

MERMAIDS AND MUSES: FROM PRAISE TO SATIRE

IN THE THEATRICAL FÊTE, 1654-1703

The opening scene of *Les noces de Pélée et de Thétis*, produced in 1654 at the Palais du Petit-Bourbon, featured the sixteen-year-old Louis XIV as Apollo (fig. 1). Surrounded by nine of the most beautiful ladies of the court as the Muses, he sat at the summit of Mount Parnassus, represented by an elevated stage machine. In keeping with the laudatory nature of the occasion, the mountain was hollowed out to resemble an arc de triomphe (fig. 2). On either side of the stage below was a male singer costumed as a river god and a divided chorus of female singers representing water nymphs, praising Apollo and entreating him to descend. As the singers receded, the machine was slowly lowered to stage level, and Louis and his Muses danced the first entrée. Thus began one of the most magnificent spectacles of the century, boasting an international cast, lavish costumes, and opulent stage sets by the master designer Giacomo Torelli.¹

This mammoth production alternated scenes from Carlo Caproli's opera (originally composed for Venice in 1637) with ballet entries danced by the court. Its loose plot, taken from Greek mythology and revolving around the love of the mortal Pélée for the water nymph Thétis, culminated in a grand ballet representing their wedding celebration. The prominent presence of the Muses in the prologue of this work is related to their presence at this mythical feast, where they were said to have sung, accompanied by Apollo on the lyre. Because Louis XIV was consistently identified with Apollo, and because the underwater realm of Thétis had a further association with monarchical

entertainment and refreshment, the intersecting mythologies of Apollo, the Muses, and Thétis came to serve as a metaphor for the relationship of the arts to absolutist power.

This essay, touching on textual, musical and visual elements of a series of related productions, will trace the radical change in how that relationship was represented between 1654 and the late years of the Sun King's reign. An important body of literature—including major studies by Jean-Marie Apostolidès, Peter Burke, Nicole Caverivière, and Jean-Pierre Néraudau—has examined the ways mythology was used in conjunction with royal propaganda in the time of Louis XIV. These studies also treat the use of mythology to undermine royal image-making. Until recently, however, this “other side of the medal,” especially as it involves the official theater, has lacked systematic study.² My own work has shown how a series of opera-ballets produced between 1700 and 1718, previously thought to be “remakes” of earlier ballets de cour from the 1650s and 1660s, actually deconstructs a complex system of royal iconography. These later works may be seen as satirizing the king through the subtle mockery of absolutist mythological figures and through the construction of a new hierarchical order led by deities such as Momus, god of raillery, and his female counterpart La Folie, goddess of comic madness.³ Through the following examination of the confluence of water imagery with a mythology of the Muses, I hope to contribute to a body of work illuminating the transformation of spectacle as it moved from the courtly fête to the public sphere.

Fountains and Fêtes at Versailles

The Grotte de Thétis was a free-standing miniature palace in the gardens of Versailles, just to the north of the main château. Like *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis*, it celebrated

Louis XIV in the guise of Apollo, with an emphasis on the festive and pleasurable aspects of his kingship. More specifically, it referenced the mythological descent of Apollo to the watery abode of Thétis, where he retired every evening after driving his sun-chariot across the sky. Attended by Thétis's nymphs, the god and his steed rested and arose refreshed to light the world again. On a more practical level, the water imagery of the Grotte derived from the function of its roof as a reservoir supplying water to the fountains in the gardens.

Completed in 1665-66, the Grotte de Thétis was inspired by the garden grottes of late-Renaissance Italy. It featured an elaborate arcade housing a series of fountains and water features, sculptures of sirens and tritons (half-human sea creatures with divided tails) and other sea motifs (fig. 3; for a contemporary description, see André Félibien's *Déscription de la Grotte de Thétis*, accompanied by engravings of Jean Le Pautre⁴). These, intermingled with fleurs-de-lis and Louis's monogram, a double "L," were crafted from a dazzling array of shells and sea coral giving the impression of an underwater cave. Le Pautre's engraving of the façade (fig. 4) shows reliefs of cupids riding dolphins and Apollo descending in his chariot, greeted by sirens and tritons. The main interior space (fig. 5) was organized around three closed niches housing impressive sculptural groupings. The central one of these, by François Giraudon, depicts a seated Apollo (clearly inspired by the ancient statue of the Apollo Belvedere) being bathed by six nymphs. In the niches on either side are sculptures of tritons tending Apollo's horses, by Gilles Guérin and Baltasar and Gaspard Marsy.

The Grotte de Thétis was the most baroque of all the structures at Versailles, one of the reasons it began to seem old-fashioned in the later classicizing decades. It was the

central node of a network of Versailles fountains. Numbering around 1400 by the end of Louis XIV's reign, these employed the latest and most spectacular hydraulic technology. Through these fountains ran a complex theme of water iconography, including river gods, Nereids and Naiads (ocean and fresh-water nymphs), tritons, and dolphins. Like Thétis's mythological abode, the fountains of Versailles provided Louis XIV with restful pleasure after his labors. Like the Grotte de Thétis, the statuary of the Versailles gardens intermingled an Apollonian iconography (fig. 6) with water imagery including sirens, tritons, dolphins, and river gods. All three of Louis XIV's grandes fêtes (1664, 1668, and 1674) highlighted the Versailles fountains and water iconography as the double symbol of pleasurable respite and technological control over the elements.

The banquet of the 1668 fête featured a spectacular fountain sculpture in the form of a large boulder representing the Muses' home on Mount Parnassus (fig. 7). Hollowed out to form a triumphal arch, as in the stage design for *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis*, it was surrounded by eight canals and surmounted by sculptures of Apollo, Pegasus, and all nine Muses playing musical instruments. In the engraving, the young king points proudly to this sculpture and the table laden with cakes, jellies, candied fruit, and almond paste buildings.⁵ In the pavilion serving as the salle de bal for the same fête, the figures of the Muses were echoed by lifelike statues of women carrying musical instruments (fig. 8). Their presence signaled Louis's control over the arts as the presence of fountains and water imagery signaled his control over the elements.

The Muses: Praise, Rebuke, Lament (1666 – 1695)

Because the Muses were generally understood as a collective mouthpiece for the fine arts, a survey of their appearances as theatrical characters may be used to track the ways in which the arts themselves were presented and propagandized under Louis XIV. It is well known that the portrayal of the Muses in courtly works served to represent the glory of the absolutist arts in the service of the king. The process by which the Muses came to represent a more critical view of the monarch has not been so widely treated. This process occurred in the late reign, during a period of widespread exhaustion with Louis's wars along with a staggering financial deficit, crippling taxation, and religious intolerance. The Académie Royale de Musique (familiarily known as the Opéra) was a particular victim not only of the dire economic situation, but also of the religious austerity to which the king had turned in the last two decades of the 17th century. Seized by a retrospective guilt for his earlier indulgences, Louis not only withdrew his financial support of the Opéra, but also began to tax the institution one sixth of all its revenues to subsidize the Hôpital des Pauvres.⁶ In these late years of the reign, the Opéra was considered a haven of the Epicurean pleasures that had been lost to the court at Versailles.

A few examples will show how the Muses' extravagant praise of Louis XIV in the court ballet turned, in later operatic works, to laments for the victimization of the arts at his hand. *Le Ballet des Muses*,⁷ a court ballet produced in 1666, stood alongside *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis* as one of the most massive of Louis XIV's entertainments. Both works made statements about Louis's relationship with the arts. By 1666, when Louis was entering the height of his power, that relationship reflected an even greater subservience of the arts to the gloire of the king. In the earlier spectacle, Louis/Apollo

was glorified as leader of the Muses, but he also danced alongside them. In the *Ballet des Muses*, the Muses were represented by a four-part male choir composed of professional singers and boy choristers, assertively proclaiming the glory of the king. Their opening chorus may be considered the ultimate expression of absolutism in music. It is based on multiple repetitions of two “premises,” corresponding to the two musical sections of the work. The first, “Rangeons nous sous ses lois/Il est beau de les suivre” (pp. 7-9), represents an acceptance of the “laws” of Louis’s propaganda, and their charge (like Louis’s image-makers) to publish his name throughout the earth. The second section, “Rien n’est si doux que de vivre/A la cour de LOUIS le plus parfait des ROYS” (pp. 9-14) sets out the reward promised to Louis’s artists by this contract.

Closely following the regular anapestic feet of the second couplet, the music reaches a climax at the final repetition of the words, “le plus parfait des ROYS” (p. 14). Throughout the second section, the words “cour” and “ROYS,” along with the second syllable of “Lou-is,” are repeatedly emphasized, underscoring the identity of Louis’s name with the court and with kingship. Given the homophonic setting, the narrow range of the melody, the regular phrase structure, and the extreme use of repetition, there is little doubt that this chorus would have indelibly branded the name, as well as the ineffable gloire of the monarch, on the collective memory of all who heard it.

In the prologue to Lully’s first operatic work, *Les fêtes de l’Amour et de Bacchus* (1672), the Muses remain the collective voice of Louis XIV’s power. The passage is a reworking of the “Le Ballet des nations,” the epilogue to Lully and Molière’s *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*.⁸ In the comedy-ballet, this diverse audience had been soothed by the beauties of fête. In the opera, they are interrupted and rebuked by the Muses. Insisting

on the high style more appropriate to a glorious king, the Muses of Tragedy, Pastoral, and Rhetorical Gesture command them to sing a stilted, artificial tribute to the king, which they teach them line-by-line like school children. This prologue, effectively transforming Molière's madcap audience into docile courtiers, announces the imminent demise of the comédie-ballet and the ascent of the high-minded, serious encomium of the operatic prologue.⁹

In the prologue to Lully's *Bellérophon*, by Lully and Thomas Corneille, Apollo assumes a role analogous to these stern Muses. In this work, Apollo and the Muses have gathered on Parnassus to celebrate France's victory in the war with the Electorate of Brandenburg, concluded by the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1679. Pan and Bacchus join them to sing Louis's praise, but veer off-topic in a dialogue with the shepherds on the pains and pleasures of love. Like the unruly dialogue of the stage audience in *Les Fêtes de l'Amour et de Bacchus*, their digression is rudely interrupted by a rebuke from Apollo:

Quittez de si vaines chansons.

Il faut par de plus nobles sons

Honorer en ce jour le Heros de la France

[...]

Allons; pour ce grand Roy, redoublez vos efforts,

Preparez vos plus doux accords.¹⁰

In later years, as Louis XIV's wars wreaked devastation on France, and as Louis began to withdraw his support for the Opéra, the Muses' songs began to change from praise and censorship to lament. In the prologue of *Isis* (Lully and Quinault, 1677¹¹), they complain that the noise of war threatens to drown out their harmonious sounds, and in *Achille et Polixène* (Lully, Collasse, and Quinault, 1687; RGO 1:309), that the "le plus grand des rois" has neglected their "plus superbes fêtes." In *Coronis* (Theobaldi di Gatti and M. Baugé, 1691; RGO 1:382), they sing of "l'affreuse cruauté" of war, and in *Les Saisons* (Collasse and Jean Pic, 1695; RGO 1:525), of their "douleur affreuse" in response to the usurpation of their place by La Gloire. Finally, in the prologue to *Ariane et Bacchus* (1696), an opera by Marin Marais with livret by a M. S. Jean, a dialogue between "noisy" La Gloire and a nymph presents Louis XIV as uninterested in the arts, preferring only his heroic exploits (RGO 1:552). While these complaints form one side of a dialectic that generally finds some kind of resolution with the other side (the Muses vs. La Gloire, for example), a growing dissatisfaction may be seen in these works.

The opéra-ballet *Les saisons* may be seen as reversing the ideological premise of *Le Ballet des saisons*, a court ballet from 1665, in which the Muses sang of their delight in the beauties of Louis's château at Fontainebleau. It marked the beginning of a series of operatic works, mostly opéra-ballets composed between 1695 and 1713, that subtly parodied the most important of Louis XIV's ballets de cour from the 1660s. (See Cowart, 174, for a list of these works.) These parodic opéra-ballets wove a complex tapestry of satire and intertextuality. Instead of glorifying the gods and warrior heroes associated with monarchical power, they celebrate a new pantheon of gods and goddesses such as Venus, Cupid, Bacchus, and Momus, associated with the pleasures of pastoral, comedy,

and satire. These figures had also appeared in the ballet de cour and in the tragédie en musique, where they represented a spirit of hedonism that would virtually disappear in the austere late years of Louis XIV's late court. Even in those earlier works, they were overshadowed by more absolutist roles such as Jupiter and Apollo. In these later public works, they often serve as a mouthpiece for monarchical critique.

Satire: *Les Muses* (1703)

In the early 18th century, what had been a subtle critique of Louis XIV's aesthetic program blossomed into full-blown satire on the Parisian operatic stage. *Les Muses*,¹² created by the composer André Campra and librettist Antoine Danchet, belongs to this series of satiric opéra-ballets. Directly targeting *Le Ballet des Muses* of 1666, whose livret had been widely disseminated with the publication of the *Oeuvres* of Benserade in 1697, this work satirizes the arts of absolutism and celebrates in their place the united arts of the opéra-ballet. Its prologue (pp. 2-82) parodies the opening scene of *Le Ballet des Muses*, in which the Muses paid obeisance to Louis as patron of the arts. It also parodies the typical prologue of the tragédie en musique, traditional site of monarchical encomium. Like *Le Ballet des Muses*, it depicts the Muses as having abandoned Parnassus, but not for Louis XIV's court. In contrast to Louis's court ballet, the Muses are described as consorting with Cupid and the god of commerce—a veiled reference to the commercial theater and probably more specifically the Opéra, known because of its flagrant libertinism as “the Temple of Cupid.”

Momus the Fool serves as master of ceremonies. A symbol of ancient Greek satire, this character had figured in the plays of the ancient writer Lucian in the same

capacity as a fool would function at court: to speak the truth under the guise of humor and mockery. The Muses return and begin to sing of gods and heroes (pp. 18-24), but their song is interrupted by the rollicking music (marked “gai”) of Bacchus and Ceres, celebrating pleasure, abundance, and love as the wellspring of the arts. This music contrasts sharply with the laudatory chorus in *Le Ballet des Muses* discussed above; with the Muses’ interruption and harsh censure of the unruly audience in *Les Fêtes de l’Amour et de Bacchus*; and with Apollo’s similar interruption and censure of Pan and Bacchus in *Bellérophon*. The prologue ends with a brief appearance by Apollo, former alter ego of Louis XIV as leader of the Muses. Instead of the object of praise, Apollo/Louis is now the target of Momus’s derisive mockery for his humiliating pursuit of the wood nymph Daphne—an obvious allusion to the king’s youthful indiscretions.

Whereas the older *Ballet des Muses* had presented a self-reflexive catalogue of the arts serving the Sun King, Campra’s *Les Muses* does the same for the arts serving a public audience in Paris. It consists of four acts, devoted respectively to Pastoral, Satire, Tragedy, and Comedy. Together these represent the current genres and modes of theater in the first decade of the 18th century, as they parody or pay tribute to earlier works. *La Tragédie* (pp. 195-239) treats the Greek myth of Méléagre. It may be read as a parody of the recent tragedy on the same subject by François Joseph La Grange-Chancel, which had appeared at the Comédie-Française in 1699. Chronicling a breathless succession of the deaths of three of its four protagonists, and ending with the impending suicide of the fourth, it may also be read as the symbolic death of the tragic heroism associated with the tragédie en musique and with the king.

The remaining three entries celebrate pastorale, satire, and comedy on the public stage and especially at the Opéra. *La Comédie* (pp. 240-326), in fact, represents the first appearance of a full-blown comedy on the operatic stage, and highlights the compatibility between the genre of comedy and the opéra-ballet. In a similar manner, *La Satire* (pp. 141-94) highlights the satirical nature of this new genre. *La Pastorale* (pp. 83-140) may be seen as a commentary on the pastoral entry of *Le Ballet des Muses*, which cast the king and ladies of the court in the roles of shepherd and shepherdesses. In contrast to the ballet de cour, it critiques the machinations of the court, which it contrasts unfavorably to the simple life of shepherds. *La Comédie* and *La Satire*, drawn loosely from the plots of Molière's *L'Amour médecin* and *Le Misanthrope*, respectively, pay tribute to Molière's influence on early 18th-century comedy and satire, and the incorporation of a Molièresque satirical spirit in the contemporary opera-ballet. Most importantly, in the presentation of an entire entry devoted to the Muse of satire, *Les Muses* admits satire into the prestigious company of the most elevated genres.

Les Muses enjoyed only a short run before a new prologue and altered *Pastorale* were substituted for the originals. The substitute prologue, based on the wedding of Thétis and Pélée, is satiric in a less direct way. Its first scene depicts Thétis descending from her throne, declaring her love for the mortal Pélée. Like the prologue of *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis* in 1654, this scene features a double chorus, formed by a group of river nymphs and a group of river gods representing "tous les Fleuves de l'univers." Their songs, however, praise only the wedding couple. The lack of monarchical flattery in any operatic prologue would be conspicuous, since it constituted the *raison d'être* of that genre; here it is doubly conspicuous in comparison to the encomium of the 1654

work. Thétis's emphatic rejection of "immortal grandeur" in choosing a human for her husband can also be read as a rejection of courtly magnificence, since the court was routinely equated with the Olympian gods. (This reading is reinforced by a later play at the théâtre de la foire, *Arlequin Thétis* [1713], in which the allusion is presented more overtly.¹³)

Just as the original prologue of *Les Muses* had reversed the absolutist aesthetics and ideology of the courtly *Ballet des Muses* of 1666, the substitute prologue reverses the politics of praise in the prologue to the courtly *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis*. In this substitute prologue¹⁴ (pp. 4-8), Apollo's function is strictly limited to a brief introduction of the Muses as master of ceremonies. The stark ideological difference between *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis* and Campra's *Les Muses* is pointed up by the similarities of their musical forces, especially the presence of a divided chorus of river gods and Naiads in the court ballet, and a divided chorus of river gods and Naiads in the opéra-ballet.¹⁵

The substitute prologue of *Les Muses* may be seen as alluding not only to the prologue of *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis*, but also to the opera on the same subject, *Thétis et Pélée* (1689), by Pascal Collasse with a livret by Bernard de Bovier de Fontenelle. This opera has been seen as questioning absolutist values, through its emphasis on the victory of love over power and its pointed critique of Jupiter and Neptune, two monarchical figures whom Fontenelle depicts as unnecessarily violent and cruel. Fontenelle's biographer Alain Niderst sees Neptune's tirade as a critique of Louis XIV's and Louvois's scorched earth policy in the Rhineland at the beginning of the War of the League of Augsburg:

Ah! dans le juste éclat de mes ressentiments,
Mon bras se servira de toute sa puissance;

Je confondrai les éléments . . .

Et sur la terre entière exerçant ma vengeance,

J'ébranlerai ses fondements.¹⁶

In this interpretation, Thétis's reference to "un tyran qui nous opprime tous" takes on special meaning, and Mercury's appeal to the "common interest" may be seen as compatible with Fontenelle's own philosophy. Thus, the allusion to the *tragédie en musique* of Fontenelle and Collasse takes its place in the intertextual satire which informs the opéra-ballet *Les Muses*.

Apollon travesti

Two frontispieces accompany different editions of *Les Muses*, both corresponding to the content of the substitute prologue treating the wedding of Thétis and Pélée. These add a visual dimension to its satire through their own allusions to absolutist imagery. The first (fig. 9), signed by Jean Bérain, depicts Thétis on a shell-throne, surrounded by water and served by two tritons, one carrying a basket of fruit. The tritons and the basket of fruit (attribute of river gods) are taken from a longstanding iconography for the wedding feast of Thétis and Pélée. Caryatids in the form of tritons or sirens also frame the stage depicted in this frontispiece. In place of the Bourbon coat of arms customarily hanging above the operatic stage is instead the head of a pig.

This frontispiece may be compared with a painting entitled *Le Triomphe de Thétis*, by Louis-Guy de Vernansal (fig. 10), which is thought to be a model for a series of tapestries on the marine gods, a collaboration overseen by Bérain in the last years of the 17th century for Louis's bastard son the comte de Toulouse (figs. 11-14).¹⁷ Its structure, in turn, is strongly influenced by Bérain's stage sets for Lully's *Atys* (1676), the fourth act of which takes place in the underwater palace of a river god (figs. 15-16).¹⁸

As in Bérain's frontispiece, Vernansal's *Thétis* sits on a shell throne surrounded by water and framed by the twisted-tailed sculptures of tritons and sirens in a grotto-like arcade. To these are added water nymphs, a river god crowned with a wreath, and dolphins. A cupid rides one of several swans, birds sacred to Apollon. On either side, confirming the association of Louis with Apollon, royal crowns are set above coats of arms bearing the Bourbon fleur-de-lis. The painting clearly alludes to the Grotte de Thétis at Versailles, in the central presence of Thétis, the arcade, the sculptures of sirens and tritons, the crowns and fleur-de-lis, and the omnipresence of water.

Bérain's frontispiece makes reference to the court and its fêtes in several ways. The grotesque mask in the central arch above the lambrequin calls to mind the grotesque mask hanging above the central arch of the Grotte (fig. 17). That mask, however, does not resemble a pig, which in the frontispiece could represent the satiric, upside-down world of carnival for which the pig traditionally served as symbol. Bérain's frontispiece further alludes to Versailles in its depiction of a pavilion such as the ones that often served as venues for events of the grandes fêtes. Like each of those pavilions as Le Pautre had depicted them, the architecture of the frontispiece consists of a domed octagonal structure in the form of a nymphaeum, open to the sky. The open oculi of the domed

vault in the frontispiece are identical to those of the banquet of 1668, which had featured the sculpture of Apollo and the Muses of Parnassus (fig. 7), and similar to the closed oculi with Louis's monogram in the salle de bal of the 1668 fête (fig. 8). Thus the frontispiece alludes to Vernansal's painting, the *Grotte de Thétis, Atys*, and the 1668 fête—especially the banquet referring to the Muses.

Bérain's frontispiece, then, includes a host of allusions that make this simple piece at least as heavily intertextual as the livret itself. The parody of Vernansal's painting with the omission of its absolutist imagery may have been a private joke or insider's allusion, since the painting may not have been known outside Bérain's professional circle. The replacement of the Opéra's coat of arms with a pig's mask, however, suggests satire and carnivalesque reversal. Another, anonymous frontispiece to *Les Muses* (fig. 18), included in an edition of livrets with an imprint of Amsterdam, 1706, represents an even more literal depiction of the *Grotte de Thétis* at Versailles, and a more subversive form of satire. In it, the anonymous artist recreates an arcade undeniably representing the *Grotte*, as described by André Félibien and illustrated by Le Pautre (fig. 5). The arcade of the *Grotte* accommodates a stage (as it often did in its heyday), where a large boulder representing Parnassus is surmounted by Pegasus and the Muses. This arrangement, quite similar to the boulder representing Parnassus at the 1668 banquet (fig. 7), appears as a stage set, over which appears the title "LES MUSES, BALLET." In the left foreground appears Ceres, who figured in the prologue to Campra's *Les Muses*. Mercury, in the right foreground, did not appear in that work, but did figure in Fontenelle's livret to the 1689 opera *Thétis et Pélée*. A grotesque mask again appears above the central arch, flanked on both sides by grotesque figures.

Most tellingly, the anonymous artist brings to life the sculptures of Thetis's nymphs and tritons caring for Apollo, his horses and his armor. Apollo is gesturing toward the stage as if offering the work to the assembled company, as he did in the substitute prologue of *Les Muses*. But instead of a laurel wreath, which he wears in Giraudon's sculpture, he sports the pointed ears of a satyr, symbol of satire, and the tritons of the sculpture group have metamorphosed into satyrs with pointed ears, horns, and cloven hoofs. Busts of satyr-like creatures grimace from the heights of the arcade. A Medusa-like figure offers Apollon a half-eaten apple, perhaps a reference to the golden apple brought by Discord to the feast of Thétis and Pélée. The satyrs may be understood in the context of the ancient satyr play, which followed the tragic trilogy and mocked its heroes and actions. (In early-modern France, the term *satire* was mistakenly thought to be related to the word for *satyr*.) The satirical treatment of Apollo—who had been so reverentially presented in courtly works—corresponds to the irreverence in the original prologue to *Les Muses* and supports the satire of the larger work. This frontispiece, then, points to the true nature of *Les Muses* as a modern satyr play, like the earlier frontispiece satirizing the king, *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis*, *Le Ballet des Muses* and other entertainments of his court, and in general his self-serving artistic program. The overt nature of the satirical imagery can be explained by the Amsterdam imprint of the publication. Whether actually printed in Amsterdam or (as was often the case with subversive literature) falsely imprinted with the name of that city, the publication would have been exempt from official censorship.

It is not surprising that the opera-ballet *Les Muses*, inheriting the trappings of the court ballet, would update an older aesthetic and ideology for a new Parisian public. Yet,

going beyond the routine changes one would expect in the reshaping of a courtly work for the public sphere, it actually mocks Louis XIV and court entertainment while celebrating the opéra-ballet and satire itself. Like a Trojan horse of fête, then, it subverts the roles, venues and images of royal iconography: Apollo, the Muses, Parnassus, the Grotte de Thétis, sirens, and tritons, as well as the self-referential mode through which the court praised itself. The real message of *Les Muses* and its frontispieces, then, is that the liberated Muses, representing a new breed of artists at the Opéra and in the Parisian public, have abandoned the praise of their predecessors in favor of a modern, satirical critique.

¹ Only fragments remain of the music and livret of this work, and nothing at all of the choreography. A stunning series of costume and stage designs, however (from which figs. 1 and 2 are reproduced) have been preserved at the Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France, along with many recorded descriptions of the event. See Marie-Thérèse Bouquet-Boyer, ed., *Les noces de Pélée et de Thétis: Venise, 1639 – Paris, 1654* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001).

² Jean-Marie Apostolides, *Le Roi-machine: Spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Minuit, 1981); Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Nicole Ferrier-Caverivière, *L'Image de Louis XIV dans la littérature française de 1660 à 1715* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1981); Jean-Pierre Néraudau, *L'Olympe du Roi-Soleil: Mythologie et idéologie royale au Grande Siècle* (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1986).

³ Georgia J. Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV and the Politics of Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); "Carnival in Venice or Protest in Paris: Louis XIV and the Politics of Subversion at the Paris Opéra," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 54 (2001): 265-302; "Watteau's Pilgrimage to Cythera and the Subversive Utopia of the Opéra-Ballet," *Art Bulletin* 83 (2001): 460-78.

⁴ André Félibien, *Description de la Grotte de Versailles* (Paris: Ballard, 1679); Le Pautre's engravings are found on pp. 24-41 (available at ETH-Bibliothek, Zurich: <http://www.e-rara.ch/zut/content/titleinfo/228066>).

⁵ Orest Ranum, “Islands and the Self in a Ludovician Fête,” in *Sun King: The Ascendancy of French Culture during the Reign of Louis XIV*, ed. David Lee Rubin (Washington, D. C.: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1992), 17-34.

⁶ Georgia J. Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV and the Politics of Spectacle* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), chapters 4-5.

⁷ Lully and Benserade, *Ballet des Muses*, Bibliothèque National de France, ms. Rés. F. 521 (available at Gallica <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k103673d/f1.item>).

⁸ Michel de Pure, ed. *Recueil général des opéras représentés par l’Académie royale de musique depuis son établissement* (Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1703–45; Geneva: Slatkine, 1971 [RGO]), 1: 38-41.

⁹ See Cowart, 120-122, for a more detailed analysis of *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* and its parody in this scene.

¹⁰ Quinault and Lully, *Bellérophon* (2nd ed., Paris: Ballard, 1714), 18-20 (available at Gallica <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8446952v.r=Lully+bellerophon.langEN>).

¹¹ Buford Norman, ed. Philippe Quinault: *Livrets d’opéra* (Toulouse: Société de Littératures Classiques, 1999), 1:233-34.

¹² Score available at Gallica:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9058749t.r=Les+Muses+Campra.langEN>

¹³ LeSage (en écritaux) and Gilliers (en vaudevilles), *Arlequin Thétis*. In Le Sage and d’Orneval, eds. *Le théâtre de la foire, ou L’opéra comique* (Paris: Etienne Ganeau, 1721), 1: 45-63.

¹⁴ Livret available at Gallica:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5504144z/f2.planchecontact.r=danchet+les+muses.langEN>

¹⁵ The vocal distribution is clear despite the loss of the music, from a printed description preserved in the *Oeuvres* of Benserade; see Marie-Claude Canova-Green, ed., *Benserade: Ballets pour Louis XIV* (Toulouse: Société de Littératures Classiques, 1997), 1: 179-187.

¹⁶ Alain Niderst, *Fontenelle à la recherche de lui-même* (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1972), 413. See pp. 411-415 for a discussion of this work. Its appearance in 1689 would place it alongside a pair of highly subversive works by the Lully sons produced at the Opéra in 1688 and 1690 (see Cowart, 144-50).

¹⁷ I am grateful to Régine Pierre-Chollet and the Office of Patrimoine Historique et Artistique of the Banque de France, Paris, for access to these works and information on them. On the tapestry series, see Roger-Armand Weigert, “La Tenture des Triomphes marins,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (mai-juin 1937), 3-8.

¹⁸ Some elements also seem to be taken from a print by Bérain entitled *Composition ornemental* (see Weigert, p. 8).