

# THE ACADÉMIE ROYALE DE MUSIQUE DURING THE ANCIEN RÉGIME: A FEW DETAILS ABOUT A POLITICAL SYSTEM

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## *Abstract*

In her numerous studies of French opera, Catherine Kintzler showed how this genre fits into the poetic system of the theater classique. In this article, I postulate that the O/opera also fits squarely into a political system. The creation of the Paris Opera dates back to 1669 when the King conferred privileges to Pierre Perrin. Built on grounds eminently political, the institution originally produced entertainment for the court, specifying the rules of the art and reflecting the glory of the sovereign. Over the course of the eighteenth century, following the ‘decentralization of pleasures’ that now dedicates the triumph of Paris on Versailles, the statutes of the institution evolved: it moved from personal to stage management, first linked to the Paris municipality between 1749 and 1780, then to the “department des Menus-Plaisirs” (until the French Revolution). At the same time, the monarchical state was characterized by a progressive disembodiment of royal power: within the Opera’s repertoire, the aesthetics of incarnation actually devolved to an aesthetics of representation. Any study of the Académie royale de musique under the Ancien Régime therefore requires taking into account a system of artistic networks in which aesthetic and political elements interact. The purpose of this article is thus twofold: to trace how this complex form of French opera develops and recomposes on the long time; and to demonstrate how the serious lyric genre testifies to a dual process of institutionalization and formalization of music, on the one hand, and the adaptation of political norms to music on the other.

In her many works devoted to French opera, Catherine Kintzler has demonstrated how the genre can be assimilated to the poetic system of classical theatre.<sup>1</sup> In this paper,<sup>2</sup> I will argue that opera (as genre) and the Opéra (the institution) can also be seen as being assimilated within a political system. The foundation of the music academy (Opéra de Paris) dates to 1669 (it became “royal” in 1772) when the

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français de Corneille à Rousseau* (Paris: Minerve, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Tim Heron for the translation of my text.

King granted this privilege to Pierre Perrin. Set up in a decidedly political context, the institution's original aim was to provide entertainment for the royal court, lay down the rules of this art form, and, most importantly, bring glory to the monarch. During the eighteenth century, following the 'decentralization of pleasures' which led to Paris outshining Versailles, the institution's status changed from individual to state management (brought under the authority of Paris city council between 1749 and 1780, then the department of the *Menus-Plaisirs* until the French revolution). As the monarchy's power became increasingly disincarnated – that is, less and less tied to the body of the King – the aesthetics of incarnation gave way to an aesthetic of representation. This article thus has a double aim: to analyse how French opera constructed and reconstructed itself in the long-term; and to show how the genre of 'serious' opera underwent a double process: on the one hand, the institutionalisation and administration of music; on the other, the adaptation of political norms to music.

#### 1669–1672: FROM “ACADEMIES DE MUSIQUE” TO THE “ACADÉMIE ROYALE DE MUSIQUE”: AESTHETIC AND ARTISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

It was Pierre Perrin's idea to establish a music academy as an official institution whose main goal would be to foster the creation of operas in the French language and to perform them before audiences. In a letter to the archbishop of Turin from 1661, which served as an introduction to a collection of his poems, Perrin drew inspiration from the presuppositions laid out in the *Trois discours sur le poème dramatique de Pierre Corneille* – which theoretically defined and contrasted tragedy and opera – to criticise the foundations of Italian opera and lay the foundations of a French opera, both distancing itself from the former and looking to classical Cornelian theatre.<sup>3</sup> Perrin lists nine faults of Italian opera which mostly concern the relationship between language and music, and the conditions of representation which, according to him, are responsible for the failure of Italian operatic works in France. Perrin noted that the Italians had not managed to strike a balance between language and music (*air/récitatif*) and concluded that what was needed was the foundation of a form of opera that was radically different from that which existed in Italy: opera would thus be a place, an artistic project and a national project. Perrin, who repeated his ideas in his foreword to his work *Recueil des paroles de musique dédiée à Colbert*, obtained what he had wished for, and in 1669 was granted the privilege to set up a music academy.<sup>4</sup> In 1671, he brought his aesthetic

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Perrin, “Lettre écrite à Monseigneur l'archevêque de Turin”, in *Les Œuvres de poésie* (Paris: Estienne Loyson, 1661).

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Perrin, “Lettre à Colbert”, in *Recueil de paroles de musique [...] dédié à monseigneur Colbert*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. fr. 2208.

project to life by creating *Pomone*, a pastoral work set to music comprised of vocal ensembles, ballets, changes of scenery and various machines. Its prologue and five-act structure anticipate the tragic operas of Lully and Quinault.

Three years later, Perrin's poetic project became a political object, when Jean-Baptiste Lully, superintendent of the King's Music, and favourite of the King, was granted management of the Opéra in Perrin's place. The new name given to the Opéra – "Académie royale de musique", instead of "academies de musique" – reflects the change of paradigm: the institution was now at the heart of the great academic movement of the eighteenth century, and the State was now becoming more and more involved in the cultural realm.<sup>5</sup> The 1672 letters patent also reveal that there was a desire to institutionalise the musical celebration of the monarchy by creating a specifically French genre of opera, which would combine musical, literary and dramatic elements, and was set against cosmopolitan standards of musical taste at a time when the Italian style was predominant in Europe. Moreover, the way in which the Opéra was managed – entrusted to a private entrepreneur under the constant supervision of a Secretary of State of the royal household – was different from the way in which the two Comédies (*Comédie-Française* and *Comédie-Italienne*) were managed: self-managed and under direct patronage of the big commensal officers.<sup>6</sup> This shows how much moral and social importance was given to opera, unlike the theatre.<sup>7</sup>

The letters patent from 1669 and 1672 also had a great impact on the repertoire of the Académie royale de musique. As a contract between the King and a geographically-based or professionally-bound group, the royal privilege granted certain guarantees that gave the group a near-monopoly. Music also became part of this system, under which the Parisian Opéra, from its very foundation, enjoyed many rights, the main one being the monopoly of music performances in the whole Kingdom of France.<sup>8</sup> This privilege can be understood in both symbolic and eco-

<sup>5</sup> Jacques-Bernard Durey de Noinville and Louis Travenol, *Histoire du théâtre de l'Académie royale de musique depuis son établissement jusqu'à présent*, 2 vols (Paris: Duchesne 1757), I, 77.

<sup>6</sup> Pauline Lemaigre-Gaffier, *Administrer les Menus Plaisirs du Roi: La cour, l'État et les spectacles dans la France des Lumières* (Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> "Et pour les obliger davantage à s'y perfectionner, nous les avons honorés des marques de notre estime et de notre bienveillance, et, comme entre les arts libéraux, la musique y tient l'un des premiers rangs," Durey de Noinville and Travenol, *Histoire du théâtre*, I, 82–83.

<sup>8</sup> "Faisant très-expresses inhibitions et défenses à toutes personnes, de quelque qualité et condition qu'elles soient, même aux officiers de notre maison, d'y entrer sans payer et de faire chanter de pareils opéra ou représentations en musique et en vers français dans toute l'étendue de notre royaume, pendant douze années, sans le consentement et permission dudit exposant, à peine de dix mille livres d'amende, confiscation des théâtres, machines et habits, applicable un tiers à nous, un tiers à l'hôpital général et l'autre tiers audit exposant," Durey de Noinville and Travenol, *Histoire du théâtre*, I, 80.

nostic terms. Indeed, the Opéra was originally set up as a private company, which distinguished it on one hand from traditional academies (with which it had only very little in common),<sup>9</sup> and on the other hand, from theatrical institutions, which were organised as societies. Moreover, the aim of the Académie royale de musique was to promote the genre of ‘serious’ opera, to magnify the monarchy and aristocracy and to exalt their moral values and practices/*étiquette*. Its mode of expression was that of the dramatic theatre of the eighteenth century – from which the opera librettists borrowed codes, decorum, metaphors and the cult of euphemism – even though they would stand out by having recourse to fantasy. The genre of ‘serious’ opera also constructed itself negatively by the rejection of any comic element.<sup>10</sup> Only serious genres were to be represented in the Opéra, comic genres having been relegated to less privileged stages, such as the *Comédie-Italienne*, or even fairs. The only sentiments allowed were heroism or grandeur; the only historical setting was that of Roman antiquity or seventeenth-century classics, such as l’Arioste’s *Roland furieux* or Tasse’s *Jérusalem délivrée*. Nevertheless, comic elements were not completely absent from the stage of the Académie royale de musique, but they were restricted to less noble genres such as musical tragedy or ballet, and even then, not without some difficulty.<sup>11</sup> Finally, in conformity with what Perrin had prescribed – he had written that one of the main faults of Italian opera was “the singing in a language which was foreign and unknown by most of the audience, and which robbed them of that which is the greatest pleasure of comedy: wit”<sup>12</sup> – the Opéra placed a lot of importance on the booklet, which was written in French: this showcased not music, but poetry – that is, a literary text that could be read in accordance with the rules of drama. For French opera composers, music had no communicative value and could only acquire theatrical value if it conformed to the rule of language. The difficulty was thus to ascribe a theatrical dimension to music through linguistic, metrical and thematic means.

## 1672–1749: THE MANAGEMENT OF LULLY’S LEGACY AND THE AESTHETICS OF INCARNATION

The history of the Opéra de Paris during *Ancien Régime* in France can be divided into three periods that correspond to specific modes of management. The first,

<sup>9</sup> Marie-Pauline Martin and Solveig Serre, “La conversation des Enfants d’Apollon: produire de la distinction au siècle des Lumières,” in *Revue de l’art* (2015), 57–63.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Noiray, *Vocabulaire de la musique de l’époque classique* (Paris: Minerve, 2005), 96–98.

<sup>11</sup> See the prologue of the *Fêtes de Thalie* by La Font and Mouret (1714), which staged the debate around the suitability of comedy on the stage of the Opéra.

<sup>12</sup> See Andrea Fabiano, *Histoire de l’opéra italien en France (1725–1815)* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2006), 16.

which stretched from 1669 to 1749, can be defined as the era of subcontractors and financial difficulties. Lully had skilfully managed the institution during his tenure,<sup>13</sup> but after his death in 1682, management was transferred to his son-in-law, Francine, and the Opéra's situation went from bad to worse. While the March 1672 letters patent only granted one individual the right to organise music performances, Francine had corrupted the system (because of financial difficulties) by resorting to subcontractors, who were dismissed as soon as the institution's financial fortunes seemed to be improving. In 1728, Francine was replaced by Destouches, a composer of some renown who had previously been inspector of the Académie royale de musique. Destouches did not fare much better. Until 1749, when the Académie royale de musique passed into the hands of the city of Paris, the institution was characterised by chronic administrative instability: in less than twenty years, seventeen directors succeeded each other, and there was an increase in royal interference, notably through the two great decrees of 1713 and 1714.<sup>14</sup> In the middle of the eighteenth century, it was clear that the Opéra de Paris, which was becoming increasingly popular, could no longer continue in such a direction: innovation was needed, or else the institution would founder.<sup>15</sup> The Crown thus decided to substitute the private entrepreneur with a public body, the city of Paris. The consequences of this decision were twofold: in the hands of the city of Paris, the Opéra became an enduring institution, independent of the changes in management and personnel. Unlike the other two theatres, which enjoyed royal privilege, the exploitation of the Académie royale de musique was originally granted to one individual: this privilege, aimed at protecting one specific individual, was revocable and provisional: it ended at the death of the individual who had been awarded such a privilege, or at the death of his descendants.<sup>16</sup> The changes brought by the 1749 letters patent, which granted management to the city of Paris "in perpetuity under the authority of His Majesty"<sup>17</sup> were thus nothing short of a revolution: indeed, for the first time this made explicit the official recognition of the association between privilege and the public dimension of the management of the institution. From then on, this idea would never be called into question.

<sup>13</sup> Jérôme de La Gorce, *Jean-Baptiste Lully* (Paris: Fayard, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Durey de Noinville and Travenol, *Histoire du théâtre*, I, 142.

<sup>15</sup> Solveig Serre, *L'Opéra de Paris (1749–1790): politique culturelle à l'époque des Lumières* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> In the patent letters of 1672, Lully has the privilege of the Académie royale de musique "pour en jouir sa vie durant, et après lui, celui de ses enfants qui sera pourvu en survivance de ladite charge de surintendant de la musique de notre Chambre, avec pouvoir d'associer qui bon lui semblera pour l'établissement de ladite académie" (Durey de Noinville and Travenol, *Histoire du théâtre*, 77).

<sup>17</sup> *Lettres patentes en faveur de la ville de Paris*, 25 August 1749, Paris, Archives nationales (hereafter *F-Pan*), O<sup>1</sup> 613.

Just as the nature of state authority, strictly defined, underwent almost no innovation, the repertoire of the Académie royale de musique during the first half of the eighteenth century saw very little change. There are two exceptions: the first is the King's loss of interest in the Opéra. This is reflected in various prologues: tragic opera became a ritual of nostalgia, longing to capture something it could never be again.<sup>18</sup> The second exception is tragic operas' loss of relevance, which is linked to the progressive construction of an Opéra repertoire: for financial reasons, it was conceived as a repository of past works brought back to the stage, rather than a dynamic repertoire of original creations.<sup>19</sup> Even after the death of Louis XIV and the relative open-mindedness of the regent, Lully's works continued to be staged, now seen as a state tradition. The re-staging old tragedies, however, had the effect of detaching the performance from its original context (celebrating the glory of the King at a given moment) and thus paved the way for a new aesthetics of representation.<sup>20</sup>

#### 1749–1780: CITY COUNCIL MANAGEMENT AND AESTHETIC TURMOIL

In 1749, the city of Paris had already placed high hopes in the Opéra, whose management it had taken over. It soon realised, however, that the Opéra brought the city little of the profit it had hoped for and, worse, that it required considerable financial investment. Thus in 1757, it fell back on the use of subcontracts: between 1757 and 1769, management of the Opéra was placed in the hands of two pairs of entrepreneurs – Rebel and Francœur (1757–1767),<sup>21</sup> then Berton and Trial (1767–1769)<sup>22</sup> – selected by the city council. In 1769, because of the negative financial results of the subcontractors, the city council had no other choice but to take over direct management of the Opéra. During the years 1770–1777, the Crown tried to intervene: the financial management of the institution was entrusted to royal commissaries, among them Papillon de La Ferté, intendant of the

<sup>18</sup> Rebecca Harris-Warrick, “Le prologue de Lully à Rameau,” in *Le Répertoire de l'Opéra de Paris: analyse et interprétation*, eds. Michel Noiray and Solveig Serre (Paris: École nationale des chartes, 2010), 199–211.

<sup>19</sup> See William Weber “The contemporaneity of Eighteenth-Century Musical Taste,” in *The Musical Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (1984): 175–94; William Weber, “La musique ancienne in the Waning of the Ancien Régime,” in *The Journal of Modern History* 56, no. 1 (1984): 58–88 and Maud Pouradier, “La modernité et le Classique: deux réponses à la nouvelle exigence de la musique à partir du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in *Comparatismes en Sorbonne* 70, no. 1 (2010): 27–40.

<sup>20</sup> Solveig Serre, “L'opéra entre incarnation et représentation: Quelques éléments d'un système poético-politique,” in *Nouvelle revue d'esthétique* 2, no. 12 (2013): 11–21.

<sup>21</sup> *Arrêt du Conseil qui concède le privilège de l'Académie royale de musique à Rebel et Francœur*, 13 March 1757, F-Pan, O<sup>1</sup> 613.

<sup>22</sup> *Soumission de Berton et Trial*, 3 January 1767, F-Pan, AJ<sup>13</sup> 3.

*Menus-Plaisirs*.<sup>23</sup> After a brief attempt at returning to private management (under Anne-Pierre-Jacques de Vismes du Valgay 1778–1779), the Opéra fell under royal control in 1780. Despite structural difficulties, and even though the 1749 decision was prompted by the mismanagement of its directors, it is clear that the Paris city council – a public body – carried out its responsibilities rather satisfactorily: whether they were subcontractors or as administrators, the men to whom the city council had entrusted the management of the institution turned out to be truly dedicated to the world of theatre, and personally invested in the running of the Opéra. In the end, the only problem the Paris city council faced was the problem of funding – a significant problem, it is true, but which must be put into perspective when considering the difficulty of running an institution that had the reputation of being unmanageable. If subcontracting had been resorted to for a number of reasons, this mechanism was not satisfactory, and demonstrated that the Opéra could not be entrusted to a private entrepreneur.

When the city of Paris took over the management of the Opéra, its repertoire was mostly comprised of musical tragedies and heroic pastorals.<sup>24</sup> The most-performed works were by Jean-Philippe Rameau, who had dominated the Opéra's stage for fifteen years. The Opéra thus confined itself to noble genres, to 'ancient/old music'. And yet, in 1752, for economic reasons, the directors of the Académie royale de musique had decided to temporarily invite Eustachio Bambini's semi-itinerant group to produce three interludes: *La serva padrona*, *Il giocatore*, and *Il maestro di musica*. Because of the public's positive reaction, the management decided to prolong the contract by one month, then a year. From December 1752, other members of the Italian theatre group arrived in Paris: other works were added to the repertoire of the *bouffons*, always in the genre of comedy. In November 1753 close to the end of his contract, Bambini decided to stage *Bertoldo in Corte*, with a booklet by Goldoni and music by Ciampi and other composers. This was a great success, judging by the trend for restaging and translation which took place in Paris's two other theatrical institutions. If the *bouffons* were quickly dismissed in 1754, it was not because of their failure to enchant Parisian audiences, who hungered for comedy, but because the argument that broke out between partisans of French and Italian music became a pretext for the outbreak of nationalist passion. To change the contents of the Opéra's repertoire was to

<sup>23</sup> Denis Papillon de la Ferté, Journal de Papillon de La Ferté, intendant et contrôleur de l'Argenterie, Menus-Plaisirs et affaires de la Chambre du roi (1756–1780) (Paris: Ollendorff, 1887), 406.

<sup>24</sup> The analyses of the Opéra's repertoire were made possible thanks to the *Chronopéra* database (managed by Michel Noiray and Solveig Serre and available at <http://chronopera3.free.fr>, accessed 5 March 2019). Sources are rich between 1749–1791 and reveal 5.806 performances at the Opéra across 13.041 days (out of a total of 14.975 calendar days).

transform performances intended to glorify the King into purely aesthetic shows. One could argue that Italian opera not only symbolised a longing for renewal, but also stood in opposition to French absolutism. After the departure of the *bouffons*, Lullyist then Rameauist tragedy became the dominant genre at the Opéra. Even if this took second place to ballet opera, the analysis of theatre revenue reveals that most of the public still favoured the noble genre. This *bouffon* episode aside, apathy defined the whole period: only 49 out of the 242 works that were staged were new creations, peppered with a proliferation of *spectacles couplés*.

A second attempt to reform the repertoire – and to contest absolutism on the stage of the Académie royale de musique – took place in 1778 with the arrival of a new manager, Anne-Pierre Jacques de Vismes du Valgay, who belonged neither to the artistic nor intellectual milieus, but to the world of high finance.<sup>25</sup> The context favoured this appointment: the operas of Gluck, who had arrived in Paris in 1774, received public acclaim (starting with *Iphigénie en Aulide*). The young Queen Marie-Antoinette exerted significant influence by importing from the Habsburg dynasty the tradition of patronage, royal management of musical affairs and a taste for contemporary and cosmopolitan music. As soon as he was appointed, Vismes changed the antiquated system of organising performances. His new artistic strategy adroitly articulated several principles: a spectacular rise in the number of weekly performances (from three to four or five); the frequent rotation of operas, which contrasted with the tradition of long series; and diversification of the opera genres which were on offer, tragic opera and *opera buffa* becoming twin poles of attraction for the Opéra. This ambitious artistic policy had a clear financial goal: to fill up the coffers of the Opéra. Like his predecessors in 1752, Vismes invited the Italian *bouffons*, who made a comeback by staging *Finte Gemelle* by Petrosellini and Piccinni. This led to a new quarrel between partisans of Gluck and admirers of Piccinni's music. Despite its brevity, this second *bouffon* episode showed that the Opéra could welcome both tragic and comic genres on its stage in close succession. It also revealed that the close association between place, political project and artistic project was coming undone: the Opéra stage could now stage works which were no longer directly linked to the glorification of the King. Between the arrival of Gluck in Paris and the resignation of Vismes, the Opéra had been invigorated by an incredible diversity of works and wave of creativity: 120 different works were staged; of these, 38 were new. These years were characterised by unprecedented cultural wealth, which opened new avenues for the Opéra repertoire. Gluck's arrival signalled the dominance of tragic opera over the

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<sup>25</sup> See Solveig Serre, "Un fermier au tripot: Anne-Pierre-Jacques Vismes du Valgay et l'Académie royale de musique (1778–1780)," in *Revue de Musicologie* 96, no. 1 (2010): 73–89.



other less serious genres. As it was a response to new aesthetic considerations, this evolution in taste enjoyed the boundless support of its contemporaries.

## 1780–1790: ROYAL MANAGEMENT AND THE AESTHETICS OF REPRESENTATION

The last great period in the administrative history of the Académie royale de musique during the *Ancien Régime* started with a decree by the State Council on 17 March 1780.<sup>26</sup> This completely transformed the legal and economic status of the Opéra, ending its lease, and bringing it under a committee of directors drawn from the most eminent members of the personnel, and thus placed it under closer royal control. The chairmen of the Chamber are not mentioned, but the new forms of administrative control were clearly based on the experience of the previous thirty years. The permanent representative of the Secretary of State to the royal household, appointed to work with the manager, acted as a guardian of the legislation whose role was comparable to that of the superintendent of the *Menus-Plaisirs* in the eighteenth century. Papillon de La Ferté's experience in management of the Comédies had probably influenced his appointment as representative of the Secretary of State to the royal household at the newly-reformed Académie royale de musique.<sup>27</sup> Although Louis XVI and his advisors had clearly hoped that the 1780s measures would put an end to the structural problems that had blighted the institution since Lully had handed over its management, the chronic instability that shook the Opéra between 1780 and 1790 paints a very different picture. The difficulty in defining the prerogatives of the director and the Committee, the confusion of administrative and financial management (compounded by the debts the institution had accumulated), and the tensions which arose when intriguing members of the personnel tried to impose their whims on managers, all seem to indicate that the new administration was at best underwhelming; at worst, a failure. Resorting to subcontractors had been rather successful, because it had encouraged managers to optimise their resources and balance their expenses. Direct control of the Académie royale de musique reinforced the role and responsibility of a state, which was reluctant to accept political and financial responsibility of the institution. When it came to the repertoire, the experiments of the previous period, which had been financially disastrous, now bore fruit in aesthetic terms.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Arrêt du Conseil d'État concernant l'Opéra*, 17 March 1780, F-Pan, O<sup>1</sup> 613.

<sup>27</sup> Pauline Lemaigre-Gaffier, *Administrer les Menus Plaisirs du Roi*.

<sup>28</sup> The most spectacular culmination of the tragic vein is the representation of the Danaïdes, Salieri's five-act lyric tragedy, given at the theatre in 1784, which ends with a horror vision: "On voit le Tartare roulant des flots de sang sur ses bords, et au milieu du théâtre Danaus paraît enchaîné sur un rocher, ses entrailles sanglantes sont dévorées par un vautour, et sa tête est

The Opéra repertoire renewed itself: tragedies now had three rather than five acts; comic operas were introduced; new subjects appeared, such as the village drama (*Le Seigneur bienfaisant* by Floquet) or the historical play (*Pizarre ou la conquête du Pérou* by Duplessis and Candeille). Furthermore, the *ballet-pantomime* was developed. This renewal had two conclusions: on one hand it gave a second lease to tragic opera, mostly thanks to increased dramatic intensity, greater unity of tone, and scenery realism; on the other hand, it paved the way for future theatrical experiments. Above all, a clearer gap emerged between the world of the audience and that of the booklet: the costumes and scenery no longer reflected continuity between represented space and the space of representation. Protected by a new distance, and maintained by the aesthetic of representation, the audience could be absorbed in scenes much bloodier than those to be found in the tragedies of Quinault or Lully. This does not mean that politics were absent from these new performances, but they no longer had to glorify the King in person; it was the aesthetic success of the performance that indirectly played homage to the power that had allowed it to come to life, and it was no longer tied to the fact that the King was present in body. Paradoxically, it was perhaps the rigidity of the royal power during the first *bouffon* episode of the Opéra that had encouraged such a change to take place, as the re-staging of old tragedies allowed the performances to be disassociated from their original context, thus striking a blow to the aesthetics of incarnation.

## CONCLUSION

Consequently, one can clearly see how the poetic project of a French opera tradition was constructed at a time when the monarchy was simultaneously giving its political importance. In fact, this political element is what allows one to understand the transformations of opera, the articulation of its performance, and its use by the King as a display of power. Indeed, to control representation – that is to codify, perhaps even to consecrate – a genre, to order and organise it, to legitimise its forms and uses, is a way for the King to associate his own body with those works, to invest it with their emotional and symbolic charge, and ultimately to control and stage his own representation, to project his image and exalt his power, in an aesthetics of incarnation. The Académie royale de musique was thus deliber-

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frappée par la foudre à coups redoublés. Les Danaïdes sont les unes enchaînées par groupes, tourmentées par les démons, et dévorées par des serpents; les autres poursuivies par des furies, remplissent le théâtre de leurs mouvements et de leurs cris; une pluie de feu tombe perpétuellement; le tout forme une pantomime du genre le plus terrible;” *Les Danaïdes, tragédie lyrique en cinq actes représentée pour la première fois sur le théâtre de l’Académie royale de musique le lundi 19 avril 1784* (Paris: P. de Lormel, 1784), 54.

ately set up to promote the serious opera genre, an exalted reflection of the King, whose power and majestic presence it celebrates. This expression of power within a genre (opera) and an institution (the Académie royale de musique) transformed over time, although it was never divorced from the need to balance its purpose (celebrating the King) and economic considerations. Indeed, this prestigious institution could not be allowed to fail – it thus had to be given both material and symbolic stability. Everything in this complex machine had to fit and work together: material and artistic history are thus intertwined. The study of this subtle mechanism, through the lens of politics, allows one to shed light on the choices, quarrels and rivalries which defined opera as a site of artistic creation and representation ‘and’ as the expression of royal influence. And yet this manifestation in power transformed over time. The reforms of the repertoire, whether they were linked to more or less subversive aesthetic changes (style, booklet, language) and thus to politics (the *bouffons* dispute) in the middle of the eighteenth century, or, later, to ideas of good management and innovations in performance style with the aim to reach out, under royal patronage, to new audiences and thus new sources of funding – these reforms reveal not only the close association between power and performance, but also its mutations. Little by little, this association would change from an aesthetics of incarnation to an aesthetics of representation. While the distancing of the person of the King in the aesthetics of representation allowed the gradual development of increasing realism, the loosening of artistic constraints, by contrast, enabled the development of new perspectives and practices in terms of artistic creation, as well as a deeper intensity of emotion in performances. The success of opera performances and the satisfaction of the audience ultimately became a new way of celebrating and exalting the power of the King.

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