La Mimographe, ou idées d'une honnête-femme pour la réformation du théâtre national* (Amsterdam: Changuion, 1770), 150. See also *Le pornographe, ou, Les idées d'un honnête-homme sur un projet de règlement pour les prostituées, propre à prévenir les malheurs qu'occasionne le publicisme des femmes: avec des notes historiques et justificatives* (London: Jean Nourse, 1769), 106.

⁸⁰ See the *Requête de deux actrices d'opéra à Momus: avec son ordonnance* (The Hague: n.p., 1743).

clearer why her colleague Marie Desgranges, the dancer and pupil of François André Bouqueton, himself associated with the foire Saint-Laurent in the middle of the century and later with the court at Mannheim, was singled out.⁸¹ We only know that these women dared to rise up against their detractors in print and to lend a degree of pride and autonomy to their otherwise upbraided activities by recourse to what Nancy Miller has described as the authorial signature.⁸²

As research by Lois Rosow has shown, the increasing autonomy of female performers in these decades was the subject of considerable public and administrative anxiety, such that the comte de Maurepas, as superintendent of the Opéra on behalf of the monarch, was moved to write to Louis-Armand-Eugène de Thuret, who served as director of the Opéra from 1733 to 1744, about the present state of the institution and about *les mesures nécessaires pour luy redonner son ancien lustre* (“the necessary measures for restoring it to its former luster”), which included tightening the reins on performers.⁸³

Le Roy est informé, Monsieur, de l’Etat dans lequel se trouve a présent l’Academie Royale de musique, sa M.^{te} ma chargée de tenir la main a ce que ce Spectacle, se soutienne, avec décence, et de prendre a cet effet les mesures nécessaires pour luy redonner son ancien lustre. En attendant, qu’on puisse avoir, pris tous les arrangements convenables, pour Retablir la regle dans toutes les parties qui y ont raport, Celle qui regard l’exécution du spectacle ma parû la plus pressée. Ainsi je commence par décider que le S. Rebel en conservant la place d’inspecteur général sur la partie du talent, ce qui comprend les acteurs Orchestre et Danse, Reprendra la mesure.⁸⁴

The King is informed, Sir, of the present State of the Académie Royale de musique; his Majesty has charged me with making sure that this Entertainment company maintains itself

⁸¹ See Parfaict and Parfaict, *Additions et corrections au Dictionnaire des théâtres de Paris*, 7 vols. (Paris: Lambert, 1756), VII, 550. On Bouqueton, see *Ballet Music from the Mannheim Court: Part I: Christian Cannabich: Le rendez-vous, ballet de chasse, Georg Joseph Vogler: Le rendez-vous de chasse, ou Les vendanges interrompues par les chasseurs*, ed. Floyd Grave, *Recent Researches in the Music of the Classic Era* 45 (Madison: A-R Editions, 1996), xiii, and Daniel Heartz, *Music in European Capitals: The Galant Style, 1720–1780* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 503.

⁸² See Nancy Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing*, Gender and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 17.

⁸³ See Lois Rosow, “Lully’s *Armide* at the Paris Opéra: A Performance History, 1686–1766,” Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1981, 326.

⁸⁴ See Paris, Archives nationales, AJ¹³¹, dossier II, “Lettre à M. Thuret, signé Maurepas: Versailles, le 5. avril 1741.”

respectably and, to this end, with taking the necessary measures to restore it to its former luster. Until all suitable arrangements can be made to Restore order in all relevant areas, That of performance seems the most pressing. Thus I have begun by deciding that monsieur Rebel, while retaining the position of general inspector in the area of musical talent, which includes the actors, Orchestra members, and Dancers, will Go back to conducting.

The letter continues with instructions about various payments as well as advice about the importance of replacing members of the orchestra and the Opéra chorus who were considered insufficiently proficient performers. The idea that the reform of the Opéra and its restoration to a state of bygone radiance should begin not with its administration or its repertory but with its performers was a consequence of the growing distaste for a system of venal charges for leading performers based on a merit system for appointment that had begun under Louis XIV. The goal of a number of musicians was not the perfection of their art or the elevation of the operatic repertory so much as the acquisition of positions as *ordinaires* of the monarch and thus the enjoyment of the benefits of *vétéranse* or seniority.⁸⁵

That the luster and respectability of the Opéra as an institution and cultural symbol rested so firmly on the shoulders of its performers was something administrators and the Parisian public knew all too well; commentators feared what was at stake for society at large when women in the theater gained the upper hand not just musically but financially and politically. Some of the most pointed critiques of actresses in the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* focus on their aspirations to power and particularly to political power beyond the confines of the theater.

XXXIV. L'Opéra est un Pérou pour les Filles qui y entrent, quoique leurs appointemens soient très-médiocres. XXXV. Il y en a telles qui sont sans appointemens, ou qui les abandonnent au Directeur, pour y rester. XXXVI. Quel abus, que toute Fille qui veut entrer à l'Opéra pour le chant ou pour la danse soit obligée de rendre au Directeur & au Maître de Ballet le même hommage que les nouvelles mariées de la Troade étoient obliges de rendre au Scamandre? XXXVII. Tout se vend, tout s'achette; tout a son prix à l'Opéra: Une place, un rôle, un air, un pas & jusqu'à une queue. XXXVIII. Depuis que les robes de Cour se sont introduites à l'Opéra, il n'y a pas jusqu'aux Filles de chœurs qui ne portent des manchettés à cinq rangs. XXXIX. Il n'y a point d'endroit où le luxe & la luxure ayent fait de nos jours plus de progrès qu'à l'Opéra. XL. Les Filles de l'Opéra ont aujourd'hui plus de pierres fines qu'elles n'en avoient de fausses autrefois. XLI. Leur en donner c'est être dupe; leur en prêter

⁸⁵ See Marcelle Benoit, *Versailles et les musiciens du roi, 1661–1733: étude institutionnelle et sociale*, Vie musicale en France sous les rois Bourbons 19 (Paris: Picard, 1971), 97, and Orest Ranum, *Artisans of Glory: Writers and Historical Thought in Seventeenth-Century France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 160.

c'est courir grand risque; on en est toujours quitte pour les perdre. XLII. Jamais les femmes de Théâtre n'ont eu tant de crédit; il n'y a rien dont elles ne viennent à bout pour peu qu'elles se donnent du mouvement, & on ne réussit aujourd'hui que par leur canal. XLIII. Les Filles d'Opéra ont partagé entr'elles le Gouvernement: L'une a le département de la Guerre, l'autre celui des Finances, celle-ci les affaires de Religion, & celle-là le maniement des affaires étrangères. XLIV. Si elles connoissoient leurs forces & pouvoient s'accorder ensemble, elles gouverneroient la Cour, la Ville, & les Provinces.⁸⁶

XXXIV. The Opéra is an Asset to the Filles who enter it, although their salaries are very mediocre. XXXV. There are several without salaries, or who give them up to the Director, to remain there. XXXVI. What an abuse, that any Fille who wants to enter the Opéra for song or dance is obligated to render to the Director & *Maître de Ballet* the same homage the brides of the Troad were obliged to render to the Scamander? XXXVII. Everything is sold, everything is purchased; everything has its price at the Opéra; A Place, a role, an *air*, a step & even a prick. XXXVIII. Ever since Court dresses were introduced at the Opéra, there are no Filles of the choruses who wear sleeves. XXXIX. There is no place where luxury & lust have made more progress today than at the Opéra. XL. The Filles de l'Opéra now have more gems than they previously had imitations. XLI. To give to them is to be duped; to lend to them is to run a great deal of risk; we are still left to lose. XLII. The women of the Theater have never had so much credit; there is nothing they cannot overcome provided that they motivate themselves, & these days we only succeed in their channel. XLIII. The Filles de l'Opéra have divided the Government up among themselves: One heads the department of War, the other that of Finances, this one Religious affairs, and this one foreign affairs. XLIV. If they knew their strengths & could get along with each other they would rule the Court, the City, & the Provinces.

Exactly what kind of asset the Opéra truly was for those who performed there remains unclear; as other accounts in the Maurepas manuscript collection attest, it was not subject to police control, as royal immunity protected lawbreakers in the Palais-Royal from prosecution for immoral conduct.⁸⁷ Mediocre as they may have been, the salaries of the *filles de l'Opéra* are recorded in the so-called Amelot manuscript, which also contains details of the performing careers of a number of these women.⁸⁸ As for the lust and greed that characterized women in the theater, these traits are denounced as the ruination of actresses and of the Opéra as an institution; the Opéra in the *Constitution du patriarce de l'Opéra* was characterized as a vehicle for luxury and lust just as

⁸⁶ See the *Constitution du patriarce de l'Opéra*, 15–18.

⁸⁷ See the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, Années 1736 & 1737. Vol.° XIX*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12634, folio 56.

⁸⁸ See the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de l'Académie royale de musique vulgairement l'Opéra depuis son établissement en l'année 1669 jusques et y compris l'année 1758*, Paris, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, Rés. 516.

equally as the site of deception and distrust. We then encounter a proposition that would surely have struck contemporary readers as a matter of great terror and suspicion, namely that the *filles de l'Opéra* were angling for positions of power beyond the confines of the theater, preparing to take up leadership positions in finance, religion, and foreign affairs. The prediction that they might well assume governance of the court, the city, and the provinces reflects the growing notoriety of actresses and dancers in these years as well as popular suspicions about their ability to wrest control of the state and the court from the hands of the elite. The *filles de l'Opéra* were often regarded as having male representatives of key governmental departments under their thumbs; commentators feared these women were ready at any moment to effect a political takeover using their illicit relationships with those in power.

A number of other propositions in the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* focus not on actresses themselves but on the financial state of the Opéra as well as the dramatic subjects of its staged works. The debt of the Opéra, which had been a sore subject even in the original Pellegrin parody, appears again here, as does a telling meditation on the process by which aspiring actresses and dancers were mentored by their superiors at the Opéra, often with the end result of upstaging them.

LXXII. Il est étonnant qu'avec le secours de l'Opéra Comique, du Concert Spirituel & du Bal, l'Opéra n'ait pû encore trouver le moyen de payer ses dettes. LXXIII. L'Opéra Comique est l'endroit où la plûpart des Actrices font l'épreuve de leur vocation, & essayent leurs talens pour le chant, la danse & la galanterie. LXXIV. La plus grande utilité dont il est pour l'Opéra, n'est pas de lui payer tribut, mais de lui fournir des Sujets, & de lui élever de jeunes Actrices & de jeunes Danseuses dans toutes les vertus de leur état. LXXV. L'Opéra Comique est un Seminaire où l'on a soin de former leurs moeurs & de cultiver les talens, & d'où l'Opéra tire les meilleurs Sujets. LXXVI. Si le Magasin ne fournit point de Sujets à l'Opéra, c'est qu'on ne leur donne pas le tems de les former, & qu'on les lui débauche en chemin. LXXVII. Ce qui a dégoûté les Actrices & les Danseuses de former des Eleves, c'est qu'elles ne profitent de leurs leçons que pour les supplanter & leur enlever leurs Amans. LXXVIII. La galanterie est un Art où la Maîtresse est souvent la dupe de l'Ecolière, & où vous donnés des verges pour vous soüetter. LXXIX. La disette des bons Sujets prouve la vieillesse de l'Opéra, & annonce sa décadence & sa ruine prochaine.⁸⁹

LXXII. It is amazing that with the aid of the Opéra-Comique, the Concert Spirituel & the Bal de l'Opéra, the Opéra could not find a way to pay its debts. LXXIII. The Opéra-Comique is where most actresses test their vocation, and try their talents in singing, Dance & gallantry.

⁸⁹ See the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra*, 23–25.

LXXIV. The greatest use it is to the Opéra is not to pay it tribute, but to provide Subjects, & to instruct young Actresses & young Dancers in all the virtues of their state. LXXV. The Opéra-Comique is a Seminar in which we need to form their morals & cultivate talents, & in which the Opéra draws the best Subjects. LXXVI. If the Magasin does not furnish Subjects to the Opéra, it is because we do not allow the time to form them, & they are bawdy in their way. LXXVII. What has disgusted Actresses & Dancers about training Students is that they make the most of their lessons to supplant them & take away their Lovers. LXXVIII. Chivalry is an Art in which the Mistress is often the dupe of the Schoolgirl, & in which you provide the rod for your own discipline. LXXIX. The scarcity of good Subjects proves the old age of the Opéra, & signals its impending fall & ruin.

While it is true that a number of the *filles de l'Opéra* began their performing careers not at the Opéra but in one of the fair theaters or at the Opéra-Comique, it is not altogether clear what the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* means to imply by calling the Opéra-Comique a source of dramatic subjects for staged works at the Opéra. In the middle of the eighteenth century when composers began to write original music to replace the *vaudevilles* sung in satirical plays at the fair theaters, an emergent genre called the *comédie mêlée d'ariettes* was born, with a range of subjects that extended beyond mere comedy. As the century progressed the term *opéra comique* increasingly referred to staged works in which spoken dialogue appeared, as opposed to the recitative that characterized staged works performed at the Opéra. The *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* nevertheless praises the Opéra-Comique as a training ground for the actresses at the Opéra as well as a source of dramatic and comedic subjects for works at the Académie royale de musique. Even the Opéra-Comique, however, could not entirely resuscitate the repertoire of the Opéra; the last third of the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* concludes on a pessimistic note reminiscent of the original Pancrace parody, claiming the Opéra is an aged institution desperate for new works and better quality dramatic subjects and ultimately destined to fall into ruin. We now know that this was not the case, but in the middle of the eighteenth century, after several decades of Lullian revivals, several revised and restaged works by Rameau, and an increasing number of works of *opéra-ballet*, the Opéra struck writers as an institution grown stale, one stuck in a rut of revivals of works from the previous century and out of step with contemporary desires.

The refashioned focus of the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra*, which devotes a full twenty-five out of approximately one hundred propositions to the state of actresses and acting,

reflects a shift in the generic and aesthetic orientation of the Opéra. In the two decades after the appearance of the original Pellegrin satire, a number of the *filles de l'Opéra* from Le Maure and Pélissier to Marie Antier (1687–1747), Marie Fel (1713–1794), and the dancers Françoise Prévost (1680–1741), Sallé, and Marie Anne de Cupis de Camargo (1710–1770) reached the pinnacles of their respective careers. These decades also saw the proliferation and popularity of *opéra-ballet* and *pastorale héroïque*. Some thirty-five new staged works specifically foregrounding dance and danced *divertissements* appeared at the Opéra in these years, fourteen of them by Rameau.⁹⁰ An increased repertorial focus on the technical and expressive aspects of dance as well as the prominence of the *filles de l'Opéra* themselves in these years in effect ushered in complex meditations on the mechanics and metaphysics of performance. Commentators marveled at the nuanced pantomimes of Sallé and the striking physicality and exertion of La Camargo, all the while reserving choice words for the *filles de l'Opéra* as social and sexual beings, as women whose influence extended well beyond the confines of the theater. These same commentators wondered what would ultimately become of the august institution of the Académie royale de musique and what role its female performers played in the elevation or denigration of the poetry, music, and spectacle at the heart of French opera and early modern French musical thought.

The *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* retained the conservative yet ironic perspective of the original Pellegrin parody, modeled as it was on a papal bull whose gloomy rejection of religious factionism was never designed with the demands of musical and aesthetic criticism in mind. The Pellegrin propositions and their later incarnation are instances of a rather denatured criticism altogether. They appropriated the formal structure and condemnatory tone of a religious document, presenting themselves as severe and above all as patriarchal reprimands of women in the theater. Assuming the voice of religious authority likely came naturally to the abbé Pellegrin; he nevertheless faced some of the same conceptual and critical challenges as Chevrier. The authors of these parodies had to have known that their feigned piety and rigorism was unmistakably and relentlessly

⁹⁰ See Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera 1597–1940*.

dissonant with the practice and criticism of the performing arts and the appreciation of musical beauty as an experience of sensuality and pleasure. It is unclear from entries in the Maurepas manuscripts or from the obscure reception history of the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* whether the members of the Parisian public who read these parodies considered them creative satires worth imitating or texts that fell flat. In the end the lure of the critical genre represented by the Pancrace satire and the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* likely stemmed as much from frustration with the Opéra, its unruly performers, and its generic ideals as from concerns that the comparably unruly ideologies of Jansenism would upset the balance of power in the institutional church as well as in other cultural institutions, from universities to the Académie française, from the Comédie-Française to the Opéra.

Jansenism

Jansenism was a complicated point of reference for opera criticism at this time in France. The relevance of the term itself has even been called into question by modern historians, who have pointed out that the principal authors and theologians associated with the movement in the seventeenth century never referred to themselves as Jansenists; this was a designation the Jesuits had coined.⁹¹ Jansenists nevertheless espoused a rigorous Augustinianism, emphasizing the strength of sin and the weakness of human will as well as elements of the theology of truth and grace derived from the posthumous publications of Cornelius Jansen.⁹² As research by Anthony Wright has shown, the theological movement that probably deserves to be called Cyranism, in honor of the colleague and patron of Jansen, the abbé de Saint-Cyran, Jean Duvergier de Hauranne (1581–1643), came together instead around the name of Jansen.⁹³ As research by Brian Strayer has shown, at the same time it is crucial to regard Jansenism as more than a monolithic system of religious thought, for the

⁹¹ See Jean-Louis Quantin, *Le rigorisme chrétien*, Histoire du christianisme (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 71.

⁹² See *Augustinus: In quo haereses et mores Pelagii contra naturae humanae sanitatem, aegritudinem et medicinam ex S. Augustino recensentur ac refutantur* (Leuven: Iacobi Zegeri, 1640).

⁹³ See Anthony Wright, *The Counter-Reformation: Catholic Europe and the Non-Christian World*, 2d ed., Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 183.

movement included moderates like Robert Arnauld d'Andilly (1589–1674), the *conseiller d'État* and *Solitaire* of Port-Royal des Champs and Gilbert de Choiseul du Plessis Praslin (1613–1689), the bishop of Comminges; centrists like the theologian and mathematician Antoine Arnauld (1612–1694) and the theologian Pierre Nicole (1625–1695), authors of *La Logique, ou l'art de penser*, known as the *Logique de Port-Royal*; monastics like the abbé de Saint-Cyran, the theologian Martin de Barcos (1600–1678), and the abbé Antoine Singlin (1607–1664); as well as extremists like the abbé Guillaume Le Roy (1610–1684) and Jacqueline Pascal (1625–1661).⁹⁴

A number of Jansenist publications authored by Arnauld and Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), the latter writing under the pseudonym Louis de Montalte, took aim at the Jesuit practice of casuistry through which the confessed sins of royalty could be forgiven no matter how dreadful they were.⁹⁵ As research by Anne Duggan has shown, moral equivocation had been a point of some soreness in the reception of Jesuitism in the seventeenth century, when the satires of Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711) took women to task as partisans of modernism and advocates of heresy yet also attacked the casuistry of the Jesuits, creating an analogy between the entire religious order, deemed apologists of sin, and the practice of witchcraft.⁹⁶ In place of casuistry Jansenism promulgated a clear sense of right and wrong as determined by divine grace. The separate studies *De la fréquente communion* (1643) and *Théologie morale des Jésuites* (1644) of Arnauld as well as the eight-volume *La morale pratique des Jésuites* (1669) compiled by Arnauld together with the abbé de Saint-Gildas-aux-Bois, Sébastien-Joseph du Cambout de Pontchâteau (1634–1690), the sometime botanist and nephew of Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal-Duc de Richelieu (1585–1642), formed the basis for

⁹⁴ See Brian Strayer, *Suffering Saints: Jansenists and Convulsionnaires in France, 1640–1799* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 14.

⁹⁵ See Albert Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 146, and Johann Sommerville, “The ‘new art of lying’: equivocation, mental reservation, and casuistry,” in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Edmund Leites, Ideas in context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 159.

⁹⁶ See Anne Duggan, *Salonnières, Furies, and Fairies: The Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 135.

arguments against Jesuitism in the *Lettres provinciales* of Pascal. These texts took Jesuits to task for their manipulated sense of morality, claiming that Jesuit views of free will were irreconcilable with Augustinian beliefs that only a predestined population could achieve salvation through the doctrine of efficacious grace often associated with Calvinism.⁹⁷ Jesuit views that original sin had not irreparably tainted human nature also contrasted with Jansenist beliefs that humans were born sinful and were incapable of freely choosing to do good. The tenets of Jansenism stressed the moral depravity of human nature and at the same time cast doubt on the relationship between Jesuit theology and theologians and the French monarchy.

Drawing Jansenism into the discourse on French opera and its audiences was thus a means of crafting a subtle institutional and moral critique. The candor and disillusionment of the *Panrace* satire represented one such critique whose irony was twofold. The document was a parody of performers on stage that cast doubt on the legitimacy of the Opéra by assuming the voice of conservative religious authority. Borrowing from the discourses associated with Jansenism and its denunciation lent opera criticism a feigned righteousness, as though its traffic in rigorism supplied it with a certain moral sovereignty. At the same time alluding to Jansenism, its figures, or its literature also introduced its numerous and virulent condemnations, turning such references in opera criticism into instances of real irony. Pellegrin knew well enough that the authoritative tone of a papal bull was in a sense perfectly suited to reprimanding immoral actresses, yet in constructing

⁹⁷ On the Jansenist critique of Jesuitism, see Eric Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy: Catholic Reform and Political Authority in France (1590–1615)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 57–96. On theological doctrines of grace in the eighteenth century, see Ephraim Radner, *Spirit and Nature: The Saint-Médard Miracles in Eighteenth-Century Jansenism* (New York: Crossroad, 2002). On efficacious grace and French sacral absolutism, see Douglas Palmer, “The Republic of Grace: International Jansenism in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution,” Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 2004, 10. On the relationship between Jansenism and Molinism, see Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). See also Antoine Arnauld, *De la fréquente communion, ou les sentimens des Peres, des Papes, et des Conciles, touchant l’usage des Sacremens de Penitence & d’Eucharistie, sont fidelement exposez: Pour servir d’adresse aux personnes qui pensent serieusement à se convertir à Dieu; & aux Pasteurs & Confesseurs zelez pour le bien des Ames* (Paris: Antoine Vitré, 1643), idem, *Théologie morale des Jésuites, extraicte fidèlement de leurs livres. Contre la Morale chrestienne en général: Deuxiesme Edition revuee et augmentée* (Paris: n.p., 1644), and Sébastien-Joseph du Cambout de Pontchâteau and Antoine Arnauld, *La Morale pratique des Jésuites*, nouv. éd., 8 vols. (Nancy: Nicolai, 1682–1735).

the Pancrace parody he also had to acknowledge the double reprimand wrapped up in *Unigenitus*. It was an attack on a heretical faith that had itself long attacked dramatic subjects and performers in the theater.

The intermingled religious and aesthetic concerns of the Pancrace satire and the revised *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* were not completely unique formulations in the critical discourse in these years. One decade after the appearance of the Pancrace parody, the abbé Charles Batteux (1713–1780) made a point of describing the model aesthete as a model citizen, extending his definition of citizenship to encompass religion. The ideal citizen of *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe* (1746) was a perfectly formed Christian in the eyes of Batteux, who claimed that the artistic manifestations of good taste inspired both civic virtue and Christian ideals. He connects taste formation to the cultivation of reason, furthermore describing *le bon Goût* or good Taste as *un amour habituel de l'ordre* or a habitual affection for the order of things. He claims at the same time that *Cet amour est une vertu de l'ame qui se porte à tous les objets, qui ont rapport à nous, & qui prend le nom de Goût dans les choses d'agrément, & retient celui de Vertu lorsqu'il s'agit des mœurs* (“This love is a virtue of the soul that extends to all objects, that maintains a relationship with us, & that takes the name of Taste in agreeable things, & retains that of Virtue when it comes to manners”).⁹⁸ While the Batteux treatise appeared after the Pancrace satire yet before the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra*, it drew parallels between Christian morality and the appreciation of the arts that likely resonated at some level with these more scurrilous parodies. At the same time *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe* was not a text that explicitly mingled the critique of the plastic and performing arts with rhetorical models from theology or religious criticism. In this respect the Pancrace satire and the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* remained unprecedented documents.

The Pancrace parody of *Unigenitus* also drew on the rich political and institutional history of the papal bull in early modern France, revealing perhaps more about the politics surrounding the monarchy and its relationship to the clergy than about the tenets of Jansenism. The impetus for the

⁹⁸ See Charles Batteux, *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe*, nouv. éd. (Paris: Durand, 1747), 130.

bull itself was the increasing popularity of Jansenism in the late seventeenth century under the bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne, Gaston-Jean-Baptiste-Louis de Noailles (1669–1720). Late in the seventeenth century Quesnel published his *Abrégé de la morale de l’Evangile* (1672) containing the four gospels in French with short explanatory notes as aids for meditation and further interpretation. Enlarged editions followed in 1678 and 1693 and contained an annotated French text of the complete New Testament published as *Le Nouveau Testament en françois: avec des reflexions morales sur chaque verset, pour en rendre la lecture plus utile, & la meditation plus aisée*.⁹⁹ The 1693 edition was highly recommended by Louis-Antoine de Noailles (1651–1729), who was at the time the bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne and succeeded by his brother, Gaston-Jean-Baptiste-Louis. While the first edition of the work had contained only a few Jansenist points, its tendency to promulgate Jansenism became more apparent in the second edition, and in its complete form, as it appeared in 1693, it was pervaded with Jansenist tenets. Several bishops forbade it to be read and Clement XI condemned it in a brief published in July 1708. The brief was not accepted in France because its wording and its manner of publication were not in harmony with the prerogatives of the Gallican church, which included the provisions that French sovereigns were not beholden to papal authority in civil matters and above all that papal decisions could have no effect in France without a *lettre de Pareatis* from the monarch.¹⁰⁰ Louis-Antoine, who had in the interim become archbishop of Paris and a cardinal, was not prepared to withdraw the approbation he had originally given to the book, and Jansenism grew more popular among the clergy and the faithful in France.

To put an end to the growing popularity of Jansenist thought in the early eighteenth century, several bishops with French monarchical approval asked Clement XI to issue a bull in place of the unacceptable brief from 1708. The bull would have to avoid every expression contrary to the

⁹⁹ See Quesnel, *Le Nouveau Testament en françois: avec des reflexions morales sur chaque verset, pour en rendre la lecture plus utile, & la meditation plus aisée*, nouv. éd. (Paris: André Pralard, 1693).

¹⁰⁰ On the tradition of the *lettres de Pareatis* required for the extension of a legal decision into a jurisdiction other than the one where it was originally made, see the *Recueil des réglemens et usages de l’insigne église collégiale et séculière de St. Pierre de Remiremont, immédiatement sujette au St. Siège* (Remiremont: Joseph Charlot, 1735), 211.

practices of the Gallican church and be submitted to the French government for approval before publication. The pope yielded to these conditions and in February 1712 he appointed a congregation of theologians, among them the cardinal and canon lawyer Carlo Agostino Fabroni (1651–1727), who had trained under the Jesuits, to cull from the work of Quesnel whatever propositions they deemed deserving of ecclesiastical censure. It took the congregation eighteen months to perform its task, the result of which was the publication of *Unigenitus* in Rome on September 8, 1713. On the evening of Sunday, September 10, 1713, the bull was posted on the doors of the Lateran basilica and San Pietro.¹⁰¹

The bull begins with a paraphrase of the warning of Christ against false prophets and those who spread evil doctrines under the guise of piety; it then proceeds to the condemnation of over a hundred propositions taken verbatim from the works of Quesnel. Among these condemned propositions, over forty of which dealt with grace and predestination and another thirty of which discussed divine love and charity, are: grace works with omnipotence and is irresistible; without grace man is only a sinner; Christ died only for the elect; every love that is not supernatural is evil; without supernatural love there can be no hope in God, no obedience to divine law, no good work, no prayer, no merit, and no religion; the prayer of the sinner and his other good acts performed out of fear of punishment are only new sins; the church comprises only the just and the elect; the reading of the bible is binding on everyone; and pastors can exercise the power of excommunication only with the consent of the whole body of the church.¹⁰² *Unigenitus* finds fault with many other statements in the published works of Quesnel without specifying them, and in particular, it faults his translation of the New Testament by calling it *damnabiliter vitiatum* or censurably altered and in many ways similar to a previously condemned French translation, *Le Nouveau Testament de notre Seigneur*

¹⁰¹ See McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, II, 353.

¹⁰² See the *Propositum in constitutione Clementis papae XI. ab exordio dicta UNIGENITUS damnatarum collatio cum quibusdam sacrae Scripturae locis ac SS. Patrum testimoniis* (Insulis Flandrorum: n.p., 1716).

Jesus Christ, traduit en françois, selon l'edition Vulgate, avec les differences du Grec (1667) of Louis-Isaac Lemaître, sieur de Sacy (1613–1684), popularly called *Le Nouveau Testament de Mons*.¹⁰³

As for the reception of *Unigenitus*, Louis XIV received the bull at Fontainebleau on September 24, 1713 and sent a copy to cardinal Noailles, who immediately revoked his earlier approbation of the works of Quesnel. The king also arranged for the French clergy to convene in Paris to accept the bull. At their first session Noailles appointed a committee headed by the eventual bishop and cardinal Louis César Constantin de Rohan (1697–1779) of Strasbourg, to weigh in on the most suitable manner of accepting the bull. The attempts of Noailles to prevent its unconditional acceptance proved vain and *Unigenitus* was accepted and officially registered. At the same time a separate pastoral instruction of Noailles forbade his priests under penalty of suspension to accept the bull without his authorization; this pastoral brief was subsequently condemned by Rome. The pope felt that his authority was threatened and intended to summon Noailles before the curia and demote him from the cardinalate. The king and his advisors believed this would constitute a trespass upon the practices of the Gallican church and instead proposed the convocation of a national council to judge Noailles and his faction.

Clement XI did not support the idea of convoking a national council and believed it might unnecessarily lengthen the quarrel and endanger his papal authority. He nevertheless drew up two briefs, one demanding the unconditional acceptance of the bull by Noailles within two weeks, on pain of turning in his hat and incurring canonical punishment, and the other more mildly pointing out the gravity of his actions. Both briefs were put in the hand of the king with the request to deliver the less severe one in case there was any hope of inspiring Noailles to submission. Noailles appeared to be completely averse to compromise and at the same time the more severe of the two papal briefs was rejected by the French government as subversive of the tenets of the Gallican church. Louis XIV

¹⁰³ See Louis-Isaac Lemaître, sieur de Sacy, *Le Nouveau Testament de notre Seigneur Jesus Christ, traduit en françois, selon l'edition Vulgate, avec les differences du Grec* (Mons: Gaspard Migeot, 1667). See also Paul Philippe Hardouin de Péréfixe de Beaumont, *Seconde ordonnance de monseigneur l'illustrissime et reverendissime Hardouin de Péréfixe archevesque de Paris, portant condamnation de la traduction du Nouveau testament imprimée à Mons* (Paris: François Muguet, 1668).

once more pressed the idea of a national council and yet died on September 1, 1715 before it could be convened. Philippe Charles d'Orléans (1674–1723) became the regent of France and favored the opponents of *Unigenitus*. Philippe disapproved of the hypocrisy of the reign of Louis XIV and opposed censorship, ordering the reprinting of books banned during the reign of his uncle. The Sorbonne also passed a resolution annulling its previous acceptance of the bull. Over twenty faculty members who protested this resolution were stripped of their privileges and banished from teaching. Clement XI accordingly withdrew every papal privilege from the Sorbonne and attempted to deprive the institution of the power to award academic degrees.

By condemning over one hundred propositions from the moral reflections of Quesnel and by sowing doubt, confusion, and discord among the faithful and the clergy, the papal bull *Unigenitus* marked a breaking point in the history of Jansenism. It attacked a number of principles that constituted a summary of Jansenist beliefs and yet also related to broader theological debates about the nature of grace as well as traditional perspectives on Gallicanism that were inevitably swept up into the discourse on Jansenism and its detractors at this time in Paris. Attitudes toward the separation of church and state during the twilight of the reign of Louis XIV prompted fierce opposition to the bull. While they did not condemn *Unigenitus* outright, Noailles and a number of other bishops could not come to an official position of acceptance and sought further explanations and seemingly endless clarifications from Rome. After the death of the French monarch in 1715 the faculties of the universities of Paris, Nantes, and Reims revoked their original acceptance of the bull and set into motion an appeal to a general council that had disastrous consequences for the balance of power in the French ecclesiastical hierarchy and for the lives and reputations of several individual bishops. The four bishops involved in the convocation of a general council were Jean Soanen (1647–1740) of Senez, Colbert de Croissy of Montpellier, Pierre de La Broue (1644–1720) of Mirepoix, and Pierre de Langle (1644–1724) of Boulogne, who appeared together before the theological faculty of the Sorbonne to advocate a reconsideration of the bull based in part on the *Déclaration du clergé*

gallican sur le pouvoir dans l'église (1682) of Bossuet, which had staunchly advocated the Gallican liberties and the independence of the French clergy from papal authority.¹⁰⁴

Clement XI himself condemned this appeal and its proponents or *appelants* in the bull *Pastoralis officii* (1718). Despite their excommunication these same bishops would renew the appeal in 1719 and 1720 together with Noailles. A number of *appelants* were subsequently affected by the issue of *lettres de cachet* in 1724, 1725, and 1727 and imprisoned or excommunicated. Soanen had advocated the close reading of the works of Quesnel over all these years and was ultimately censured by the archbishop of Embrun, Pierre Guérin de Tencin (1679–1758) and exiled by *lettre de cachet* to La Chaise-Dieu, where he died in 1740. The exile of Soanen incited a great deal of unrest among the *appelants* and prompted the successor of Noailles in Paris to attempt to silence the opposition. Charles-Gaspard-Guillaume de Vintimille du Luc as Parisian archbishop banned nearly three hundred priests from his Jansenist diocese and saw to it that the séminaire Saint-Magloire and the collège Sainte-Barbe as the main centers of the movement in Paris were closed once and for all. At last in 1730 *Unigenitus* became a state law.¹⁰⁵ This only increased the dismay of the over seven thousand clerics and some thirty prelates who numbered among the community of *appelants* at this time.¹⁰⁶ The dozens of epigrams in the volumes of the Maurepas manuscripts that ridiculed the fate of *Unigenitus* or *la constitution* continued to figure in popular conversation in Paris and at court.¹⁰⁷ At its peak in the second decade of the eighteenth century the Jansenist movement altogether pervaded the dioceses of Paris, Châlons to the east, Tours to the southwest, Senes in the southeasternmost part of France, and central Auxerre.

¹⁰⁴ See David Hudson, "The *Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques*, Jansenism, and Conciliarism, 1717–1735," *The Catholic Historical Review* 70/3 (1984), 389.

¹⁰⁵ See Catherine Maire, "Les querelles jansénistes de la décennie 1730–1740," in *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie* 38 (2005), 77.

¹⁰⁶ See Peter Campbell, *Power and Politics in old regime France, 1720–1745* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 202.

¹⁰⁷ See the *Recueil dit de Maurepas: Pièces libres, chansons, épigrammes, et autres vers satiriques sur divers personnages des siècles de Louis XIV et Louis XV*, 6 vols. (Leyde: n.p., 1865).

Penitence

The Pellegrin parody of *Unigenitus* is notable not only as a document that reflects the considerable scandal the original bull brought about in Paris; the parody also clarified its allegiance to Le Maure, the implication being that if the Opéra was serious about maintaining its eminence as a cultural institution it could not afford to dismiss such a woman as a triviality. But the association of Le Maure with *Unigenitus* and its turbulent history went even further. One year before the appearance of the Pancrace satire, Jean-Charles de Ségur (1695–1748) unexpectedly resigned his position as bishop of Saint-Papoul in southern France and published an explanation in the brief *Mandement de monseigneur l'évêque de Saint Papoul* (1735).¹⁰⁸ He had accepted *Unigenitus* only out of ambition to become a bishop and he withdrew from his position with what appeared to be great grace and remorse, asking pardon from those in his diocese and retreating to the abbaye Notre-Dame-du-Val-de-Gif located in what is now Gif-sur-Yvette southwest of Paris, a convent of Jansenist nuns of which his sister Marie-Anne-Françoise de Ségur de Ponchat (1697–1749) was abbess. This was not by any means the only instance of doctrinal disavowal and desertion on the part of a bishop in these years. As research by John McManners has shown, Honoré de Quiqueran de Beaujeu (1655–1736), the bishop of Castres who vanished from his post in the year of his death, had retracted his original acceptance of *Unigenitus* and banned Jesuits from preaching in his diocese only one year after the Ségur incident.¹⁰⁹ Le Maure, or quite possibly a ghostwriter like Pellegrin with sufficient knowledge of ecclesiastical politics as well as the situation of actresses at the Opéra at this time, promptly parodied the Ségur brief in a *Manifeste de Mademoiselle Le Maure pour faire part au public de ses sentiments sur l'Opéra et des raisons qu'elle a pour le quitter* (1735) dated the fifth day after the February moon that year or 27 February. The *Manifeste* was a document not on doctrinal

¹⁰⁸ See the *Mandement de monseigneur l'évêque de Saint Papoul; pour faire part à son peuple de ses sentimens sur les affaires présentes de l'Eglise, & des raisons qui le déterminent à se démettre de son évêché* (Saint Papoul: n.p., 1735).

¹⁰⁹ See McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, II, 461. See also Barbier, *Chronique de la régence et du règne de Louis XV (1718–1763)*, III, 10, and Jean-Marie Alliot, *Histoire de l'abbaye et des religieuses bénédictines de Notre-Dame du Val de Gif (au diocèse actuel de Versailles)*, par l'abbé J. M. Alliot (Paris: Picard, 1892), 255.

disavowal or deserting the faithful but on the analogous situation of abandoning a chosen profession.

Outraged and writing in the first person plural, Le Maure listed the contemptible conditions under which she had worked at the Opéra and complained bitterly about her alleged mistreatment.

L'on voudroit aussi nous assujettir comme la moindre Actrice à nous rendre, sous peine d'amende, à notre loge au moins une heure avant de paroître, qui est contraire à notre usage ordinaire, & diametrallement opposé à notre génie hautin & independant. C'est pourquoi sans nous repentir des plaisirs que nous avons pû vous procurer par le passé, nous quittons de ce jour pour jamais l'Opera.¹¹⁰

People wanted to force us, like the lowest Actress, under penalty of fine, to appear in our dressing room at least an hour before appearing onstage, which is contrary to our customary practice & diametrically opposed to our proud & independent genius. This is why, without repenting the pleasures we have given the public in the past, we leave the Opéra forever on this day.

Le Maure also took pains to underscore the unclean mind and moral irresponsibility of the director Louis-Armand-Eugène de Thuret, all the while emphasizing the independence and honor of actresses at the Opéra, women she claimed were above blame.

C'est ainsi que cet esprit de vengeance et d'orgueil conduit à sa perte ce directeur infortuné, tandis que, par toutes sortes d'infamies, il exerce ailleurs sa qualité d'esprit impur sur les fanatiques adulateurs de la fausse vertu de nos actrices. Applaudissons, M. T. C. F., les desseins de Momus qui ne permet toutes ces abominations que pour faire voir à l'univers de quoi l'on est capable quand on s'est une fois révolté contre la licence du théâtre. C'est sans doute un avantage pour l'Opéra que M. Thuret se soit ainsi dévoilé lui-même; un ennemi caché eût pu faire au théâtre de plus dangereuses blessures; en se démettant de sa gravité, il épargne aux acteurs de sévir contre lui, peut-être ne va-t-il dans les coulisses que pour y couronner son malheur. Au reste, M. T. C. F., ne croyez pas que l'honneur invulnérable des actrices soit obscurci par une démarche aussi odieuse; leur réputation est indépendante des qualitez personnelles de ceux auxquels il est confié.¹¹¹

Thus it is that this spirit of vengeance and pride drives this unfortunate director to his loss, while, by every sort of infamy, he exercises his quality of unclean spirit over the fanatic adulators of the false virtuousness of our actresses. My Very Dear Brothers, let us applaud the designs of Momus who permits all of these abominations only to render visible to the universe what people are capable of doing once they rebel against the license of the theater. It is without doubt an advantage for the Opéra that M. Thuret himself thus comes to light; a hidden enemy should have been able to inflict more dangerous wounds in the theater; by giving up his seriousness, he spares actors from clamping down on him, perhaps he ventures into the wings only to crown his misfortune there. As for the rest, My Very Dear Brothers, do not believe that the invulnerable honor of actresses is obscured by such an odious step; their reputation is independent of the personal qualities of those to whom it is entrusted.

¹¹⁰ See Catherine Nicole Le Maure, *Manifeste / de / Mademoiselle / Le Maure. / Pour faire part au Public de ses sentimens sur / l'Opéra, & des raisons qu'elle a de le quitter* (Paris: n.p., 1735), 4.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 2.

Le Maure alludes to the designs of Momus, the god of satire and censure and also the god of writers and poets, as if to prove that she knew well enough the depths of critical and satirical disdain for the *filles de l'Opéra*. In Greek mythology Momus was known to have criticized Aphrodite for her creaky sandals and overly talkative nature. He also appears in one of the fables of Aesop, where he is tasked with judging the handiwork of three separate gods but subsequently swells with jealousy and derides all of their creations before finally being banished from Olympus by Zeus. The subtext of the parody in the *Manifeste* of Le Maure was that she, like the bishop Ségur, evinced what Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé (1694–1733) had referred to in discussions of righteousness, sincerity, and integrity among ideal actresses in the theater. Among the Aïssé letters we read that violent gestures and bravado should be left solely to male characters and magicians while females were expected to be sweet, modest, and above all restrained, something audiences had come to expect from the performances of Le Maure.¹¹² If Le Maure had abandoned the Opéra, its administration, and its audiences in her fits and flights from the stage, she nevertheless remained correct in the larger scheme and even aspired to a moral superiority she found lacking in the director Thuret. If right and wrong could be apprehended in absolute terms, she was in the right, as in her characterization as *divine* in the Pancrace parody.

As the critic and musicologist Adolphe Jullien (1845–1932) has explained, the Ségur letter also inspired the publication of an *Arrêt de la Bazoche, qui ordonne que le mandement de M. l'évêque de Laon* as a response to a letter from the bishop of Viviers and Laon, Étienne-Joseph de La Fare Montclar (1690–1741), who had published a brief to warn people about the ecclesiastical scandal brought about by the resignation of Ségur.¹¹³ The conservatism of La Fare was amply expressed in his original pastoral letter on Ségur as well as in a separate document he would write

¹¹² See Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, ed. Alexandre Piedagnel (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1878), 8.

¹¹³ See the *ARREST / DE LA BAZOCHE / Qui ordonne que le Mandement de M. l'Évêque / de Laon donné à Laon le 2 avril 1735. contre / M. l'Évêque de Saint Papoul, sera brulé par la / main d'un Décroteur le premier rencontré au / bas du grand escalier de la cour du Palais, le / 22 avril 1735* (Paris: n.p., 1735).

three years later on the virtues of denying the sacrament of the sick and funeral masses to *appelants* who had refused to accept the premises of *Unigenitus*.¹¹⁴ The word *Bazoche* in the title of the *Arrêt de la Bazoche* is likely related to the word *basilique*, which could designate a cathedral church as well as a courthouse. The brief pamphlet called the Ségur incident a shock to decency both divine and human and a break with tradition and duty deserving of the most humiliating disgrace. The document nevertheless came down hard on La Fare, whose critique of Ségur it condemned as furious, indecent, and contrary to Christian dignity. While the *Arrêt de la Bazoche* advocated the burning of the original *mandement* of La Fare, something of a compromise characterizes its conclusion, in which its author Griffon, quite possibly a reference to the chimerical animal, urges the public to continue to read the original *mandement* to know full well how contemptuous and dishonorable its author was. After a concluding statement about how the *mandement* was burned in the presence of Griffon and two bailiffs, the following verse on the resignation of Ségur appears.

De la grace, tel est l'effet victorieux.
 Un seul de ses rayons, éloigne l'imposture,
 En rappelant Segur, qu'un coeur ambitieux,
 Par la brigue éleva jusqu'à la prelatrice,
 Lui-même il se dépose, & pleurant ses erreurs.
 Pour suivre désormais l'Eglise primitive,
 Il court dans la retraite, & vous fuit Séducteurs,
 Qui tenez dans vos fers l'innocence captive.

Il fût d'abord Mousquetaire
 Janséniste, & plus dévot.
 Il signa le Formulaire,
 Pour être Evêque plutôt.
 Il renie le Saint Pere,
 Et cela son dernier mot.¹¹⁵

Such is the victorious effect of grace.
 One of its rays banishes falsehood,
 In recalling Ségur, an ambitious heart,
 Who rose to the prelatrice by intrigue,
 He alone dissociates himself, & weeping for his mistakes.

¹¹⁴ See Étienne-Joseph de La Fare, *Lettre de monseigneur l'évêque duc de Laon, à un Chanoine d'Arras, sur l'obligation de priver de l'Oblation du Sacrifice de la Messe & des Suffrages de l'Eglise, ceux qui meurent Appellants de la Constitution UNIGENITUS, du 18 Décembre 1738* (Laon: n.p., 1738). See also Charlton, *Opera in the Age of Rousseau*, 200.

¹¹⁵ See the *ARREST / DE LA BAZOCHE*, 3.

Henceforth to follow the early Church,
He sprints into retirement, & flees you Seducers,
Who hold in your irons captive innocence.

He was first a Musketeer
Jansenist, & more devout.
He signed the Formulary,
To be a Bishop sooner.
He denies the Holy Father,
And that is his last word.

The complete reversal involved in the transformation of Ségur from musketeer Jansenist into a man who had signed his name to the formulary, the declaration drawn up by a group of bishops convened by Mazarin to denounce five propositions of Jansenius as misinterpretations of the theology of Augustine, was a blow to those who still held fast to the tenets of Jansenism.¹¹⁶

The language describing the seducers who compromised the innocent and drove Ségur into a remorseful retirement is also resonant with the language of the *Manifeste de Mademoiselle Le Maure*, which stressed the immorality and irresponsibility of the administration of the Opéra. Le Maure had gone to great lengths to prove how corrupt and irresponsible Thuret was, all the while claiming she and the other *filles de l'Opéra* were models of rectitude. That Le Maure stood up to this administration was tantamount to Ségur denying papal authority, a parallel that was not overlooked in the spate of parodied pamphlets that followed the publication of the original Ségur *mandement*. The matter was not as simple as the use of similar turns of phrase; instead it involved a characterization of the Opéra and its administration that implied the same level of distaste for corrupt authority that appears in the *Arrêt de la Bazoche* condemning La Fare.

C'est une nécessité, dit un jour d'Argenson à Trenelle, qu'il arrive des scandales. Mais malheur à celle par qui le scandale arrive; malheur encore à celle qui le reçoit; malheur à celle qui l'autorise par son silence. Vous concevez sans peine quel est l'objet de nos larmes; c'est l'emprisonnement injurieux & tortionnaire fait de notre personne en Prisons du Fort-l'Evêque, insulte digne en même tems de compassion & d'horreur, dans laquelle l'on voit un vil Administrateur séduit & falciné par le parti qui l'obsède.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ See William Doyle, *Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to the French Revolution*, Studies in European History (London: Macmillan, 2000), 27. On the likelihood that the formulary itself was a forgery, see Jacques Gres-Gayer, "The *Unigenitus* of Clement XI: A Fresh Look at the Issues," *Theological Studies* 49 (1988), 262, and Strayer, *Suffering Saints*, 95.

¹¹⁷ See Le Maure, *Manifeste / de / Mademoiselle / Le Maure*, 3.

It is a given, d'Argenson says to Trenelle one day, that scandals arise. But woe to her visited by scandal; woe also to those who endure it; woe to those who authorize it by their silence. You can imagine without effort the object of our tears; it is the tortuous & injurious imprisonment of our person in the Prisons of Fort-l'Evêque, an insult marked at the same time with compassion & horror, in which one sees a vile Administrator led astray & blinded by the party he is obsessed with.

That the *vil Administrateur* Thuret was taken in by one of the more cherished *filles de l'Opéra* and yet subsequently hauled her away for misconduct was worse, although not much worse, than the damning silence of the complicit public, a populace on par with the culpable seducers named in the *Arrêt de la Bazoche*.

In the midst of the clamor over the resignation of Ségur one published response was none other than a *Lettre de Mademoiselle Lemaure à Monseigneur l'évêque de Laon* (1735). The actress wrote to thank La Fare for various kindnesses received in February of that year and yet she characterized herself ironically, boldly asserting her estrangement from the Opéra and at the same time emphasizing her insignificance as an actress, author, and social influence.

Monseigneur, de voir le stile ignoré d'une vile actrice, d'une malheureuse pescheresse servir de modèle à un profond docteur, à un grave théologien, à un saint évêque qui semble se faire honneur d'adopter aux yeux de l'univers le premier enfant d'une plume brute que l'on sçait s'être publiquement abandonnée au caprice. Il faut l'avouer ingénument, Monseigneur, je ne m'étois pas même flattée qu'une pièce telle que le manifeste que j'ay donné au public dans le feu d'une colère bachique allumé du souffle de la calomnie et de la vengeance, pût être goûtée du moindre petit clerc, et j'ai appris avec étonnement que tout le monde la recherche, que tout le monde la veut, que tout le monde l'admire, qu'en moins d'un mois elle a souffert jusqu'à quatre différentes éditions sans tomber, et ce parce que, le saint nom de Dieu invoqué, un grand père de l'Eglise, animé de la plus vive charité, l'a copié pour ainsi dire à la lettre dans un illustre mandement qu'il adresse à tous les fidèles. C'est donc à Votre Grandeur, Monseigneur, à l'aveuglement et à la prévention du public qui applaudit sans connoissance tout ce que vous daignez lui représenter sans réflexion, que je dois le grand débit qui s'en fait encore aujourd'hui; ainsi, loin d'estre jalouse de ce que mon coup d'essai sert à immortaliser votre nom, sous lequel il paroist, je vous remercie très-humblement de l'attention que vous avez eue de n'en supprimer que l'intitulé et les conclusions qui ne pouvoient cadrer à votre louable dessein.¹¹⁸

Sir, to see the overlooked style of a cheap actress, of an unfortunate female fisherman used as model for a significant doctor, a serious theologian, a holy bishop who seems to give credit

¹¹⁸ The *Lettre de Mlle Le Maure à Mgr l'évêque de Laon, pour le remercier de l'honneur qu'il a bien voulu faire à son manifeste du 3 de la lune de février 1735, de l'extraire fidèlement dans le mandement qu'il a adressé aux fidèles de son diocèse, sous la date du 2 avril suivant* (Paris: n.p., 1735) is transcribed in Adolphe Jullien, *La comédie et la galanterie au XVIIIe siècle, au théâtre — dans le monde — en prison* (Paris: Édouard Rouveyre, 1879), 36–38.

for adopting in the eyes of the universe the first fruits of a blunt writing instrument that one knows to have been publically abandoned to caprice. It should be acknowledged creatively, Sir, that I had not even flattered myself that a piece such as the proclamation I issued to the public in a fire of Bacchic anger lit from the breath of calumny and revenge could be noticed by the slightest, most insignificant clerk, and yet I learned with astonishment that everyone seeks it out, everyone wants it, everyone admires it, that in less than one month it appeared in four different editions without falling out of circulation, and this since a great Church father, moved by the most vigorous charity and invoking the holy name of God, copied it, as one might say to the letter, in a famous pastoral brief which he addressed to all the faithful. It is thus to Your Magnanimity, Sir, to the blindness and protection of the public, who unwittingly applaud everything you condescend to represent to them without reflection, that I owe the great debt still in force today; thus, far from being jealous of what my first essay attempt does to immortalize your name, under which it appears, I very humbly thank you for the attention you have done away with which the aforementioned and the conclusions could not figure in your laudable design.

This odd confessional letter to La Fare is modest where the earlier *Manifeste de Mademoiselle Le Maure* had been bold. Beyond complicating the image of Le Maure as an actress and author, the letter sheds light on the sensational ways in which the politics of the clergy and the joys and sorrows of the *filles de l'Opéra* intersected in this period. If notoriety and intrigue were the defining characteristics of the *filles de l'Opéra*, these sacrilegious printed pamphlets would seem to suggest that ill repute made these women no less significant as cultural commentators and authorities. Like the clergy with whom they shared an undeniable level of infamy, the *filles de l'Opéra* were acknowledged as powerful yet flawed presences in French public life. At the same time it was a significant insult to the clergy to be considered on the same moral and social level as women in the theater. The parallels satirical commentators drew between these two groups only served to reinforce the status of the *filles de l'Opéra* as morally despicable, a position that Le Maure in particular defied.

After an *arrêt du conseil* finally suppressed the Ségur *mandement* and a parody of this very *arrêt du conseil* extracted *des registres du Conseil d'État de Momus* ("from the registers of the State Board of Momus") appeared shortly thereafter, yet another parody was published as the *Arrest de Momus qui ordonne la suppression d'un écrit qui a pour titre Manifeste de Mademoiselle Lemaure* (1735).¹¹⁹ This was a document whose marginalia cast yet more suspicion on the entire Ségur

¹¹⁹ See the *Parodie de l'Arrêt du Conseil, du 2 avril 1735, qui supprime le Mandement de M. de Saint-Papoul. Extrait des registres du Conseil d'État de Momus* (Paris: n.p., 1735).

incident, for it claimed the matter was little more than a misguided epistolary campaign, a spate of *les excuses les plus humbles & les Lettres les plus soumises* (“the most humble excuses & the most submissive Letters”) authored by M. Ségur *père*, the father of the deposed bishop, by way of apology for the moral and political deficits of his son.¹²⁰ Once again its subject Le Maure rose above the tumult of satire and parody that had driven earlier pamphlets and was characterized as a *fille de l’Opéra* of particular virtue. Her decision to leave the Opéra is treated in the *Arrest de Momus* as a necessary evil inspired by insincere souls who abused her trust. The introductory paragraphs of the document explain exactly how the divinity of Momus intercedes to yet higher powers on behalf of Le Maure, whose desire to retire from performance and from what she always claimed was unfair treatment at the Opéra had existed for some time.

Sa Divinité auroit voulu d’abord douter de la verité d’une action si extravagante pour cette Fille, & si affligeante pour l’Opera; mais après l’aveu qu’elle en a fait, en lui envoyant la démission de sa place, sa Divinité ne peut plus s’empêcher de reconnoître que cette action est l’ouvrage d’une fille malheureusement trompée par des esprits artificieux qui ont abusé de sa confiance pour lui faire abandonner ce qui avoit été jusqu’alors le plus cher objet de ses desirs.¹²¹

His Divinity first of all would have liked to doubt the truth of such an extravagant action for this Girl, & one so distressful for the Opéra; but after the confession she made, by sending him the resignation of her place, his Divinity can no longer help acknowledging that this action is that of a girl unfortunately deceived by insincere souls who abused her trust to make her leave what had until that point been the dearest object of her desires.

Blameless in spite of the uproar she caused by her tumultuous resignation from the Opéra, Le Maure appears here as a woman wholly devoted to her craft in the theater, forced to give it up not because of her own desires but because of the pressures placed on her by the administration of the Opéra. The Momus satire would go on to describe the reactions of the audience to these proceedings, reactions fueled by a deep contempt for what originally motivated Le Maure to seek a post at the

¹²⁰ See the *ARREST / DE MOMUS, / Qui ordonne la suppression d’un écrit qui a pour titre, Manifeste de Mademoiselle LEMAURE, pour faire part au Public de ses sentimens sur l’Opera, & des causes qu’elle a de le quitter* (Paris: n.p., 1735), 4. The document also appears in the *RECUEIL / DE / CHANSONS, / VAUDEVILLES, SONNETS / ÉPIGRAMMES, ÉPITAPHES / ET AUTRES VERS / Satiriques & Historiques / avec des remarques curieuses, depuis 1732 jusqu’en 1735. Vol.^e XVIII*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12633, folia 435–439.

¹²¹ See the *ARREST / DE MOMUS*, 1.

Opéra, where she had no choice but to sacrifice her conscience to the pursuit of wealth and quickly fell prey to feelings of guilt and remorse.

Ils ont crû ne pouvoir faire excuser une variation si surprenante dans une Fille de Théâtre, qu'en l'engageant à faire elle-même une Peinture odieuse de son entrée à l'Opéra; ils lui font avouer que le libertinage seul & le sacrifice de sa conscience à sa fortune, lui ont ouvert les portes du profane sanctuaire: Que ne pouvant ni étouffer entièrement ses remords, elle a cherché à les colorer, en faisant enragier les Directeurs du spectacle, & croyant s'afermir dans une place qu'elle appelle pernicieuse.¹²²

They believed themselves able to excuse so surprising a variation in a Fille de Théâtre, by engaging her to paint an odious picture of her entrance at the Opéra; they have made her avow that libertinage alone & the sacrifice of her conscience to her fortune had opened the doors of a profane sanctuary: That, being unable to suppress her feelings of remorse, she sought to color them by enraging the Directors of the production, & believing herself established in a place she calls wicked.

On the one hand this passage provides a detailed account of the double binds in which Le Maure was caught and it comes off as a serious polemic; on the other hand it is obviously intended as satirical.

The authorship of the pamphlet remains difficult to identify with any certainty, as it is signed on its last page by a Citron, either male or female, beneath the signature of Momus, who was known in contemporary satirical pamphlets as the *censeur des Censeurs* ("censor of Censors").¹²³ Delivered in the voice of the ultimate censor and satirist, this passage on Le Maure and her conflict of conscience maligns the profane sanctuary of the Opéra, access to which could only be gained through an apparent sacrifice of conscience. This was a bleak portrait of one of the most important theaters in France. In the end Momus pokes fun not at the immorality of Le Maure or her decision to leave the Opéra but at her disingenuous belief that life in the theater should be more virtuous or more accommodating. He concludes that she should return to the Opéra to honor her contractual obligation to give notice at least six months before leaving. Resemblances between the moral quandaries of Ségur and Le Maure were sufficient to generate satirical responses indefinitely; still there was an element of seriousness to these satires in that they emphasized the ethical underpinnings of the

¹²² Ibid., 2.

¹²³ See Pierre-François Guyot Desfontaines, *DICTIONNAIRE NEOLOGIQUE A l'usage des beaux Esprits du Siècle Avec l'Eloge HISTORIQUE de PANTALON-PHOEBUS. Par un Avocat de Province*, 3e éd. (Amsterdam: Michel Charles Le Cène, 1728), 234.

situation in which Le Maure found herself caught at the Opéra. These pamphlets all but confirmed that more was at stake in her relationship to the theater than mere musicality or performativity. The Palais-Royal and the Opéra were not conceived exactly as religious institutions, but the dogmatic and politicized nature of the attacks they endured would seem to suggest that writers viewed these institutions as sites for morally mindful criticism, much in the same way they regarded critiques of religion and religious institutions.

The critique of the Opéra voiced in almost religious terms is at home in a text by Jean-Florent-Joseph de Neufville de Brunaubois-Montador (1707–1770), who wrote an extended letter on the occasion of the return of Le Maure to the Opéra following her brief retirement in the fourth decade of the century.¹²⁴ Her tumultuous exit from the Opéra on the night she was to perform as Iphise in a revival of the lyric tragedy *Jephté* (1732) by Michel Pignolet de Montéclair (1667–1737) ended in infamy as she was conducted to Fort-l'Évêque prison and subsequently fled to the convent of Précieux-Sang on the left bank, not far from the Palais du Luxembourg.¹²⁵ Neufville de Brunaubois-Montador nevertheless characterizes Le Maure as a paragon of virtue, a woman above the arrogance of other members of the Académie royale de musique, a collective he repeatedly refers to as a *vile populace*. He rallies around the actress as someone who could not help the gender into which she was born or the parallels numerous philosophers and commentators had drawn between femininity and obstinancy. He thought retirement to a convent was one of the only satisfactory options for Le Maure, whose devotion to religion might become a virtuous path to obtaining freedom from the constraints of her commitments to the Opéra and its administration. As Neufville de Brunaubois-Montador explains in an apostrophe to the actress, her flight from the oppression of the Opéra remained beyond blame.

¹²⁴ See Jean-Florent-Joseph de Neufville de Brunaubois-Montador, *Lettre au sujet de la rentrée de la demoiselle Le Maure à l'Opera, écrite à une dame de province par un solitaire de Paris, avec une Parodie de la quatrième scène du troisième acte de Zaïre; et quelques pièces en vers sur le même sujet* (Brussels: n.p., 1740).

¹²⁵ See Bruzen de La Martinière, *Anecdotes ou Lettres secrettes sur divers sujets*, 527.

Vous n'avez pû souffrir les airs impérieux d'un Directeur de l'Académie Royale; c'est une noble fierté qui vous a fait agir, & l'on ne peut vous blâmer d'avoir des sentimens. Mais enfin n'auroit-il pas mieux valu ramper sous lui, & demeurer sujette à des loix qui sont faites pour tant d'autres que vous, que de ramper & de prendre des loix d'une soeur que vous considériez assez peu pour l'avoir fait votre femme de chambre en public.¹²⁶

You could not suffer the imperious airs of a Director of the Académie Royale; it is a noble pride that inspired you to act, & people cannot blame you for having feelings. But at last would it not be better to worm along under him & remain subject to laws that are made for so many others besides you, than to skulk away & take the vows of a sister whom you had considered too meager to have made your maid in public?

Rumors circulated in the Parisian public that Le Maure would become a vowed nun and forever leave behind her career in the theater, but in only a few short years, she was no longer cloistered. Her absence had been keenly felt at the Opéra, where her performances had brought in a great deal of revenue and where patrons in the theater apparently could not be consoled; many visited the convent during her tenure there to hear her perform in liturgical services. The return of Le Maure to the stage was something of a pressing topic in the year she would reappear. Neufville de Brunaubois-Montador himself urged the actress to return from retirement if for no other reason than to secure a more favorable financial position.

Une consideration beaucoup plus forte, c'est l'empressement du Public pour vous. J'en ai entendu les cris & les gémissemens; vos Directeurs sont désolés; ils sentient bien qu'on desertera leur Spectacle si vous n'y revenez. Vous pouvez mettre à profit ces heureuses circonstances, pour vous faire faire d'excellentes conditions. Vous trouverez à accumuler; vous rapporterez chaque jour de beaux & bons Louis qui n'empêcheront pas qu'on ne vous donne quatre mille francs d'appointemens. Vous vous verrez claquer par un Partere idôlâtre une demie heure avant que vous paroissiez; Vous entendrez votre nom retentir par tout, & voler jusqu'aux Cieux.¹²⁷

A much stronger consideration is the zeal the Public has for you. I have heard the cries & groans; your Directors are full of pity; they feel full well that people will desert their Production if you do not come back. You can take advantage of these favorable circumstances, to make excellent conditions for yourself. You will find things to accumulate; every day you will fetch beautiful & beneficial *Louis* that will not prevent you from being granted a salary of four thousand francs. You will see applause from an idolatrous Parterre half an hour before you appear; You will hear your name reverberate everywhere, & fly to the Heavens.

As Neufville de Brunaubois-Montador explained, the Parisian public was ready to sacrifice

¹²⁶ See Neufville de Brunaubois-Montador, *Lettre au sujet de la rentrée de la demoiselle Le Maure*, 16.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 21.

everything in order for Le Maure to return to the stage but it remained a public he characterized as *malin* or evil, capable of driving actresses off the stage and into the reclusive life. The moralizing tone of this *Lettre*, in which Le Maure was cast as a woman of great strength of character, an actress pushed to her limits by an oppressive administration and a public whose behavior descended effortlessly into irreverence and corruption, signals a turn in the literature on the *filles de l'Opéra* toward greater appreciation for the ethical underpinnings of their positions in the theater. While there were a number of perceived parallels between the resignation of Ségur and the retreats and renunciations of Le Maure at the Opéra, she remained a curious heroine on and off stage, elevated above her hostile colleagues as a paragon of independence, assertiveness, sincerity, and masterful performance.

Authority

The power of the Gallican church to censure and undermine the acting profession and the institutions in which actors plied their trade was readily apparent only several decades after the incidents that swirled around Le Maure and her retirement from the Opéra. Some two decades into her career at the Comédie-Française, the great *tragédienne* Claire-Josèphe-Hippolyte de Lérès de La Tude (1723–1803), known as La Clairon, rose above her role as an actress to become an advocate for reform, forcing the monarch and the public to focus on the injustices visited upon the acting profession and in particular the excommunication of actors. The harsh treatment of the acting profession by the Gallican church extended back as early as the middle of the seventeenth century, when the Parisian archbishop Paul Philippe Hardouin de Péréfixe de Beaumont (1606–1671), following the premiere of *Tartuffe* (1664) of Molière, issued an ordinance threatening the excommunication of any actors who performed or read the play. As Lenard Berlanstein has explained, La Clairon worked behind the scenes at the Comédie-Française in the eighteenth century to cast doubt on the legal basis for the condemnation of its performers; she went so far as to urge several other actors to speak out about the issue.¹²⁸ In the last third of the century she became

¹²⁸ See Lenard Berlanstein, *Daughters of Eve: A Cultural History of French Theater Women from the Old Regime to the Fin-de-Siècle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 70.

entangled in a skirmish involving Louis Blouin, dit Dubois (1706–1775), one of her colleagues who had an outstanding bill with a surgeon named Benoît.¹²⁹ After an official inquiry revealed that Dubois had not paid the debts he claimed he had, he was expelled from the stage along with his colleague Pierre-Jean Fromentin de Blainville, who had submitted dishonest statements on his behalf. Marie-Madeleine Blouin, dite Dubois (1746–1779), the daughter of the expelled actor, claimed his unfortunate fate was due to the influence of La Clairon, and she saw to it that an order was issued from Versailles to allow Dubois to resume his post. The writings of the dramatist Charles Collé (1709–1783) single out five members of the troupe of the Comédie-Française, including La Clairon, Henri Louis Cain (1728–1778), dit Lekain, Jean-Baptiste Britard (1721–1791), dit Brizard, François-René Molé (1734–1802), and Étienne-Dominique Bercher d’Auberval, who, upon hearing news of the reinstatement of Dubois, refused to appear in a production of *Le siège de Calais* by the dramatist Pierre-Laurent Buirette de Belloy (1727–1775), himself an actor.¹³⁰ The following morning the *lieutenant de police* Antoine Raymond Jean Gualert Gabriel de Sartine (1729–1801), who had purchased his position with funds from his friend, the minister and lawyer Guillaume-Chrétien de Lamoignon de Malesherbes (1721–1794), delivered an order from the monarch to conduct La Clairon to Fort-l’Évêque prison. Imprisoned for approximately one week, before she was deemed too frail for confinement, La Clairon returned home and entered a period of retirement from the stage that lasted several months. Encouraged to return to her profession by her adoring public, La Clairon insisted that she would appear only on the condition that the Comédie-Française was refashioned into a royal academy of drama with legal status for its members and the removal of an ecclesiastical ban on its actors. As Hugh Noel Williams has explained, a petition was drawn up with the support of Emmanuel-Félicité de Durfort de Duras (1715–1789) and Louis Marie Augustin d’Aumont (1709–

¹²⁹ See H. Noel Williams, *Queens of the French Stage* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 328.

¹³⁰ See Charles Collé, *Journal historique, ou Mémoires critiques et littéraires, sur les Ouvrages Dramatiques et sur les Evénemens les plus mémorables, depuis 1748 jusqu’en 1772, inclusivement*, ed. Antoine-Alexandre Barbier, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Bibliographique, 1807), III, 27.

1782) and submitted to the monarch without ever being accepted. The following year La Clairon demanded a retirement pension of 1,500 *livres* for her twenty-two years as an actress, a pension to which only those who had worked at least thirty years were entitled.¹³¹

The pressure La Clairon placed on the monarchy on behalf of those in the acting profession did win her several concessions, perhaps most notably the permission to reprint *lettres patentes* from Louis XIII (1601–1643) that removed moral blame from thespians.¹³² Her actions and her brief imprisonment established La Clairon as a voice of conscience and reason in the troupe of the Comédie-Française, a woman fully aware of the emergent force of public opinion as a potential opposition to monarchical and ecclesiastical policies. This force was no more keenly felt than approximately five years before her final retirement from the stage, when a volume titled *Libertés de la France contre le pouvoir arbitraire de l'excommunication; ouvrage dont on est spécialement redevable aux sentimens généreux & supérieurs de Mademoiselle Clai...* appeared in print in Amsterdam and subsequently circulated in Paris.¹³³ The document was notable for its prefatory letter from La Clairon: she launched the call for liberty and autonomy that the lawyer François-Charles Huerne de La Mothe was careful to weave throughout this lengthy volume, claiming that she herself was hesitant to continue in the acting profession any longer for fear of the excommunication to which it subjected her.¹³⁴ As for Huerne de La Mothe, his name was struck off the register of lawyers once Parisian authorities realized the reactionary and potentially revolutionary nature of his text. Like a number of commentators who dared to challenge the establishment through the medium of the printed word, Huerne de La Mothe saw his efforts cut short when a decree was issued ordering the burning of his ambitious volume by the public

¹³¹ See Williams, *Queens of the French Stage*, 336.

¹³² See Berlanstein, *Daughters of Eve*, 71.

¹³³ See François-Charles Huerne de La Mothe, *Libertés de la France, contre le pouvoir arbitraire de l'excommunication; ouvrage dont on est spécialement redevable aux sentimens généreux & supérieurs de Mademoiselle Clai...* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1761).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, xv.

executioner in the place de Grève.¹³⁵ Neither he nor La Clairon lived to enjoy the freedoms that eventually came to the acting profession in the final decade of the century. At the same time their ardent advocacy decades earlier did not go unheard despite insults or imprisonments, satire or censorship. Years after the incidents involving Ségur and Le Maure, their public and prominent battles with the oppressive policies of the Gallican church would seem to suggest that the joys and sorrows of French theatrical life never strayed far from the rhetoric and reach of religious institutions.

* * *

Intersections of religious and aesthetic thought at this time in France took on added zeal when commentators confronted issues of morality and theatrical presence among the *filles de l'Opéra*. For Pellegrin and the author of the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* to treat the degeneration of lyric tragedy in some of the same terms *Unigenitus* had used to attack Jansenism required a critical readership that understood the dynamics of disenchantment with theologies as well as with actresses. The reception of *Unigenitus* in Paris swelled with political and nationalistic overtones and with concerns about the assertion of Roman over Gallican ecclesiastical control perhaps more than detailed theological debate. As research by Jacques Gres-Gayer has shown, the conflict over the bull was nevertheless understood in terms of a clash between two conceptions of theology, two visions of ecclesiastical authority, and for lack of resolution it exploded in many theological, political, and social directions, becoming a phenomenon that the Parisian public took seriously as one of the major theological events since the time of the apostles.¹³⁶ As research by Catherine Maire has shown, *Unigenitus* was a veritable shock wave reverberating in religious, political, and moral discourse; the history of France and the history of Christianity in the eighteenth century revolved around it.¹³⁷ The spate of satirical letters that followed the resignation of the bishop

¹³⁵ See Williams, *Queens of the French Stage*, 324.

¹³⁶ See Gres-Gayer, "The *Unigenitus* of Clement XI," 281.

¹³⁷ See Maire, *De la cause de Dieu à la cause de la nation: Le jansénisme au XVIIIe siècle*, Bibliothèque des histoires (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1998), 9.

Ségur similarly foregrounded the issue of morality. La Fare, who was concerned that this controversial *volte face* would inspire similar disavowals among the clergy and the laity, warned against considering Ségur a heroic critic worth imitating. Le Maure, responding to La Fare, stressed her contemptible status as an actress yet at the same time maintained a degree of autonomy and critical distance, using her *Manifeste* to defend her decision to leave the Opéra and ultimately to assert her moral rectitude. This was farther than Ségur had gone in his original *mandement*, which was a departure from conservative theology that nevertheless still sought pardon. Le Maure had not been so repentant. Her commentary on conditions at the Opéra reflected the sincerity and fortitude writers had elsewhere ascribed to her and the intriguing way her situation figured ethical and not just musical concerns.

The religion of French opera criticism, if we can call it by this name, operated in an environment replete with turmoil. The questionable nature of the performers at the Opéra and the fact that the Opéra increasingly stood behind the genre of *opéra-ballet* led writers like Pellegrin to interrogate the enduring value of the institution, even going so far as to equate the *filles de l'Opéra* with heretics. Placing actresses, audiences, and repertories under the same scrutiny with which the original bull *Unigenitus* had confronted Jansenism gave the Pancrace parody something of the appearance of a moral and critical upper hand. It was a document that boldly asserted its claims about the declining quality of performers and livrets and the impending ruination of the Académie royale de musique. While we know that the Opéra never met such an end, the doom and disillusionment of the Pancrace parody reveal the incredible force of critical opinion bolstered by religious rhetoric. In the eighteenth century a number of readers would have understood the Pellegrin propositions and the *Constitution du patriarche de l'Opéra* in light of the French reception of *Unigenitus* and the considerable amount of unrest and discord it introduced into the ranks of the clergy. These parodies traded in rich cultural and theological references that extended well beyond the confines of the theater, to questions of tradition, genre, and morality that would continue to animate opera criticism years after the eighteenth century.

Conclusion

In a novel about the rise to prominence of the unknown daughter of a Parisian luthier in the age of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687) and Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643–1704), Susanne Dunlap casts her protagonist Émilie as a young woman with a rare musical talent that renders her the envy of those at court and in Paris. When Émilie takes up vocal lessons with Charpentier, her concerned father fears for the worst, assuming her youth, beauty, talent, and poverty will drive her into a career as a courtesan.¹ The path was not an uncommon one in the French eighteenth century, when the line between the repertory of gestural and visual idioms of women on stage and those of the courtesan, herself a bearer of cultural and artistic tradition, was rendered indistinct by the behavior of performers in and outside of the theater proper. As in the case of the courtesan, the work of the *fille de l'Opéra* and her traffic in what Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon have called intellectual and artistic currency was understood in the eighteenth century and in subsequent constructions of her musical and cultural history as interdependent with her commerce in sex.² The female performer on stage at the Opéra registered culturally as a woman in two worlds, as a performer at home in the world of tragedy, comedy, and dance, on one hand, and as a social and sexual performer, on the other hand, a figure whose exploits with male patrons reinforced common conceptions about the *filles de l'Opéra* as sexual predators, as women whose comfort level with their expressive, mobile bodies on stage radiated out into their relationships with the very men and women who gazed upon them in the theater. At once the subject of societal scrutiny and the agent of change in the development of early modern attitudes toward the sophistication of performance, the *fille de l'Opéra* was in every respect a product of the unwavering public appeal of the theater.

So deep was the fascination with theater in the French eighteenth century that the author and historian Henri d'Alméras (1861–1938) was moved to remark that *Les Français ont toujours*

¹ See Susanne Dunlap, *Émilie's Voice: A Novel* (New York: Touchstone, 2005), 20.

² See *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

aimé le théâtre, mais jamais peut-être autant qu'au XVIIIe siècle ("the French have always loved theater, but perhaps never as much as in the eighteenth century").³ As research by Thomas Kavanagh has shown, for this claim to make sense, we must think of theater not only as what transpired on the stage at the Comédie-Française or the Opéra in the eighteenth century, but as a widespread cultural practice, a form of socializing that permeated all levels of society, in which the performance of pantomimes inspired by the fair theaters as well as the donning of costumes in private formed an essential part of daily life. As Kavanagh has explained, the development of theater in this broader cultural sense and in particular as an organ of pleasure stems from two related phenomena: on the one hand, the growth in popularity of play acting beyond the confines of the theater and thus beyond the strictures of the Gallican church, and on the other hand, the emergence of an erotic theater that set out to stage performances of sexual pleasure, using living, speaking, coupling bodies to perform what Kavanagh has called an Epicurean subversion of social rank and privilege that suited the politics of the impending Revolution.⁴ Even Martine de Rougemont, writing at the end of the twentieth century, described a *théâtre d'amateurs* that served in the eighteenth century as a bastion of fashionable life and social exchange and rested on a *tissu conjonctif* or a connective tissue that drew together savants and illiterates, rich and poor.⁵ In institutionalized theater or in amateur theater in the sitting room or the bedroom, the vogue for acting and the pleasure it provided was everywhere.

It is not surprising that in the midst of its unprecedented popularity in these years, the theater had its detractors, whose scathing philippics bemoaned the degeneration of generic ideals at the Opéra in addition to the immorality of the administrators of the Comédie-Française and the Opéra as well as that of performers on stage. As research by Laurence Senelick has shown, the rants

³ See Henri d'Alméras, *Les Théâtres libertins au XVIIIe siècle*, Bibliothèque du vieux Paris (Paris: Henri Daragon, 1905), 1.

⁴ See Thomas Kavanagh, *Enlightened Pleasures: Eighteenth-Century France and the New Epicureanism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 171.

⁵ See Martine de Rougemont, *La vie théâtrale en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1988), 314.

of those opposed to the theater have more than a germ of truth in them, for they lay bare a cultural and institutional paradox, namely that the theater presents itself as an endorsement of the establishment and yet remains staffed by a dubious and marginalized personnel; it regularly eludes the controls and violates the terms of its social compact.⁶ This paradox is at the heart of early modern French theater as well as the musical theater of the Opéra, a public institution with roots in ritual, myth, and didacticism, and a sanctuary for the temperamental personae non gratae who performed on stage, figures whose opportunities to express themselves outside of the theater were often rather limited. What many members of the audience in early modern Paris found most unsettling about contemporary theatrical practices was the exploration of plots that mingled the mortal and the divine; such dramatic conceits blurred the boundaries between fantasy and reality in troubling ways and did little to keep in check the numerous and at times unorthodox appeals to the erotic that placed the bodies of performers and the impressionable bodies and minds of their audiences in tension. As research by Susan McClary has shown, one acutely musical objection to the theater was the idea that professional female singers violated a number of cultural taboos, that the enterprise of selling the voice had met with resistance at least as far back as the twelfth century, when the city of Paris tried to police the growing number of entertainers crowding into the burgeoning metropolis.⁷

The striking level of attention the *filles de l'Opéra* received in an era when neither women nor their presence in French theater were considered subjects worthy of serious meditation gives pause for thought. A considerable paradox stands at the center of their lives and literature, namely that these women were as popular and captivating as the satires that circulated about them attest and yet we are left with scant biographical information about the majority of them. So many of these women have fallen into obscurity, their full names no longer known, their whereabouts in Paris and

⁶ See Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre*, Gender and Performance, ed. Susan Bassnett and Tracy Davis (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 9.

⁷ See Susan McClary, *Desire and Pleasure in Seventeenth-Century Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 80.

at court difficult to trace, their various lovers, patrons, and illegitimate children in most cases almost impossible to identify. For the most popular of these women, the likes of Marie Pélissier (1707–1749) and Marie Anne de Cupis de Camargo (1710–1770), extended periods of their careers as performers have been meticulously documented in rhymed verse and satirical ballads and poems in the Maurepas and Tralage collections, leaving behind descriptions that writers in the eighteenth century seemed certain would endure for centuries to come.

Like the subjects of the most recent study by the historian Robert Darnton, the *filles de l'Opéra* present one additional facet that makes the construction and reconstruction of their histories a challenge: they sang.⁸ This is not to say that there was less information about singers in general; since an essential part of the lives of these women was their participation in the ephemeral act of singing, we can only ever hope to recapture their presence partially. As research by Roger Chartier has shown, singing is akin to reading in that it rarely leaves traces and is scattered in what he has called an infinity of singular acts that disquiets any historian who would hope to inventory the practice.⁹ The many sung performances of lyric tragedy and *opéra-ballet* and perhaps even of the street songs that parodied these women remain lost to us today. Printed scores and livrets have survived as well as modern performances and recordings of these, and among the collections of the Maurepas manuscripts at least two full volumes reproduce the music to which each subversive epigram and ballad in each volume was set.¹⁰ The voices and performances of the *filles de l'Opéra* in all their candor, vigor, enchantment, and ephemerality nevertheless remain beyond our grasp. We cannot experience for ourselves what Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé (1694–1733) described as *la voix*

⁸ See Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2010), 82.

⁹ See Roger Chartier, *L'ordre des livres: lecteurs, auteurs, bibliothèques en Europe entre XIVE et XVIIIe siècle* (Aix-en-Provence: Alinéa, 1992), 13.

¹⁰ See the *RECUEIL / D'AIRES NOTEZ / RANGÉS PAR ORDRE / ALPHABÉTIQUE / VOL.^e I.^{er} / A. jusques & compris l'I*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12656, and the *RECUEIL / D'AIRES NOTEZ / RANGÉS PAR ORDRE / ALPHABÉTIQUE / VOL.^e II.^e / L. jusques & compris le Z*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12657. These volumes reproduce the titles and the music of the popular *chansons* and *airs* to which each verse in the Maurepas collection was sung. They do not reproduce the text of the original *chansons*.

très-petite of Pélissier or the purportedly intoxicating voice of Catherine Nicole Le Maure (1704–1786).¹¹ While the aurality and visuality of these women elude us, methods from the field of sensory history prove promising as a means to reimagine their voices and bodies. The cultural historian Alain Corbin has pioneered the historiographical reconstruction of the popular sense of smell in the eighteenth century and has also worked on the social history of sound and on the village bells that lent meaning and resonance to city life in the French nineteenth century.¹² He has effectively used historical documentary accounts to access smells and sounds no longer available to us, recreating worlds that traditional historiography had left unexplored. A number of satires of the *filles de l'Opéra* do not completely put modern readers in touch with these women as performers; they nevertheless leave fragmentary clues that allow us to reconstruct something of their image and sound. One writer refers to *la voix très-petite* of Pélissier; another satire mocks her *chétive encolure* and *petits yeux*, her scrawny neck and small eyes. These offer up not the sights and sounds of her body itself but a glimpse into the ways in which one of these women might have been viewed and heard by her contemporaries. The few available statements of a sensory nature about the *filles de l'Opéra* augment perspectives on these women that have emerged from their discursive construction as objects of moral, aesthetic, political, and religious fascination.

The proliferation of *chansons*, epigrams, ballads, and rhymed verse that circulated about the *filles de l'Opéra* is but a small component of a culture of satire and singing that pervaded the Parisian landscape in the early eighteenth century, in what Robert Isherwood has called the apogee of the era of derisive laughter through song.¹³ The wealth of printed material related to satires,

¹¹ See Charlotte-Élisabeth Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, ed. Alexandre Piedagnel (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1878), 8. See also Gabriel-Charles de Lattaignant, *Poésies de Monsieur l'abbé de l'Attaignant*, 4 vols. (London and Paris: Duchesne, 1757), III, 138–140.

¹² See Alain Corbin, *Le miasme et la jonquille: L'odorat et l'imaginaire social, XVIIIe–XIXe siècles*, Collection historique (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1982), and idem, *Les cloches de la terre: Paysage sonore et culture sensible dans les campagnes au XIXe siècle*, L'évolution de l'humanité (Paris: Michel, 1994).

¹³ See Robert Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 14.

songs, and other subjects led the abbé Adrien Baillet (1649–1706) even in the seventeenth century to remark with wonderment and anxiety on the overabundance of books.¹⁴ We have little evidence about styles of singing except on stage, but historical memoirs and correspondence indicate that popular *chansons* and *vaudevilles* were sung throughout the city by all manner of people in the eighteenth century.¹⁵ As Darnton has written, one could not turn around in Paris without confronting performances of popular song.

Aristocrats sang at court, sophisticates in salons, idlers in cafés, workers in taverns and *guinguettes* (popular drinking places located outside the city limits), soldiers in barracks, hawkers in the streets, market women at their stalls, students in classrooms, cooks in kitchens, nurses next to cradles—all of Paris was constantly breaking into song, and the songs registered reactions to current events.¹⁶

As research by Laura Mason has shown, the songs, singing practices, and Parisian habits of mind early in the eighteenth century served as a foundation upon which Revolutionary politics would build and as a problematic nexus of tensions between musical performance and censorious representations of singers and satirical poets.¹⁷ In the last two decades of the eighteenth century the dramatist and journalist Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740–1814) would write that *Point d'événement qui, chez ce peuple moqueur, ne soit enregistré par un vaudeville* (“There is no event that is not recorded in song by this mocking people”).¹⁸ He would go on to describe these very *vaudevilles* as highly satirical in nature but in most cases no less truthful as a result, many of them offering a

¹⁴ See Ann Blair, “Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload ca. 1550–1700,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64/1 (2003), 11.

¹⁵ On singing, see Jean-Antoine Bérard, *L'art du Chant, dédié à Madame de Pompadour* (Paris: Dessaint & Saillant, 1755), Jean Blanchet, *L'art: ou, les principes philosophiques du chant*, 2de éd. (Paris: Lottin, 1756), François-Joseph Lécuyer, *Principes de l'art du chant, suivant les règles de la langue et de la prosodie françoise* (Paris: l'auteur, 1769), and from earlier in the seventeenth century, Bénigne de Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter et particulièrement pour ce qui regarde le chant françois* (Paris: Ballard, 1668), and Jean Millet, *La belle méthode, ou l'art de bien chanter* (Lyon: Jean Grégoire, 1666).

¹⁶ See Darnton, *Poetry and the Police*, 83.

¹⁷ See Laura Mason, *Singing the French Revolution: Popular Culture and Politics, 1787–1799* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 16.

¹⁸ See Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, nouv. éd., 8 vols. (Amsterdam: n.p., 1782), I, 301.

better historical narrative of events than the works of historians themselves. As for the *filles de l'Opéra* who were the subject of numerous *vaudevilles* yet almost no dedicated historical studies, we are resigned to taking Mercier at his word, that the satires in which female performers were enchained provide a truthful account of many of their activities even if a number of these subversive song texts are prone to exaggerating the physical and moral attributes of these women.

Vixens vilified in *vaudevilles*, singers mocked in a culture of singing, in what the playwright and secretary Sébastien-Roch Nicolas (1741–1794), known as Chamfort, called *une monarchie absolue tempérée par des chansons* (“an absolute monarchy tempered by songs”): such was the fate of the *filles de l'Opéra* in the early eighteenth century.¹⁹ The legacy these women leave behind is replete with scandal but is also a significant early modern reflection of the emergent power and autonomy of musical performers as well as of the fraught culture of celebrity into which they were swept up, in which they were gifted with what Joseph Roach has described as a kind of public intimacy that accounted for their popularity on stage and in public life.²⁰ This autonomy would not fold into notions of the transcendental that would reign in the nineteenth century, nor was it associated with modern ideas about taste and subjectivity; as Downing Thomas has pointed out, it relied on a conception of the arts as increasingly independent of certain moral and political frames and as capable of challenging the discursive boundaries to which they had been assigned by a predominantly literary and visual culture.²¹ That writers in the French eighteenth century were so fascinated by aspects of concealment, pretense, and artifice in the performances of Pélissier, by the overpowering, enchanting, and intoxicating effects of the voice of Le Maure, by sincerity and depth in

¹⁹ See Marc Gagné and Monique Poulin, *Chantons la chanson: enregistrements, transcriptions et commentaires de chansons et de pièces instrumentales*, Ethnologie de l'Amérique française (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1985), ix.

²⁰ See Joseph Roach, “Public Intimacy: The Prior History of ‘It,’” in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660–2000*, ed. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 15.

²¹ See Downing Thomas and Charles Dill, “Disciplines, Interdisciplinarity, and Cultural Studies: A Dialogue on Music’s Place,” in *Cultural Studies 1: A State of the Question*, ed. David Lee Rubin and Julia Douthwaite, EMF: Studies in Early Modern France 6 (Charlottesville: Rockwood Press, 2000), 37.

the performances of Marie Sallé (1707–1756) and vigorous physicality and innovation in the steps and leaps of La Camargo, is a testament to a growing culture of sophisticated appreciation for the mechanics of performance itself.

In the last decade of his life, the marquis Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d'Argens (1704–1771) was so moved by the power of female performers in the theater that he went so far as to reverse his position on the *filles de l'Opéra*, abandoning past descriptions of the Opéra as a pestilent infirmary or a school for scandal and instead describing these women as miracle workers.

Car de raisonner simplement comme Descartes fait, & de dire qu'encore que l'Esprit soit uni à tout le corps, il ne s'ensuit pas delà qu'il soit étendu par tout le corps, parce que l'essence de l'esprit ne consiste point dans l'extension, mais dans la pensée. Je pourrai établir, si je veux, que les Filles de l'Opera font des miracles: je n'aurai qu'à supposer que le propre des Danseuses & des Chanteuses est de guérir ceux qui les voyent danser, & qui les entendent chanter, je serai en droit de conclurre ensuite que la theater du palais Royal a une vertu aussi miraculeuse que le Tombeau de St. Paris.²²

Because to reason simply as Descartes does, & to say that although the Mind is joined completely with the body, it does not follow that it is occupied by the whole body, because the essence of mind does not consist in extension, but in thought. I shall be able to establish, if I want, that the Filles de l'Opéra make miracles: I shall only suppose that the domain of Dancers & Singers is to cure those who see them dance & who hear them sing. I shall be entitled thus to conclude that the theater of the Palais-Royal has a virtuousness as miraculous as the Tomb of St. Paris.

His reference to the Tombeau de St. Paris, the final resting place of the Jansenist deacon François de Paris (1690–1727) in the cemetery of the Église Saint-Médard on the left bank, was as much an allusion to its appearance in *La femme docteur, ou La théologie tombée en quenouille: comédie* (1730) of the Jesuit historian Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant (1690–1743), who had strongly satirized the Jansenists, as to the infamous *convulsionnaires de Saint-Médard*, the religious pilgrims who visited the tomb and claimed it was the source of miracles, prophetic dreams, visions, and instances of bodily contortion and convulsion.²³ As research by Catherine Maire has shown, the

²² See Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d'Argens, *Histoire de l'esprit humain; ou, Memoires secrets et universels de la republique des lettres*, 14 vols. (Berlin: Haude et Spener, 1765), III, 319.

²³ See Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant, *La femme docteur, ou La théologie tombée en quenouille: comédie* (Liège: Chez la veuve Procureur, 1730), idem, *La femme docteur, ou La théologie janséniste tombée en quenouille: comédie* (Amsterdam: Ledet, 1731), and idem, *Suite de La femme docteur, ou La femme docteur vengée, ou Le théologien logé à bicetre: comédie nouvelle en cinq Actes* (The Hague: Pierre L'Orloge, 1732), 114. See also David Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris*

overwhelming majority of the pilgrims who experienced these convulsions were unmarried women and girls, many of them celibate or widowed.²⁴ Their connection to the *filles de l'Opéra* was one the marquis and his readers likely understood in an ironic light. For all their apparent miraculousness, for as often as the *filles de l'Opéra* were called magical or astounding in the theater, nothing would have incited more laughter at this point in the eighteenth century than the idea that actresses on stage had anything in common with celibate women or widows, let alone pious religious pilgrims.

Years before the advent of the Romantic instrumental virtuoso, years before the development of modern critical theories about performance, commentators nevertheless recognized something of a miracle in the power and allure of the *filles de l'Opéra* on stage. As technicians and marvels in the theater, these women inspired progressive and socially jarring views of opera. Audiences increasingly regarded the genre less as a formal system of poetry and music than as what Mary Hunter has described as performed sounds from performing bodies, as a medium in which anxieties and certainties about life and death, contagion and contentment played out.²⁵ While an admiring and at times disdaining public picked apart the morality and sexuality of these women, a number of commentators also paid special attention to the complexity of performance as an ephemeral, embodied art. The array of texts and contexts, panegyrics and parodies in which the *filles de l'Opéra* were swept up forces us to confront their broader cultural significance and to consider anew a peculiarly Parisian perspective on the institutionalization of performance as an aesthetic concept in the early eighteenth century. Years after the eighteenth century, we too can tap into a sense of astonishment and wonder, not that these women were sexual deviants, irresponsible parents, thieves, whores, or courtesans, but that they were skilled performers, so much so that accounts of their mastery persist in an otherwise obscure collection of ribald verse and satires. It is in pulling

(Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 142, and Brian Strayer, *Suffering Saints: Jansenists and Convulsionnaires in France, 1640–1799* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 242.

²⁴ See Catherine Maire, *De la cause de Dieu à la cause de la nation: Le jansénisme au XVIIIe siècle*, Bibliothèque des histoires (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1998), 531.

²⁵ See Mary Hunter, “Editorial,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10/2 (1998), 129.

back the curtain of these more salacious narratives that we encounter the true contributions of the *filles de l'Opéra* to the art of performance; it is in historical parodies as well as in historical praise that we come to know them.

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