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Aristophanes, Rameau and *Platée*[1]

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Abstract: Rameau's *Platée* owes much more to Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs* than the frog chorus. The main character in *The Frogs*, Dionysus, may well have been the inspiration for many of the traits of the nymph Platée. Both rule over wetlands and their inhabitants, and both are subjected to extensive mockery. While Dionysus is a divine patron of the theatre, Platée is a visual metaphor for opera. Dionysus, disguised as Heracles, fails to measure up to the hero, exhibiting cowardly behaviour and physical weakness, just as Platée fails to speak and act as a satisfactory operatic heroine, the model for which is, arguably, Lully's Armide. The parodic elements in the debate between Aeschylus and Euripides over the nature and function of tragedy resonate with the parody of *tragédie lyrique* which lies at the heart of Rameau's opera.

Introduction

Rameau's 1745 opera *Platée* derives its uniqueness from a complex of sources which reference at some point nearly every corner of the theatrical world. Strictly classified as a *ballet bouffon*, or comic ballet, which emphasises its many dances, its plot contains elements related to both the *tragédie lyrique* and the *opéra comique*. It also comments in places on French classical tragedy. The subject is derived from antiquity, and its views of comedy, stretching back to its origins in ancient Greece, are – as I will show in this essay – heavily coloured by Aristophanes, notably *The Frogs*. Exploring the obligation that *Platée* owes to the latter source will help us develop a better understanding of a work which has often suffered critical misapprobation in modern times.

The work's generic amalgam coalesces in the nature of the main character, the nymph Platée, queen of a patch of wetlands with a variety of indigenous creatures, notably birds and frogs, as her subjects. The needy Platée has been searching for a mate and believes that neighbouring King Cithéron (Cythaeron) is infatuated with her; however, he treats her with indifference. Meanwhile, Jupiter, weary of his wife Juno's jealousy over his many affairs with mortals, decides to teach her lesson. At the suggestion of Cithéron, he sends Mercury as a messenger to approach Platée to tell her that she has found favour with the great god, and Platée is enraptured

[1] An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society in November 2008 in Nashville, Tennessee. I would like to express my posthumous appreciation to Elizabeth Bartlett, who provided me with much material prior to the publication of her edition: Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Platée: ballet bouffon en un prologue et trois actes*, ed. Elizabeth Bartlett, *Opera omnia* sér. 4, v. 10 (France: Société Jean-Philippe Rameau, 2005), LXI and LXVI. I have used for this article the most recent and, I believe, thorough translation for Aristophanes' *Frogs* by Alan H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes* 9 (Oxford, 1996). Line numbers are used when specifically referring to the text of the play. Page numbers are used when referring to Sommerstein's notes. I would like to thank Downing Thomas and Timothy Long for their suggestions and advice.

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with the prospect. Jupiter descends to earth, transforming himself into various animals on the way down, alternately terrifying and confusing Platée. Finally in human form, he woos her, knowing that Juno will hear of this romance, and in her efforts to put a stop to it, will realise, seeing the undesirability of Platée, that she has been fooled. On the wedding day the prenuptial entertainments are interminable, as Juno, who has been alerted to the impending marriage, is slow in arriving. Platée becomes increasingly impatient, but finally the wedding can be delayed no longer. Just as Jupiter begins his nuptial vows, Juno arrives and halts the proceedings. When she sees Platée, she breaks into laughter, and Jupiter and Juno are reconciled. Rejected, the angry nymph is mocked by the people, and, with a series of curses aimed at Cithéron, whom she views as the instigator, retreats to her abode.

The role of Platée is sung by a man dressed as a woman, whose appearance is clearly undesirable, although nowhere in the livret does it specifically state that she is ugly.[2] A painting of Pierre de Jelyotte, the actor and celebrated hautcontre for whom the role was written, dressed and made up as Platée, shows a middle-aged, somewhat heavy woman with a coquettish expression.[3] Obviously, a mannish element manages to creep through, adding to her general unattractiveness.[4] These features combine to present the perfect parody of the portrait of an operatic heroine. In contrast, modern productions have pushed the boundary of the grotesque in costuming the actor as part amphibian, or clown, tending to overemphasise the comedic nature of the character.[5]

The opera was pressed into service at the last minute as an entertainment to celebrate the marriage of the Dauphin Louis and Maria Theresa of Spain in March 1745, when the planned opera by Pancrace Royer was not completed in time. Later in 1749, when it was finally performed at the Paris Opéra, it was popular. Some reviewers were put off by the lowly and often offensive language which violated *bienséance*, prescribed by Aristotle, and followed faithfully by official theatrical

[2] Harry Halbreich, '*Platée*, ou de l'incongruité', *Platée*, L'Avant Scène OPERA 109 (Paris, 1999), 56–9, questions whether her physical beauty, or lack of it, in fact plays much of a role, observing that there is no reference to physical ugliness in the livret. Further, he points out that in an era when small-pox scars and other physical deformities were common, education and manners carried more weight.

[3] Charles-Antoine Coypel (1694–1752), *Portrait de l'acteur Jelyotte en costume de femme* (*c.* 1745, Musée du Louvre).

[4] The appearance on the stage of a man dressed as a woman was deeply offensive to some. In discussing the character of Tacmas, a travesty role in Rameau's *opéra-ballet Les Indes galantes* (1735), the *Mercure de France* decreed, 'The dignity of our theatre does not support the weakness of a man dressed up as a woman. This degradation of the superior sex dulls the soul of the spectator.' ('La diginité de notre Théâtre ne soutient pas la lâcheté d'un homme travesti en femme. Cet avilissement du sexe supérieur affadit l'âme du spectateur.') As quoted in Halbreich, 58.

[5] Michel Sénéchal, who became identified with the role of Platée, beginning in 1956, dressed as an androgynous clown with a painted face in a dress with a tiny crown on his head, so he was identifiably human. The Spoleto production featured a reasonably attractive Platée thus avoiding the issue of ugliness. The Platée of both the Mark Morris production and that of the Paris opera (and thus featured in the DVD cited in note 12, below) is clearly part amphibian.

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productions, since Platée used language and exhibited behaviour inappropriate to her station.[6] Others were unreservedly enthusiastic.[7]

After 1749 *Platée* was revived several times in its entirety, although in later years only the prelude was performed.[8] After its last appearance in 1773, *Platée* disappeared from the stage for 128 years.[9] The publication of the opera in the *Œuvres complètes* of Rameau in 1907 resulted in a few performances in the first decades of the century, but the revival began in earnest with its production at Aix-en-Provence in 1956 under the direction of Hans Rosbaud, who later made its first recording.[10] It received its first English performance in 1983 and its first American performance in 1987.[11] The performance which has received the most attention in the English-speaking world is that staged by Mark Morris. Jointly produced by the Edinburgh Festival and the New York City Opera in 1997, it was a resounding success. The 1999 Paris Opéra production was released on DVD, and this production was imported by the Santa Fe Festival in the summer of 2007.[12]

Platée has thus assumed a solid place in the operatic repertory and has become one of Rameau's best-known stage works. Audiences have enjoyed Rameau's witty evocation of animals, attractive dance music, and the amusing delusions of the main character, the nymph Platée.[13] In order to appeal to an audience bred on Mozart and Verdi, many recent productions seek to humanise Platée and, in doing so, set themselves a trap, because the unsympathetic way in which the main character is

[6] Remond de Sainte Albine reviewing *Platée* in the *Mercure de France* (March 1749), 188–95, provides a list of offensive words and others used in a vulgar or suggestive context, nevertheless, he concludes with, 'Platée est un de ses [Rameau's] ouvrages les plus brillians.' He touches on the issue of *bienséance*, 'A way of speaking [which] would appear trivial in the mouth of a divinity, a nymph, or a sovereign would not offend at all in the mouth of a peasant.' ('Une façon de parler paroît trivial dans la bouche d'une Divinité, d'une Nymphe, d'un souverain, & elle ne blesse point dans la bouche d'un paysan.')

[7] For a discussion of reviews of *Platée* in relation to issues of language, as well as the *bienséances* as they apply to *Platée*, see Downing A. Thomas, 'Rameau's *Platée* Returns: A Case of Double Identity in the *Querelle des bouffons*', *this journal*, 18 (2006), 1–19.

[8] Bartlett, XLVII, counts thirty-one performances of the opera and another fifty-four of the prelude alone.

[9] Elisabetta Soldini, 'Œuvres à l'affiche', *Platée*, L'Avant Scène OPERA 109 (Paris, 1999), 78–81, provides a partial list of twentieth-century performances. The earliest took place in Munich on 26 January 1901.

[10] Soldini, 78, lists performances in Montecarlo in 1917 and Como and Milan in 1921. For a discussion of the three complete recordings of this work by Rosbaud (Pathé DTX 223-224, 1956), Malgoire (CBS Masterworks M2K44982, 1988) and Minkowski (Musifrance WE815-ZA, 1988), see Alain Perroux, 'Discographie', *Platée,* L'Avant Scène OPERA 109 (Paris, 1999), 74–7.

[11] The first English performance took place at Sadler's Wells by the English Bach Festival Orchestra in celebration of Rameau's Tercentenary year under the direction of Jean-Claude Malgoire. The American performance took place in Charleston, South Carolina as part of the Spoleto Festival.

[12] *Platée* (TDK, 2003) Opéra National de Paris, with the Orchestra and Chorus of Les Musiciens du Louvre-Grenoble, Mark Minkowski, cond. With Paul Agnew as Platée.

[13] For example, 'There are orchestral effects which make Richard Strauss sound grey. Not only do we witness a couple of marvellous storms but there are also parodies of idyllic nature: no nightingales here but rather croaking frogs, hooting owls and a *charivari* of bird noises'; Richard Langham Smith, 'Opera on its Head', *The Musical Times*, 133 no. 1788 (February 1992), 83. This is a highly favourable review of the Minkowski recording.

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treated in the plot serves to leave audiences with a sense of ambivalence towards the work as a whole. Girdlestone's 1957 rant is typical:

> an unlovely physique is a crime in the erotic and hedonistic world of opera … Even the climate of unreality in which this story unfolds cannot make us forget entirely that the basis of the comedy is physical ill-favour. That the unsightliness of an unweddable female should be the ground of such prolonged sport is not wholly pleasing, and it is hard not to be repelled in the long run by the inhumanity of the theme.[14]

In a more moderate way, the *New York Times* critic Anthony Tommasini expresses the typical reactions of audience members to the Mark Morris production: 'If there is some degree of cruelty in all comedy, there is more than some in *Platée,* Jean-Philippe Rameau's *comédie-lyrique* from 1745 … you feel a little guilty laughing at the fate of Platée, which is just, I'm sure, as Rameau intended.'[15]

As the above citations indicate, the cruelty inherent in the opera's conclusion has been discussed at length without definitively resolving its purpose, but I believe the true nature of Platée, indeed the message of the opera, has been misunderstood. I propose to explore this question by returning to one of the principal sources of the opera, old Greek comedy, and, in particular, Aristophanes' play *The Frogs*.[16] The frog chorus in *Platée* is an overt reference to Aristophanes and direct evidence that the composer and, probably, the librettist were familiar with *The Frogs*. An understanding of the relationship between the play and the opera provides a window into the inspiration and motivation for the latter work's composition and for understanding Platée herself.

Rameau was not the first to create a stage work using Aristophanes as a model. In 1668 the great tragedian Jean Racine (1639–99) wrote *Les Plaideurs*, a comedy that satirised the judiciary, deriving the main character and many of the plot elements from Aristophanes' play *Wasps*.[17] He felt it necessary to provide a defensive justification for his choice, saying that Aristophanes offered greater freedom than the more common comic models, such as the Roman playwright Terence, in 'pushing things beyond the plausible'.[18] Racine had good reason to be defensive. Aristophanes was playwright-non-grata among dramatic critics, because his language was often vulgar, he failed to 'obey' Aristotelian principles (applied retroactively),

[14] Cuthbert Girdlestone, *Jean-Philippe Rameau: His Life and Work* (London, 1957; rev. edn New York, 1969), 404.

[15] Anthony Tommasini, 'Gods are Catty to the Swamp's Miss Piggy', *New York Times*, 30 September 2004.

[16] Others have attempted to explore *Platée* in relation to Greek drama in a more general way. Dominique Quéro, '*Platée*, "Drame Satyrique"?' in *Humour, ironie et humanism dans la litterature française: Mélanges offerts à Jacques van Heuvel par ses élèves et amis*, ed. Philippe Koeppel (Paris, 2001), 195–220, suggests that the opera owes its mixture of comic and tragic elements to the satyr plays only one of which, *Cyclops*, by Euripides, survives.

[17] Nathan Gross, 'Racine's Debt to Aristophanes', *Comparative Literature*, 17 (1975), 209–24. Ironically, Girdlestone, 404, briefly compares the mockery found in *Les Plaideurs* and that found in *Platée* without recognising that they might been inspired by the same author.

[18] Jean Racine, *Les Plaideurs* (Paris, 1669), Au lecteur.

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and his mockery of individuals and institutions was regarded as a threatening precedent.[19] Indeed, Racine's play was initially a failure in Paris, because it scored a direct hit on lawyers and members of the judiciary. Only after its success at court did it become a permanent part of the repertory at the Comédie-Française, and has remained so to this day.

It is probable that Rameau took on the challenge of creating comedy with the same thought and preparation that had characterised his tragedies and it is natural that he should have considered the origins and nature of the genre. The *Querelle des anciens et des modernes* in the early eighteenth century over the relevance of ancient works as aesthetic models had amply demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of using them as a springboard for creation. The works of Aristophanes became more prominent in France in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when Mme Dacier and Pierre Brumoy helped to popularise Greek drama, with considerable attention to comedy, by translating some plays into French and providing summaries of others.[20] *The Frogs* (*Ranae*) had been translated into Latin in the sixteenth century and was not translated into French until later in the eighteenth, but the large majority of educated people had some Latin fluency, and Rameau, with his Jesuit training, had no problems with the language.[21]

Platée

The product of the playwright Jacques Autreau (1657–1745), the *Platée* livret initially had no connection with Aristophanes or *The Frogs*.[22] Autreau derived the basic plot from the ancient travel writer Pausanias. In his version of the story, Jupiter tricks Juno into believing that a wooden statue hidden by a veil is his new love. Autreau replaced the statue with a character who was essentially his own invention.[23] No direct evidence exists as to when or how Rameau came to know Autreau and

[19] Girdlestone, 404, condemns the mockery in *Les Plaideurs* with the same censoriousness with which he approaches the character of Platée: 'it is derisive, pitiless, without the sympathy with which habitually comic playwrights like Molière give warmth to their creations.' He then points out that both Racine and Rameau were 'artists whose normal activity lay in, or near, the field of tragedy.'

[20] Anne Dacier, *Le Plutus et les Nuées traduites en françois, avec des remarques & un examen de chaque pièce selon les régles du théâtre; par Mademoiselle Le Fèvre* (Paris, 1684). Pierre Brumoy, *Théâtre des grecs* (Paris, 1730). This latter work saw multiple editions and was later translated into English by Elizabeth Lennox under the supervision of Samuel Johnson.

[21] Sallier used an edition from 1516. *Aristophanis ranae* was published in Paris in 1730.

[22] Bartlett provides a detailed biography of Autreau, emphasising his connections with the operatic world from the beginning of the eighteenth century. H. Stanley Schwarz, 'Jacques Autreau, A Forgotten Dramatist', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, 46 (1931), 498–532, discusses his importance to theatre history. When the Comédie Italienne returned to Paris in 1716 from its long exile (beginning in 1697), the company was out of touch with current Parisian taste. Autreau saved them from bankruptcy by providing them with their first success, *Port à l'Angloise, ou les Nouvelles Débarquées*. Over the next two decades he continued to provide them with both successes and failures.

[23] Autreau, Avertissement, 'Je n'ai fait d'autre changement à l'histoire que d'animer la figure de bois, et d'en faire une nymphe ridicule.' See Nicolas Anderson, 'Rameau's *Platée*: Burlesque or grotesque?', *Early Music*, 11 (1983), 505.

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when he became involved in the livret for *Platée*. Bartlett hypothesises a three-step timeline which suggests Rameau's involvement almost from the beginning:[24]

(1) In the mid 1730s Autreau began work on the *Platée* livret, perhaps hoping that Jean-Joseph Mouret, a former collaborator, would set it. Autreau's friend and patron La Poplinière (also Rameau's patron) may have contributed verses to the work. Autreau and Rameau became acquainted through their mutual association.
(2) In the late 1730s, Autreau began to revise the livret to meet the demands of Rameau (perhaps following suggestions of La Poplinière and members of his circle), but work was halted when Rameau had a falling out with Thuret, the Director of the Opéra, thus eliminating for the time being the possibility of a performance.
(3) When it became clear that Thuret would no longer continue as director for the Opéra, Rameau returned to the livret again, buying the work from Autreau no later than 1743.

According to this hypothesis, Rameau may have become involved in the work as early as the mid 1730s, but there is good reason to question his contribution prior to 1743.

Autreau's *Œuvres* were published posthumously in 1748, most likely edited by Charles-Étienne Pelissier, and included an early version of *Platée*, probably from early 1743. It is therefore possible to compare the early-1743 version of the livret with the final one set by Rameau. As Bartlett notes, 'the Prologue, as published in the *Œuvres*, is quite close, but the three acts differ widely from the version Rameau set'.[25] Those differences are so extensive that they suggest a fundamental shift in concept. If Rameau had been involved in the work for perhaps seven years, it seems unlikely that he would have so completely changed direction at this late stage. In Autreau's early version, Jupiter, Juno and Platée form a dramatic triangle, as the alternative title 'Junon jalouse' suggests. Juno has ample opportunity to reveal her point of view, and it is easy to understand and sympathise with her attitude towards Jupiter's philandering. Rameau and Autreau eliminated much of her part, leaving her a monologue in Act III and a brief appearance at the moment of discovery when she realises that Jupiter has put one over on her, and to emphasise this point they eliminated 'Junon jalouse' from the title.[26] By contrast Platée's role is greatly increased, moving her to the centre of the drama. She is rarely off stage, even when she functions as an observer. The wedding scene and the conclusion are vastly extended, with the addition of the curse and the mockery of the people.

[24] The following is a partial summary of Bartlett's table, LXXVII, giving a history of the opera from its beginnings through to the eighteenth century.
[25] Bartlett, LXXII.
[26] Her assistant Iris is eliminated as well.

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All of the above has not escaped notice and some of these changes might be attributable to the exigencies of the first performance, but the movement of Platée to the centre coincides with a fundamental change in the way the character is conceived. In the early version, Platée is a nymph who behaves according to her station; she speaks correctly and acts appropriately. She is deluded in her relationship with Jupiter, but there are plenty of aristocratic heroines who have suffered from delusions and paid the price. The post-1743 Platée becomes an object of mockery through her speech and through behaviour inappropriate to her station in life. In short, the early Platée observes *bienséance*, while the final version of the character does not. In the early livret Platée retains some dignity. She often speaks eloquently in the language of tragedy, while in the later version her speech is filled with linguistic horrors. Her age (she is immortal) is a source of humour, and her interaction with Jupiter is much less comic. Finally, the mockery to which she is subjected is simply absent prior to 1743. A fine example of these changes is found at the end of the opera with her final exit. In response to the revelation of Jupiter's deception, she gives a speech worthy of a tragic heroine.

Platée à Jupiter:[27]	Platée to Jupiter:
Perfide amant, époux plein de foiblesse,	Unfaithful lover, spouse full of weakness,
Va gémir dans les fers de ta fière Déesse;	Go kneel in the chains of your proud goddess;
Elle vengera ma douleur,	She will avenge my pain,
Je t'abandonne à sa fureur.	I abandon you to her fury.
Que jalouse bientôt de quelqu'autre maîtresse,	When soon jealous of some other mistress,
Elle fasse tomber les Cieux	She will make the sky fall
De nouveau torrents en ces lieux,	In new torrents here,
Mon peuple* en poussera mille cris d'allégresse.	My people* will rejoice a thousand times.
Allons jusqu'à ce temps au fond de mon Palais	Let us go now to the depths of my palace,
Cacher l'affront que tu me fais.	To conceal the insult you have done me.
*Les grenouilles.[28]	*Frogs.
Platée et les nymphs se vont précipiter dans le marais.	*Platée and her nymphs plunge into the swamp*

This speech has been eliminated in the final version and replaced by Platée's attack on Cithéron, whom she blames for the deception. As Jupiter and Juno depart, the following stage directions have been added: 'Platée is brought back on stage by a group of country people, their wives and children who surround her and mock her.'[29]

The crowd prevents Platée from escaping until they have mocked her in a series of choruses. This scene, the culmination of Platée's humiliation, is generally regarded as the most 'cruel' in the opera. It removes any dignity which Platée might

[27] Autreau, *Œuvres*, 86.
[28] This is the only reference to frogs in Autreau's earlier version.
[29] *Platée*, Act II scene 8: 'Platée est ramenée sur la Scène par une troupe d'Habitants de la champagne, de leurs femmes & de leurs enfants qui l'entourent & le moquent d'elle.'

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have retained in the speech originally written for her by Autreau. It encapsulates the changes which occurred at the time that Rameau purchased the work.

Once he had control of the work, Rameau probably became fully involved in the preparation of the libretto. The composer had a long history of interfering in the preparation of the livret. Librettists of the stature of Louis Cahusac and Voltaire gave way before his demands, and Autreau, in desperate need of Rameau's money, and lacking the stature of either of the other librettists, was in no position to offer resistance.[30] Although Autreau probably made the changes himself, it was almost certainly under the direction of the composer, and thus Rameau must be considered fully responsible.[31] I will argue that all of these changes are, at least in part, influenced by Aristophanes' *The Frogs*.

The Frogs

In order to establish the relationship between *The Frogs* and *Platée*, the salient features of Aristophanes' play that are relevant to the opera require some explanation. *The Frogs* was created for the *Lenaea*, a festival in honour of the god of theatre Dionysus (also known as Bacchus). The year was 405 BC, shortly after the death of the tragic genius Euripides, and a period of great peril for Athens as a result of its losses in the Peloponnesian War. During the composition of the play the last of the great tragedians, Sophocles, died, leaving no comparable figure to carry on a tradition that stretched back to Aeschylus half a century before. Indeed, for Aristophanes, the revered institution of tragedy, then only a century old, was in danger of a decline into oblivion.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle derives the word 'comedy' from the Greek *Komos*, a drunken party often closely associated with the symposium, and also with religious ritual.[32] The wine served at a banquet or symposium causes the drinker to lose himself, to adopt another persona, as the actor adopts a different persona on stage. Wine may thus be a springboard for inspiration by freeing the individual of the inhibitions of daily existence.[33] Dionysus (Bacchus) became strongly associated with comedy – and performances thereof at the annual festival in his

[30] Girdlestone, 444, summarises the frustrations Voltaire experienced in working with Rameau on *La Princesse de Navarre* in 1744 and 1745 at the same time the composer was dealing with Autreau. Nicolas Bricaire de La Dixmérie, *Les Deux ages du gout et du genie français, sous Louis XIV et Louis XV* (Paris, 1769), in discussing the contributions of Louis de Cahusac to the art of lyric poetry, says, 'Il [Cahusac] sacrifie souvent les droits du Poëte ceux du Musicien; c'est une justice que lui rendait l'illustre Rameau, qui sur cette matière pouvait juger sans appel. Au surplus, nous ne pouvions que gagner à cet sacrifice.' (He often sacrifices the rights of the poet to those of the musician; it is a right that he yielded to the illustrious Rameau, who in this matter could render judgement without appeal. Besides, we could only benefit from this sacrifice.)

[31] Bartlett, LXXVI, demonstrates that the later contribution of the other librettists Le Valois d'Orville and Balot à Sorat who made alterations to the livret at various times was minor.

[32] Current scholarship has emphasised the ritual nature of the origins of comedy. See, for example, Kenneth S. Rothwell, *Nature, Culture and the Origins of Greek Comedy: A Study of Animal Choruses* (Cambridge, 2007), 7.

[33] The Prologue to *Platée* exploits this connection. On the origins of the prologue, see Dominique Quéro, 'Bacchus et la naissance de comédie', *Dix-Huitième Siècle*, 29 (1997), 255–68.

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honour – as a result of his association with wine. *The Frogs* is a play about 'plays and playwrights' and it is only natural that Dionysus, the god of 'dramatic poetry and of dramatic performances as theatrical events' should be at the centre.[34]

During the *Lenaea*, it was assumed that the god, often associated with disorder and chaos, enjoyed seeing himself mocked, in keeping with the topsy turvy nature of the festival.[35] To cite two examples, he had been portrayed in previous plays as a paunchy, ridiculous competitor in the Olympics (Aristomenes' *Dionysus the Athlete*), and a clumsy, incompetent sailor in Athens's great navy (Eupolis' *Taxiarchs*).[36] When he appeared at the beginning of *The Frogs* dressed as the celebrated hero and strong man of antiquity, Heracles (Hercules), whom he wishes to impersonate, wearing a woman's saffron robes with Heracles' iconic lion skin around his neck, and walking while his slave rode on the back of a donkey, the audience immediately recognised that he would not be spared in this production.[37] The symbolism associated with this costume is multi-layered and filled with tradition, but for the purposes of this essay it is enough to observe that it emphasises the discordant nature of Dionysus' role.[38] The costume is, in any case, associated with Heracles, and throughout the first part of the play Dionysus is compared unfavourably with the latter; in fact he is the exact opposite of the hero. The mockery of Dionysus is central to the first part of the play. 'He is the person to whom things happen, and we laugh more at him than with him.'[39]

Dionysus' reason for his disguise is, he tells us, to bring Euripides back from the underworld, and he believes, wrongly, that he will be safer in this disguise, as he will spark fear in potential adversaries. Since Heracles has previously made the journey, Dionysus visits the 'real' Heracles at his house to ask him for directions to Hades; then Dionysus and his slave, Xanthus, travel to the body of water that separates the underworld from the world of the living to seek passage from the ferryman Charon.[40] Since Dionysus – although he is the god of wealth in addition to his other duties – does not have the requisite fee, Charon insists that Dionysus do the rowing, a task for which he is both incompetent and out of shape.[41]

[34] Ismene Lada-Richards, *Initiating Dionysus: Ritual and Theatre in Aristophanes' Frogs* (Oxford, 1999), 163–4.

[35] Rothwell, 20–1, refers to this as 'festive inversion'.

[36] On this point, the 'burlesque' nature of Dionysus has been extensively treated. Lada-Richards challenges this interpretation.

[37] Heracles was enslaved by Queen Omphale for one year as punishment for the killing of Iphitus, the brother of Iole. According to some sources, she made him do women's work, and he is depicted by ancient artists dressed as a woman spinning wool.

[38] See Lada-Richards, 17–26, for further discussion of the significance of Dionysus' costume. Dionysus was the patron of women and the centre of their secret rites where he wore, at times, women's clothes.

[39] K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Frogs* (Oxford, 1993), 17.

[40] In *The Frogs*, the body of water is a 'bottomless lake', identified by scholars as the Lake of Acheron. Others, including Brumoy, I, 143, have assumed it to be the river Styx, which it is clearly not. See Ronnie H. Terpening, *Charon and the Crossing: Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance Transformations of a Myth* (London and Toronto, 1985), 53–9.

[41] Dionysus is god of many things. His ubiquity is unique in the Greek Pantheon. Dionysus was regarded as an outsider, whose presence in the Greek religion was the result of foreign influence.

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Meanwhile the frogs on the bank recognise Dionysus, who, as god of marshlands, is their patron, and begin to sing a hymn in his honour, the chorus of which is the repetitive phrase 'Brekekekéx, kowáax, kowáax'.[42] The frogs and Dionysus engage in a singing contest, which the god loses to his subjects as he becomes more winded by his rowing and finally falls into their cadence and adopts their song. This scene is the inspiration for the frog chorus in *Platée*, the refrain of which is also based on a repetitive pattern 'Quoi, quoi, quoi'.[43] The chorus was a late (post-1743) addition and therefore directly attributable to Rameau's intervention in the livret.

That Rameau understood the context of this chorus as it occurred in *The Frogs* is suggested by the stage directions of the opera, which state that the frogs sing behind the scenes, as they are hidden in the marsh behind the nymph and only approach when bidden. A debate that began in ancient times and that continues today is whether or not Aristophanes' frogs were visible in the 405 BC production.[44] In Rameau's day, Pierre Brumoy addressed the controversy in his popular *Théâtre des grecs* (1730) and decided that the frogs were probably visible.[45] Greek comedies were normally given only one chorus, and *The Frogs* has two which play different roles and which would thus have required additional costumes. But the 405 BC production would have had available only limited funds, making such an extravagance especially unlikely. Since the second chorus plays a highly visible role, it has been argued that the frogs would have sung off stage. At the core of this scene is the mockery of Dionysus. The skill of rowing was a matter of pride to the Athenians, and it was especially on their minds after recent naval victories.[46] Dionysus' complaints about his chafed bottom must have been especially amusing

[42] Dionysus became god of the marshes because his sanctuary was located in a marshy area of Athens. The sound made by the Greek frog *rana ridibunda* is uncannily like the sound of Aristophanes' frogs.

[43] Rameau here is imitating the *rana temporaria* or common frog indigenous to Europe, which emits one exclamatory croak. Here the roles are reversed with the frogs picking up the song from Platée, whereas Dionysus takes on the frogs' cadence.

[44] The debate began with a *scholia* of unknown age (Σ*Frogs*211) which specifically states the frogs are invisible. Most recently Richard Allison, 'Amphibian Ambiguities: Aristophanes and His Frogs', *Greece and Rome*, 30 (April 1983), 8–20, summarised the arguments for and against the appearance of the chorus. He observes, 'quite simply, and astonishingly for such a well-loved scene, there is no scholarly agreement, even on the broadest level, how it was presented in the theater'. His arguments against the appearance of the frogs, in addition to the issue of expense include (1) frogs in the wild, especially the Greek frog *rana ridibunda*, are heard more often than seen; Aristophanes was a keen observer of wildlife. (2) All the verbs used by Charon describe the frogs as being heard but never mention their being seen. (3) Frog choruses are found in earlier plays and, therefore, would be no novelty to the Athenian audience. C. W. Marshall, 'Amphibian Ambiguities Answered', *Echos du monde / Classical Views*, 40 (1996), 251–65, rebuts Allison's argument point-by-point and then offers the suggestion that the frogs were behind Dionysus, invisible to him but visible to the audience. Most recent research cites these two articles to support their conclusions either way, but the issue will never be conclusively settled.

[45] Brumoy, I, 143–4.

[46] In the course of the play there are many references to the Athenian naval victory at Arginusae which occurred only a few months before the performance.

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to Athenians who had rowed many hours, sometimes to the point of exhaustion, in naval campaigns.[47]

Heracles had warned Dionysus that he would encounter monsters, a warning to which Dionysus replies with bluster and bravery, but he soon reveals his cowardice, for after crossing the river he encounters the monster Empusa, who transforms herself into a cow, a mule, a beautiful woman and a dog. Her face blazes with fire. Dionysus is terrified, wetting himself and trying to pass it off as a libation.[48] But he is also fascinated by her beauty, as he is always on the lookout for a beautiful woman – just as Platée seeks a husband – although his ineptness (like hers) invariably leads to failure.[49]

The second part of the play is, in the words of Alan Sommerstein, 'the earliest sustained piece of literary criticism surviving in the Western tradition'.[50] It is an extensive parody of traditions associated with Greek tragedy and the work of two playwrights generally acknowledged by the Athenians and subsequent generations as the greatest: Aeschylus and Euripides.[51] Euripides was especially well known to French classic tragedians, some of whose writings are essentially retellings of his works.[52] The two playwrights had considerably different approaches to their subjects, which are highlighted in what follows. With Dionysus as judge, the two tragedians vie for the seat of honour and the crown of tragedy. Aeschylus and Euripides artfully dissect each other's work. The entire play is peppered with mangled quotations from the works of both playwrights, with the assumption that the audience would recognise the references and their appearance in a vulgar and mundane context as trivialising them.

To summarise, three features that dominate *The Frogs* form the basis of Rameau's involvement with the play. First, there is the element of mockery which plays a defining role in the treatment of Dionysus. Second, there are the multiple aspects and functions of the character of Dionysus, his traditional roles as god of marshlands and animals, and as god of the theatre. He plays the latter role as an avid

[47] There are a number of different interpretations of the humour found in this scene. Rothwell, 136–40, suggests that the frogs mistakenly think they can sing as well as swans. This interpretation might be reflected in Rameau's unmelodic setting of 'Quoi'. Others are based on the erroneous assumption that Dionysus is rowing across the river Styx, for example, Martin Revermann, *Comic Business: Theatricality, Dramatic Technique, and Performance Contexts of Aristophanic Comedy* (Oxford, 2006), 65.

[48] This may be regarded as a satire on Heracles' vaunted reputation as a monster killer. For more on Heracles' reputation in this respect, see Mark W. Padilla, 'Herakles and Animals in the Origins of Comedy and Satyr-Drama', in *Le Bestiaire d'Héraclès. IIIe Rencontre héracléenne*, ed. Corinne Bonnet, Colette Jourdain-Annequin and Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge (Liège, 1998), 217–30.

[49] Note the similarity here with Platée's inept search for a mate.

[50] Sommerstein, 14.

[51] Sophocles died while Aristophanes was working on the play and therefore plays no part.

[52] Four of Racine's eleven tragedies are at least in part based on plays of Euripides: *Phèdre* (from *Hippolytus*, also Seneca's *Phaedra*), *Andromache* (from *Andromache*), *Iphigénie* (from *Iphigenia in Aulis*) and *Antigone* (from *The Phoenican Women*, as well as Sophocles' *Antigone*). By contrast, Corneille based only *Medée* (*Medea*) on a play by Euripides. Rameau–Pelligrin, *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733) is based on Euripides, Seneca and Racine.

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theatre-goer. It is his desire to see more Euripides, after all, that sets the drama in motion. After his arrival in the underworld, he serves as arbiter in the debate between Aeschylus and Euripides.[53] The third element is the discussion of tragedy, framed as a debate between Aeschylus and Euripides using parodic techniques. These elements resonated with French authors such as Rameau, engaged as they were in debates over genre.

Throughout the first part of the eighteenth century, parody was at the forefront of critical dialogue concerning the *tragédie lyrique* and the *opéra-ballet*, and, therefore, it is not surprising that Rameau turned to parody to convey his reflections on these genres.[54] Almost from the first appearance of the *tragédie lyrique*, comic allusions to opera began to appear on the stage. By the eighteenth century, parodies of both plays and operas appeared regularly at the Théâtres de la Foire and after 1719 at the Nouveau Théâtre Italien alongside other types of comic operas. That parody had become an institution in its own right is demonstrated by a large body of contemporary critical literature both pro and con the mode. Those who attacked parody regarded it as threatening to moral values, since it undermined the noble messages affirmed by tragedy. Tragedy presented the message of the establishment, the status quo, and attacks on it could be regarded as subversive. The supporters of parody, on the contrary, argued that it upheld moral values by keeping the feet of the authors of tragedy to the fire.[55] Nevertheless, hard-pressed to justify their work, parodists turned to antiquity in search of a philosophical and historical basis in order to achieve respectability, and they found what they were looking for in old Greek comedy. Such groups as the Société du Caveau (1729–39), which included Rameau himself, Rameau's associate Alexis Piron, Charles Collé, the novelist and satirist Crébillon *fils*, and the Abbé Sallier, discussed these issues.[56] Noteworthy in this respect is the Abbé Sallier's history and analysis of parody published in 1733, in which he defined the term first as a genre and then as a mode, 'a work in verse composed on an entire play … that is diverted to another subject and in another direction, by changes in some phrases … [Parody

[53] Sommerstein, 12, discusses the about-face in the treatment of Dionysus between the first and second part of the play.

[54] Susan Harvey, 'Operatic Parody in Eighteenth-Century France: Genesis, Genre and Critical Function', Ph.D. diss. (Stanford University, 2002).

[55] A number of statements in eighteenth-century essays on parody reflect this sentiment, for example, 'bien des tragédies déguisent les vices en vertus, les parodies leur en arrachent le Masque' ('Many tragedies disguise vices as virtues, parodies tear away their mask'). 'Discours à l'occasion d'un discours de M.D.L.M. sur les parodies' in *Parodies du Nouveau Théâtre Italien* (Paris, 1738; rpt. 1970), xxxi.

[56] Arthur Dinaux and Gustave Brunet, *Les Sociétés badines, bachiques, littéraires et chantants, leur historie et leurs travaux* (Paris, 1867). This group was originally formed to sing songs of a popular nature while 'celebrating Bacchus'. Between songs there were discussions concerning literature and drama, including comedy. Before its demise in 1739, this group numbered around twenty, including the singer Jelyotte (an indication that Rameau's association with the singer was not limited to the stage). The playwright Bernard-Joseph Saurin (1706–81), a member of the group, has left a poem in praise of Jelyotte, providing a sense of the vigorous discussions which took place there:

footnote continued on next page

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is] the torch that illuminates the faults of an author that has astonished admiration.'[57] The latter phrase became a battle cry for those who argued that, far from denigrating moral values, parody upheld them by pointing out the inconsistencies of the plot and the hypocrisies of the deities and heroes who populate the dramas of Lully and his early eighteenth-century successors.[58] The characters' love lives in these works provided particularly satisfactory material for ridicule, because many critics felt that they were diversions from the central function of tragedy and caused characters to behave in unconvincing ways.[59] Sallier demonstrated that many of the techniques associated with the eighteenth-century parodists can be traced to ancient sources, notably Aristophanes.[60] Sallier says, 'Aristophanes provides an infinity of examples of it [parody]', but he focuses on one drawn from the debate between Aeschylus and Euripides in *The Frogs*.[61] Given Rameau's general interest in parody and the particular prominence of Aristophanes in justifications for parody, it is not surprising that *Platée*, with its relationship to *The*

Jelyotte était notre Orfée, Et quand, parlant tous à la fois, Sous un vain bruit de mots la raison étouffée Ne pouvait récalmer ses droits, Il chantait, et soudain à sa douce harmonie Plus farouche souvent que les monsters du bois, L'amour-propre laissait déarmer sa furie: Nous étions tous d'accord pour admirer sa voix.	Jelyotte was our Orpheus, And when speaking all at the same time, Under a useless noise of words, suffocated reason Could not reclaim its rights, He sang, and suddenly to his sweet harmony, Often more untamed than the monsters in the woods, Vanity let its fury be disarmed: We all agreed to admire his voice.

[57] 'un ouvrage en vers composé sur une piéce entire … que lon détourne à un autre sujet & à un autre sens par le changement de quelques expressions … [Parody is] le flambeau dont on éclaire des défauts d'un auteur qui asurprise l'admiration.' Sallier, L'Abbé, 'Discours sur l'origine et sur le caractére de la Parodie', *Histoire de l'Academie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres avec les memoires de literature tirez des Registres de cette Académie depuis l'année M.DCCXXII jusques & compris l'année M.DCCXXXIII. Tome septiéme* (Paris, 1733), 402.

[58] The repertory of the Nouveau Théâtre Italien included parodies of Lully's tragedies *Atys*, *Armide* and *Roland*, Rebel's and Francœur's *Pyrame et Thisbé*, and Charpentier's *Medée*, among others.

[59] 'Love is the principal motivation for these ridiculous metamorphoses; love renders them [parodies] easy to execute; otherwise there would be infinitely fewer [parodies], if tragic poets would only apply themselves to such subjects as Cinna and Britannicus, and so many others of the same character.' (C'est l'amour qui est la source principale de ces metamorphoses ridicules; c'est l'amour qui facilite l'exécution, & qui par là-même les rend si communes & si nombreuses: au lieu qu'elles le seroient infiniment moins, si les Poëtes Tragiques ne s'attachoient qu'à des sujets semblables à ceux de Cinna, de Britanicus, & de tant d'autres du meme caractére.) Louis Riccoboni, 'Observations sur la Parodie', 283, as cited in Harvey, 242.

[60] Sallier, 400–1.

[61] Sallier, 400, 'Aristophane en fournit une infinité d'exemples'. Euripides' play *Hippolytus* contains a line deemed controversial, because it involves the breaking of an oath. When Hippolytus learns of the guilty passion that the queen Phaedra harbours for him, the nurse begs him not to reveal it and break his oath to remain silent. Hippolytus replies, 'My tongue has sworn, but my heart has not.' Sallier's example comes from the conclusion of *The Frogs*, when Dionysus chooses Aeschylus over Euripides for a return visit to the land of the living, and the latter reminds him of his promise to take him back. Dionysus responds by quoting Hippolytus, refunctioning the line. Both Racine in *Phèdre* (1677) and Rameau–Pellegrin in *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733) avoid this situation by having the queen reveal her passion for Hippolytus herself.

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Frogs, presents a synthesis of the eighteenth-century approaches to the practice of parody.

Dionysus, Platée and the swamp

In several regards, there are strong similarities between Aristophanes' depiction of Dionysus and Rameau's treatment of the character Platée, which suggest that the former provided the model for many of the latter's attributes. There is a direct correspondence between Dionysus, god of the marshlands and patron of nature and animals, and Platée, queen of the swamp and her subjects, the animals that inhabit it. A typical technique in parody is to reduce the rank of the characters so that they are portrayed as 'worse than they are'.[62] For example, an author might represent 'Aeneas as a vagabond and Dido as a fishwife'.[63] Conversely, those of lower estate may act in ways ill-suited to their station in life. The character of Don Quixote attempting to play the epic hero is an oft-cited example, and we might also cite Dionysus in the role of Heracles as belonging in this category. People of high rank populate the *tragédie lyrique*; sorceresses such as Armide or Melissa are queens who rule over magic kingdoms, palaces, castles and armies. Platée's kingdom is a swamp, and her subjects are animals who are elevated to the role normally played by human subjects, or, in magic kingdoms, spirits. Platée's swamp reduces the idealised pastoral images so prevalent in the *tragédie lyrique* to mud. The birds used so often to enhance pastoral imagery in a programmatic way are also inhabitants of the swamp, and so serve to call attention to that connection.[64] *Platée* is unique in French opera in the prominence given to animals and references to them, from the inhabitants of the swamp to the transformations of Jupiter in his descent from a small four-legged creature to an owl.[65] This feature was so prevalent in the works of Aristophanes and his contemporaries, however, that it has become a fertile subject for research into its symbolism and dramatic purpose.[66]

Finally, Platée functions as a sort of goddess of the *tragédie lyrique*, as Dionysus functioned as god of theatre. She serves as a visual metaphor for opera. Charles Dill points out that labelling a work 'monstrous' was the easiest way to dismiss it as a distortion of its genre.[67] He quotes a number of eighteenth-century definitions of the word that include such phrases as 'contrary to the order of nature'. He goes on to catalogue critics who describe opera, itself notorious for being a

[62] Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (Cambridge, 1993), 57.
[63] As cited in Rose, 57.
[64] Note the unromantic substitution of the cuckoo for the song bird in Act I scene 4.
[65] Jupiter transforms himself into a small four-legged creature (a dog?) and then an owl. He then returns to his original form and unleashes his thunderbolts, terrifying Platée.
[66] Note Aristophanes' other plays, *Wasps* and *Birds*, where animals are used as substitutes for humans. The most recent major contribution to this field of study include G. M. Sifakis, *Parabasis and Animal Choruses* (London, 1971) and Rothwell (see n. 33). To be noted is his analysis of the frog chorus, and the frog's place in Greek society, 135–41. Lada-Richards (1999) devotes large portions of her study to Dionysus' relation to nature and animals.
[67] Charles Dill, *Monstrous Opera: Rameau and the Tragic Tradition* (Princeton, 1998), 12–13.

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concatenation of existing genres, as 'a monstrous jumble' and attack the presence of 'monstrous heroes'.[68] Where ugliness may not specifically define Platée's appearance, Coypel's portrait of the actor Jelyotte, for whom Rameau conceived the part, suggests that he played the role in such a way that there was little doubt that he was a man playing a woman.[69] In this sense he/she becomes a freakish distortion of the operatic heroine. An actor playing Dionysus playing Heracles creates a distance which enables laughter at the god without fear of sacrilege, just as presenting Platée as a male in feminine dress similarly helps to distance the audience from her, thus objectifying her and emphasising her symbolic significance.

The sensuous nature of opera, its stimulation of eyes and ears, led to the use of feminine metaphors in discussing it. Such metaphors were reinforced by opera's popularity with women. Female personifications of opera thus occur in the parodies of the *opéra comique* from time to time.[70] The characterisation of opera as feminine within French criticism went back at least to the beginning of the century, in the writings of such figures as Lecerf de la Viéville.[71] In his *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise* of 1704, Lecerf mixes traits related to appearance with those of character, French opera being described as 'a young person with a noble bearing … tall and slender … with a reasonable plumpness and beautiful natural colours'.[72] If Platée is also meant to represent French opera, nonetheless most of these visual characteristics would not apply to her. She is certainly not young (she is immortal), and while she might not be ugly the inference to be derived from others' reaction to her is that she is not visually appealing.[73] The irony of Platée's appearance in relation to positive personifications of French opera must have played a part in the creation of this work. The disjunction between this visual image and the musical appeal of *Platée* lies behind many of the criticisms of the opera.[74]

[68] See also Downing A. Thomas, *Aesthetics of Opera in the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge, 2002), 35.

[69] This portrayal can be contrasted with Italian opera of the period, where castratos frequently played women in a thoroughly convincing way, although, as caricatures suggest, not always successfully.

[70] I have found two French parodies that personify opera. Susan Harvey, 109, describes a work entitled *La vengeance de Columbine, ou Arlequin beaufrere du Grand Turc, comédie avec la parodie de l'Opéra de Tancrède* (anon., 1703) where opera refuses to make an entrance until after the overture is played. After the overture to *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, opera is carried in on a stretcher, announcing that he is too ill to make the journey to Turkey. Alain-René Lesage (1668–1747) produced a work with D'Orneval in 1729 entitled *Les Spectacles malades* (see below). An extreme example of personification appears in Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* (Book 4, 1743) where opera is portrayed as a harlot (Book 4, 45) seducing the upper classes.

[71] Lecerf de la Viéville, *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise* (Paris, 1704; rpt. Geneva, 1972), 46. Cowart, 'Of Women, Sex and Folly: Opera under the Old Regime', *this journal*, 6 (1994), 212, quotes the entire passage in translation.

[72] This is not to suggest that Rameau was commenting on French or Italian opera per se, but on opera in general.

[73] If she were not in some way unattractive, Juno's reaction to her at the end would make no sense.

[74] No critic refers specifically to the appearance of Platée, but general condemnations of 'lewdness' and 'obscenity' (specifically the words used by Voltaire describing the court performance) may refer to her. See Bartlett, LXI–LXII.

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Dionysus and Platée thus share a number of features in common: both rule over a swamp and its animal inhabitants and both have a strong symbolic association with the theatre; and, as noted above, both are interested in forging romantic liaisons, but are ultimately unsuccessful. Further, both serve as objects of mockery which is mitigated by some distancing mechanism. In part, the nature of the mockery is based on their inability to measure up to a heroic figure. For Dionysus this figure is Heracles, for Platée it is the operatic heroine of the *tragédie lyrique*. Since the speech and actions of Platée invite comparison with the most revered characters of the genre, this similarity must be explored further.

Platée as the tragic heroine

It is widely accepted that *Platée* is a parody of the *tragédie lyrique*, but Catherine Kintzler has suggested more specifically that some of the plot points, such as the wedding, as well as the conflict between Jupiter and Juno, come from Lully's *Isis* (1677), a work of which there were several opera parodies in the eighteenth century.[75] Kintzler points out, for example, that the descent of Jupiter plays a role in both *Isis* and *Platée*. However, the transformations into various animals that occur during Jupiter's descent in *Platée* are not found in *Isis*; indeed, they are unique. They may instead have been inspired by the transformations of the monster Empusa in *The Frogs*.

If *Isis* might be seen as one possible source of inspiration, *Armide* could be another. It is possible to make the case that much of Platée's character is based on that of Lully's sorceress-heroine Armide, and that Platée suffers from this comparison in much the same way Dionysus suffers from comparison with the hero Heracles. Instead of a magic kingdom, Platée rules over a swamp. Instead of commanding armies, she rules frogs and birds. The first suggestion of this comparison occurs in her first moments on the stage. When Platée emerges from her swamp, and in effect introduces herself to us, she sings an air that begins, 'Que ce séjour est agréable'. We are immediately aware of her lack of grace, as the accents of the music fall on the wrong syllables, creating disjunction between music and text.[76] This line is a parody of a verse from the famous passacaille for dancers and orchestra with soloist and chorus in Act V of *Armide*.[77] Here are the three versions

[75] Catherine Kintzler, '*Platée*: la comédie vérité de la tragédie', *Platée*, L'Avant Scène OPERA 109 (Paris, 1999), 46–8. Susan Harvey lists three parodies prior to 1750. On the relation between *Platée* and the *tragédie lyrique*, see also Sylvie Bouissou, '*Platée* de Rameau à l'avant garde d'une evolution du goût', in *La 'Querelle des Bouffons' dans la vie culturelle française du XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Andrea Fabiano (Paris, 2005), 33–41.

[76] Girdlestone, 416, thoroughly analyses the difference between the rhythms of the music and the accents of the lyrics.

[77] These lines might sound commonplace, but I have searched for them in every one of Lully's operas, as well as other works by other composers and found nothing close. Lully owned these lines. Parodies should not be too obvious, as there is a certain satisfaction in being 'in' on a joke which the less knowledgeable might miss. Susan Harvey points to parodies of lines far more obscure than the one described here. In the context of almost continuous parody occurring in this part of the opera, there seems little doubt concerning the source of this reference.

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of this verse: Quinault's for *Armide*, the original verse of Autreau for *Platée*, and the revision made under Rameau's direction:

Armide, Act V scene 2 Chorus and Passacaille

Les plaisirs ont choisi pour asile	The pleasures have chosen for their refuge
Ce séjour agréable et tranquille.	This pleasing and tranquil place.
Autreau:	
Que ce séjour est tranquille et charmant!	How charming and tranquil this place is!
Revision:	
Que ce séjour est agréable!	How pleasing this place is!

Although both Autreau and Rameau clearly reference Quinault's text, Rameau's substitution of 'agréable' for 'tranquille' arguably brings the text closer to the original so that this connection will not be missed. In highlighting the connection, Rameau enhanced *Platée*'s comedy. Lully's original lines described a magic place created by Armide to indulge her love for Renaud, but, for Platée, this will be no magic kingdom. Nor will it prove a paradise for lovers as far as Platée is concerned, as she is quickly rejected by Cithéron, the first man she encounters. Further, she has just stepped out of her swamp, a dark and damp habitation, and *anywhere* else might seem 'agréable'.[78]

A series of references to the various conventions associated with the operas of Lully and Rameau follow in which they, like dramatic conventions in *The Frogs*, are refunctioned to trivialise them. Some allude to instances involving the presence of supernatural forces, or gods. Platée summons her subjects, frogs and birds, using a monotonal topic often described as oracular, and found in scenes where gods are called upon for divine assistance, or sorcerers summon spirits (Ex. 1).[79] It is supported by scurrying figures in the lower parts, depicting her subjects rushing to her side (Ex. 2). Textually, the passage references the 'summons' found in a number of operas. For example, at the beginning of *Atys*, Act I, Atys calls to the Phrygians to witness the descent of the goddess Cybele. Another example is Armide's summoning of the spirits of hate:

Platée, Act I scene 3

Platée: Habitans fortunés voisins de ces bocages	Blessed inhabitants, neighbours of groves
Quittés vos sombres marécages	Leave your sombre marshes
Hatés-vous, venés promptement	Hurry, come promptly

Lully, *Atys*, Act I scene 1

Atys: Allons, allons, accourez tous,	Come, come, everyone hasten,
Cybele va descendre,	Cybele is descending,
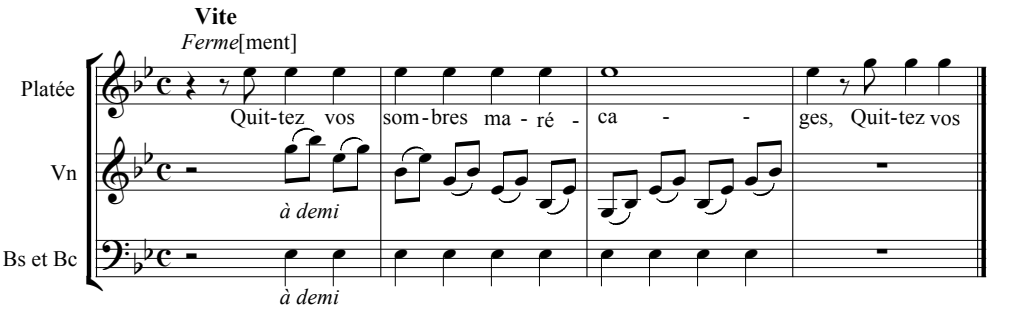
Lully, *Armide*, Act III scene 3

Armide: Venez, venez, Haine implacable,	Come, implacable Hate
Sortez du gouffre épouvantable.	Leave your frightful abyss.

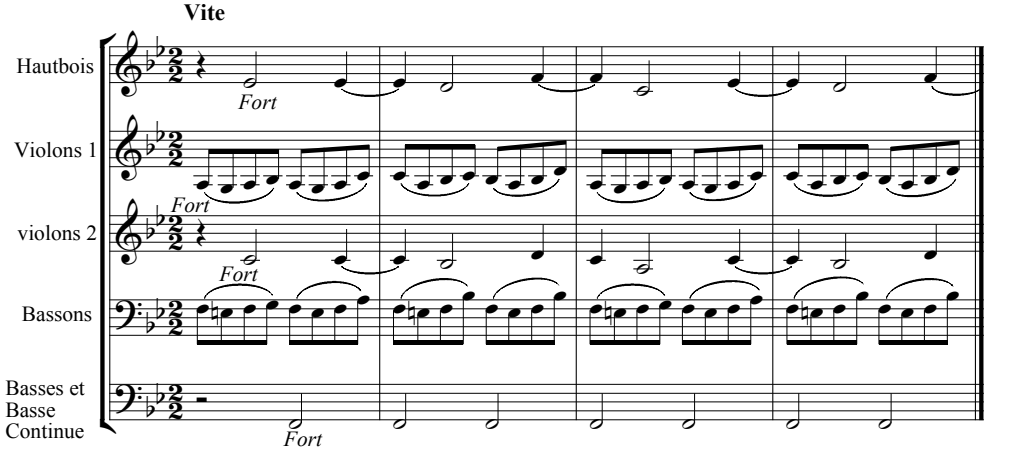
[78] Halbreich, 57, suggests that the swamp is the provinces.

[79] An extended example of this topic serving as an oracular function is Zoroastro's monologue in Act I scene 1 of Handel's opera *Orlando* (1733).

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Ex. 1: *Platée*, Act I, scene 3, bars 280–3



Ex. 2: *Platée*, Act I, scene 3, bars 305–8

In each case, these summonses precede and prepare a momentous event, the arrival of Cybele (in *Atys*), or the appearance of the spirits of hate (in *Armide*). In Platée we hear the sound of her subjects, the birds and frogs, who sing a chorus glorifying their queen:

Platée, Act I scene 4 Chorus	
Que vos voix applaudissent,	May our voices applaud,
Que les airs retentissent;	Let our songs ring out;
Chantons et crions tous,	Let us all sing and shout,
Que nos accents unissent;	Let our voices unite;

Girdlestone and Jacques Van Heuvel have both pointed out that this chorus resembles the Chorus of Troezens, who come together to welcome and praise the heroic king Thesée, home from the underworld in Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*.[80] It

[80] Jacques Van Den Heuvel, '*Platée*, opéra-bouffe de Rameau au milieu du XVIIIe siècle', in *Jean-Philippe Rameau Colloque Internationale*, ed. Jérôme de La Gorce (Geneva, 1987), 106. Also see Girdlestone, 407.

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is one of the most extensive and bombastic choruses in Rameau's stage works, criticised for its interruption of the action:[81]

Hippolyte et Aricie, Act III scene 8[82]

Que ce rivage retentisse	Let this shore resound
De la gloire du Dieu des flots!	To the glory of the god of the waves!
Qu'à ses bienfaits tout applaudissent!	Let all applaud his blessings!
Il rend à l'univers le plus grand des héros.	He has returned to the world the greatest of heroes.

Both choruses proceed in fugal fashion, but the triumphal instrumental passages in *Hippolyte* are replaced by cuckoo calls in the flutes in *Platée*, while the animals continue to scurry around in the background (Ex. 3). The cuckoo has its own set of associations which are completely out of place in this context.[83]

Platée's rejection by Jupiter and her angry reaction provide a fitting finale to her Armide impersonation. Armide surrenders to her passion for the hero Renaud and to the delusion that he truly loves her, although he is under her spell. In the final act, when Renaud rejects her, she reacts with rage. As the palace disappears, Armide exits on a chariot pulled by dragons.

Armide, Act V scene 5

Il m'échappe, il s'éloigne, il va quitter ces bords,	He escapes me to leave these treacherous shores,
Il brave l'Enfer et ma rage; …	He braves hell and my fury; …
Traitre, attends, je le tiens, je tiens son cœur perfide.	Traitor, watch out, I hold him and his treacherous heart.
Ah! Je l'immole à ma fureur…	Ah! I sacrifice him to my rage…
Démons, détruisez ce palais.	Demons, destroy this palace.
Partons, et s'il se peut, que mon amour funeste	Away! And if it can be, let my cursed love
Demeure enseveli dans ces lieux pour jamais.	Remain buried in this place forever.

[81] For example, Girdlestone, 165, 'Despite its rising emotional strength and ultimate dramatic power there is no doubt that this chorus is too long for an opera. Since Rameau never wrote another like it he himself must have realized this.' Is Rameau mocking himself by referencing it here?

[82] This chorus resonates with Virgil, *Georgics* I, line 359, a colourful evocation of the sound of the ocean. The French translation provided by Brumoy, I, 169, of these lines reads, 'Les rivages rentissent au loin de mugissements des flots qui s'entre-choquent'.
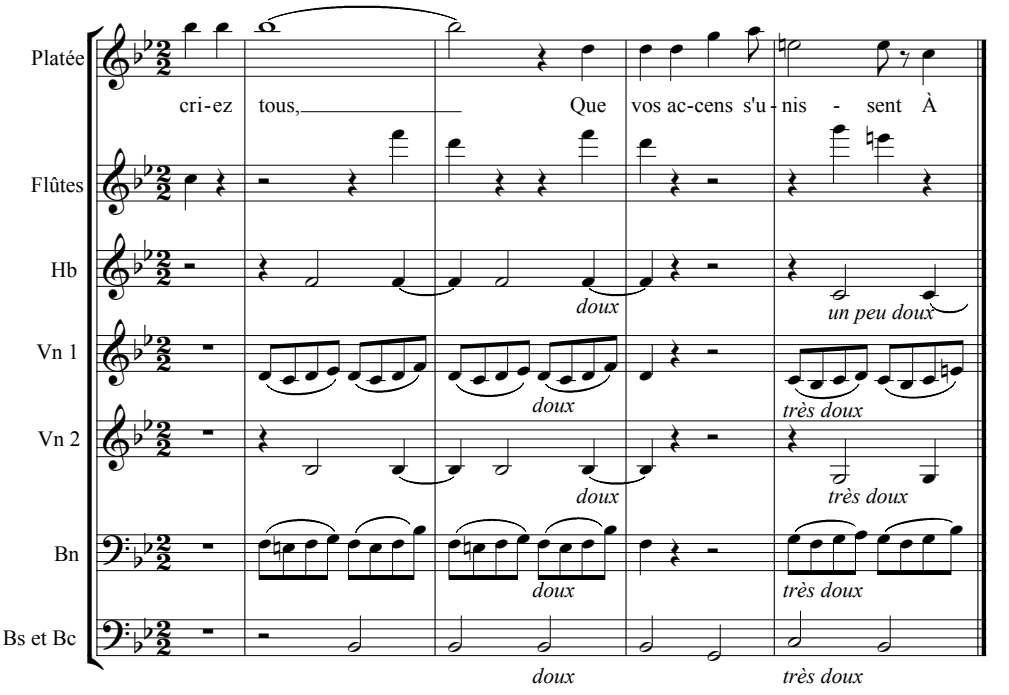
[83] References to the cuckoo abound in eighteenth-century French literature. It is a night bird. Each time the cuckoo sings, a wife is unfaithful to her husband, so it is often cursed. Thus generally associated with marital unhappiness, its presence often intensifies a melancholy moment. Its voice is often described as sad. Typical is the following poetic evocation:

Quant au triste coucou, d'arbre en arbre courant,	As for the sad cuckoo, racing from tree to tree,
sa voix que la coutume érige en noir présage	His voice which tradition has established as a dark omen
au mari courroucé fera perdre courage.	Will cause the angered [jealous] husband to lose courage.

(Pierre-Antoine-Augustin de Piis, *L'harmonie imitative de la langue française: poème en quatre chants*, 1785)

In *Platée* the juxtaposition of the cuckoo's call with the text 'charmants oiseaux' in the chorus is truly discordant.

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Ex. 3: *Platée*, Act I scene 3, bars 315–19

Like Armide, Platée has deluded herself into believing that Jupiter truly loves her. Her reaction to his deception, and to the part that Cithéron has played in it, is similar to that of Armide in her threats of vengeance employing supernatural powers. Armide has demonstrated that she has the power to be dangerous, and might still remain a formidable adversary, although she has failed to maintain Renaud's bewitched ardour through her magic. There is no evidence, on the other hand, that Platée has the capability to carry out her threats, so she appears laughable when she makes them: she is merely adopting the persona of a sorceress.

Platée, Act III scene 8

Quoi! L'on craint si peu mon courroux?	What is this? Is my anger so little to be feared?
Je brouillerai, je troublerai mon onde,	I shall disturb everything, I shall disturb the waves,
Et c'est du sein profonde,	And from the heart of my deep cavern,
Je vous lancerai mes coups…	I will launch my blows…
Tu vois ma rage,	You witness my anger,
Frémi d'effroi.	Tremble in fear.

Instead of flying away in a chariot like Armide, she rushes into her swamp, accompanied by the mockery of the people, bringing the opera full circle. This exit had already been the subject of parody. In the *opéra comique Armide*, produced at the Nouveau Théâtre Italien on 21 March 1725, Renaud the hero flees followed

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by Armide's curses.[84] The stage directions then say, 'The demons transformed into bailiffs and policemen, destroy the palace of Armide, and instead of departing in her flying chariot, as in the opera, she flies off in a sedan chair, and the play concludes.'[85]

In Baron Grimm's 1753 essay, *Le Petit prophète de Boehmischroda*, the title narrator is magically transported to a French opera and observes an angry sorceress:

> I saw a woman come striding in, and she came down to the front of the stage, and she frowned and shook her fists, and I judged that she was in a bad temper. And it seemed to me that she was making threats. And she had in her hand a wand which was mysterious, because the poet had said so, and by means of that wand she could do everything and know everything, except how to sing, which she did not know at all, although she thought she did. And I heard her utter frightful shrieks, and her veins became swollen and her face became as red as Tyrian purple … And with her voice which was off the pitch, she called up the dead, even though she put the living to flight.[86]

Platée's curse scene caricatures the reactions of the audience, as well as those of the characters on stage. From the beginnings of opera, critics noted the genre's seductive power, the overwhelming effect on the listener being surrender to the emotions and a resulting inability to think clearly.[87] The result of this obsession was often the failure to separate reality from operatic fiction. The ensuing delusional behaviour was played out on stage on several occasions. Florian Carton Dancourt's play *Renaud et Armide* (1686) tells the story of an elderly widow Mme Jacquinet, who is enthralled with the opera *Armide* and acts it out in real life by falling for a young man, Clitandre, whom she refers to as her 'Renaud'. Clitandre is in fact in love with her niece, but realises that Mme Jacquinet possesses the money he needs to further his military career, so he feeds her delusions by pretending to return her affections. When she discovers that she has been duped and abandoned by her Renaud, she reprises Armide's curse in the final scene of the play. The potential cruelty of this scene is mitigated by unattractive features in Mme Jacquinet's character and the absurdity of her delusion.[88] John Powell suggests that Mme Jacquinet's 'opera obsession may well have been modelled after that of contemporaneous, real-life fanatics'.[89] The stage character who has delusions of being Armide may occur frequently enough to be described as a type.[90] Although Platée presumably has neither seen an opera nor is familiar with the character Armide, she behaves in much the same way as Mme Jacquinet, or,

[84] *Parodies du Nouveau Théâtre*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1738), III, 1–51.
[85] *Ibid.*, 51: 'Les démons transformés en huissiers et sergens détruisent le palais d'Armide, qui au lieu de s'en aller sur un Char Volant, comme à l'opéra, passe en l'air dans une brouette, et la pièce finit.'
[86] F. W. von Grimm, *Le petit prophète de Boehmischbroda* (Paris, 1753), 14–17.
[87] Thomas (2002), 124, for audience obsession with Armide.
[88] She is not hesitant to use her wealth as a 'persuasive' tool. For example, she offers a judge in her pending law suit a bribe.
[89] John S. Powell, 'The Opera Parodies of Florent Carton Dancourt', *this journal*, 13 (2001), 106.
[90] For example, Susan Harvey, 86–9, describes Dufresny's parody *L'Opéra de Campagne* (1692) in which Mme Prenelle imagines herself as Armide and becomes obsessed with Arlequin, who is going to play Renaud in her amateur production.

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put another way, as an avid theatre-goer caught up in the emotions of the operatic world. The idea that she is a potential mate for Jupiter, who is of course already married to Juno, is as absurd as Mme Jacquinet's amorous interest in a young man – and the curse scene functions in Dancourt's play and in *Platée* similarly.

Aeschylus vs. Euripides

The Frogs provides the pre-eminent model for the exposition of critical literary commentary using the techniques of parody in the context of a comic stage work.[91] This factor may have contributed to Rameau's interest in the play. At the core of *The Frogs* is the debate between Aeschylus and Euripides over the relative merits of their tragedies. This confrontation has elements which are reflected both in *Platée* and in the *tragédie lyrique* more generally. Substantial elements which make up the debate between the two playwrights resonate with the discussions surrounding the operas of Rameau and Lully, which were carried on within the framework of the dispute between the Lullistes and the Ramistes. It is easy to imagine that Rameau recognised in Euripides' contributions to Greek drama something of his own contribution to French opera, and Aeschylus' role as the founder of Greek tragedy can be compared to that of Lully in the creation of the *tragédie lyrique*. Euripides presented his first play in 456/5 BC, the year of Aeschylus' death, and thus was regarded as his successor.[92] Euripides goes on to credit himself with 'introducing a rational, critical spirit into my drama'.[93] Rameau could easily identify with Euripides' characterisation of his contribution in that he regarded himself as a musical *philosophe*.[94] He established a theory of music that was as rational and systematic as those of the natural scientists of his period, and considered his work on a level with that of his intellectual contemporaries, such as Leonhard Euler (1707–83) and Daniel Bernoulli (1700–82), both noted mathematicians and physicists, with whom he corresponded.[95] Both Euripides and Rameau introduced considerably more music into their works than their predecessors, interfering, in the eyes of some, with the unfolding drama and the text itself.[96]

Euripides leads off the debate by defending his work, characterising the tragedy he inherited as a sick patient.

[91] A recent example is the adaptation of *The Frogs* by Stephen Sondheim, where Aeschylus and Euripides are replaced by Shakespeare and Shaw.

[92] Sommerstein, 239.

[93] *Frogs*, 975–6.

[94] Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1993), is devoted to developing this point. See in particular, 209–51.

[95] Christensen, 7, 'As the enthusiastic commendations of Condillac, d'Alembert and de Laborde all suggest, Rameau's theory of music was seen as a *scientific* system.'

[96] The tension between text and music, inherent in opera, may be a subtheme of *Platée*. While the central interest may lie with the text for much of the opera, music overwhelms the text in Folie's aria. Bouissou, 37, opines that Folie, 'could indeed be the incarnation of Rameau himself' ('l'extraordinaire personage de la Folie qui pourrait bien être l'incarnation de Rameau lui-même').

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as soon as I first took over the art from you, swollen as it was with bombast and overweight vocabulary, I began by reducing its swelling and removing its excess weight with a course of bite-size phrases, walking exercise and small white beets … then I fed it up again with a diet of arias.[97]

The metaphor exploited by Euripides is much the same as that found in a work entitled *Les spectacles malades* by Alain-René Lesage (1668–1747), produced in 1729, in which he personified all the theatres of Paris as sick patients.[98] Asked by a doctor what medicines he has been taking, the opéra responds, 'the rhubarb of *Amadis*, the true catholicon of *Armide*, with the preparation of *Atys*, the elixir of *Proserpine*, but these do not work any more'.[99] Like the plays of Aeschylus, Lully's operas were increasingly regarded as monumental and boring. Diderot suggested that there was a certain sameness to them.[100] Rameau may well be credited with breathing new life into French opera, as Euripides did for Greek tragedy.

Turning to Aeschylus, the parallel with Lully could be drawn on several grounds. The progressive dominance of romantic intrigue over heroism was a feature of the eighteenth-century musical stage, particularly in the *opéra-ballet*. Rameau's *Les Indes galantes*, which comprises four amorous episodes in exotic locations, is a prime example. The struggle between the demands of love (*l'amour*), or one's personal desires, and one's duty to the state to give battle and defeat enemies (*la gloire*) is the major conflict faced by French operatic heroes,[101] but the balance had shifted more in the direction of *l'amour* since Lully's time. The call to glory certainly had patriotic overtones, as the central duty of the nobility (and the justification for their privileges) was military service. While the love interest, at least in eighteenth-century terms, is absent from the plays of Aeschylus, the call to arms certainly plays an important role and is the justification for Aeschylus' eventual victory in the debate. In *The Frogs* Aeschylus boasts of the military virtues he glorified: 'my art created many portraits of courage – of men like Patroclus or the lion-hearted Teucer – in the hope of inspiring every man in the citizen body to measure up to their standard every time he hears the trumpet'.[102] He then turns

[97] *The Frogs,* 940–5. Sommerstein translates μονῳδίαις as 'arias', presumably because the dialogue later makes it clear that Euripides is referring to melodic (as opposed to recitative-like) songs. The term 'arias', however, has more modern associations which make it problematic in this context. Other translators almost universally translate the term as 'monodies', which poses its own problems in its associations with seventeenth-century opera and a more recitative-like style.

[98] For a discussion of this work, see Robert M. Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford, 1986), 74–5.

[99] 'De la rhubarb d'*Amadis* / Du vrai catholicon d'*Armide* / De la confection d'*Atis* / De l'elixir de *Proserpine*'; as cited in Isherwood, 75.

[100] '[I]t is the uniformity of Lully's operas which causes the boredom which people experience in them nowadays.' Denis Diderot, *Réponse à l'auteur de la letter sur les Opéras de Phaëton et d'Hippolyte* (1743), as cited in Caroline Woods and Graham Sadler, *French Baroque Opera: A Reader* (Aldershot, 2000), 104.

[101] James Anthony suggests that this is most true of Lully's *Roland* and *Armide*, with the implication that this element has been overstated.

[102] *Frogs*, 1041–2. Patroclus and Teucer were both heroes of the Trojan Wars.

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to the attack: 'But Zeus, I never used to create trollops like Phaedra or Stheneboea; in fact no one can point to any instance, in any of my compositions, of a woman in love.'[103] While the comparison may be a bit less cut and dried, Rameau would probably have identified with Euripides' emphasis on the heroines of his plays rather than with the stark patriotism of Aeschylus, whereas Lully might have been more strongly linked to the latter.

Comedy and language

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the livret was considered at least equal to, if not more important than, the music itself. The music and livret were often considered separately. Charles Collé gave faint praise to the music of *Platée* while criticising the text, 'I will believe there is some magic in the composition of Rameau if the ballet succeeds: The words could not be more low class, silly, stupid, and dull than they are.'[104] Given the importance of language, what Platée says is as important as the music she sings or how she looks.[105] Her inappropriate speech would have grated on the ears of a French audience in a way equivalent to singing out of tune. The nature of her utterances provides a prime source for mockery and would have distanced her from an eighteenth-century audience which prided itself on the art of conversation.[106] Platée is, after all, the ruler of a 'humide empire' and as a member of the upper classes should know how to speak. When those expectations are not met, she invites humiliation.[107]

An obvious example of her inability to respond appropriately occurs when Jupiter, in his most courtly manner, asks her, 'Would you be insensitive to my tender wishes?'[108] All she can manage is, 'Ouffe', an exclamation akin to breaking wind. When Jupiter presses his case, 'I offer you my vows of constancy. You have nothing to say?' she manages, 'Excuse me, I am suffocating.'[109] These scenes of courtly romance were often dramatic highpoints in the *tragédie lyrique*. Platée

[103] *Frogs*, 1043–4. Stheneboea was the heroine of a lost play by Euripides.

[104] 'je croirai qu'il y a de la magie dans la composition de Rameau si ce ballet réussit; les paroles ne peuvent être plus basses, plus sottes, plus bêtes et plus ennuyeuses qu'elles le sont.' For a thorough discussion of contemporary criticism, Bartlett, LXI and LXVI.

[105] See Thomas (2006), which discusses language issues in *Platée* and the part they played in the debate over the singability of French language during the 1750s.

[106] The art of conversation became an important part of French cultural life in seventeenth-century salons (see Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, *Exclusive Conversations* (Philadelphia, 1988)). For further discussions of the art of conversation in the eighteenth century, see Benedetta Craveri, *The Age of Conversation* (New York, 2006).

[107] Thomas (2006), 10, argues that if she pronounces words properly (specifically 'quoi'), she sounds like a social climber, and if she pronounces them badly she confirms her low social status. I am assuming that as a ruler, however humble, she possesses a nominal aristocratic status. Saint-Albine, 193, reinforces this interpretation by listing a nymph in the same class with 'une divinité' and 'un souverain'.

[108] Jupiter, Act II scene 3, 'Seriez-vous insensible à mes tendres voeux?'

[109] Act II scene 3, Jupiter: 'Je vous offer des voeux constants. Vous ne répondez rien?' Platée: 'Pardonnez-moi, j'étouffe.'

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reduces them to triviality through inarticulate dialogue. Elsewhere she mispronounces words by changing their accents.[110]

The axiom that characters should speak a language appropriate to their station (*bienséance*) plays a part in the debate between Aeschylus and Euripides. The latter attacks Aeschylus for his high-flown words in providing moral guidance for his audience: 'Shouldn't your guidance have been given in the language of human beings?'[111] Aeschylus responds: 'It is absolutely imperative, you wretched fool, when expressing great thoughts and ideas, to create words that measure up to them … it's only natural that the demigods should use words bigger than ours, just as they wear more splendid clothes than we do.'[112] In the following passages they dissect the prologues to each others' tragedies word by word, destroying metaphors and pointing out redundancies.[113] These prologues are composed in the highest form of poetry and prepare the audience for what is to come. One means of attack is to insert meaningless phrases into high-flown speeches, rendering them trivial. To demonstrate the rigidness and interchangeability of stock phrases with the same metre, Aeschylus inserts a phrase dealing with an everyday object, the oil flask (equivalent to today's bar of soap), into Euripides' high-flown poetry, thus trivialising it:

Euripides: … 'Aegyptus, as the story is most widely told,

Together with his fifty sons, by sailor's oar
To Argos voyaged, and –'

Aeshylus: – mislaid his oil-flask.[114]

This type of bathetic parody begins early in the play, when Dionysus attempts to explain his fascination with Euripides by misquoting passages from the latter's plays, replacing one word with a mundane or everyday expression (for example, 'the dwelling place of the gods' becomes 'the bedroom of the gods').[115] The insertion of a word never used in the language of tragedy challenges the genre's solemnity and authority, characteristics which most often stood for the established

[110] Girdlestone, 416–19, devotes considerable space to discussion of this point.

[111] *Frogs*, 1057.

[112] *Frogs*, 1058–62. Charles Platter, *Aristophanes and the Carnival of Genres* (Baltimore, 2007), 20, points out that tragedy and epic, 'share a sense that the characters of their representations are superior to contemporary humans … and both employ meters and special poetic dictions that help to create an environment that reinforces that sense of separation.'

[113] Typical of the type of argument that ensues are *Frogs*, lines 1173–7:

Aeschylus: 'And at this burial mound I invocate my father To hear and hearken.'
Euripides: 'That's *another* thing he's said twice "To hear and hearken" – practically the same thing.'

[114] *Frogs*, 1205–8.

ΕΥΡΠΙΔΗΣ. … 'Αἴγυπτος, ὡς ὁ πλεῖστος ἔσπαρται λόγος,
ξὺν παισὶ πεντήκοντα ναυτίλῳ Πλάτῃ
'Άργος κατασχών–'
ΑΙΣΧΥΛΟΣ. Ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν.

[115] *Frogs*, 100 (see Sommerstein note, 165).

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order. The juxtaposition of the elevated language of tragedy with the mundane is a feature not only of Aristophanes but of many other comic writers as well.

While differing in the particulars, Platée's speech, like the debate in *The Frogs*, challenges the language of tragedy. Her everyday language, never used in tragedy, was regarded as vulgar and served to distance the audience from her and her eventual fate. The humour in these instances derives not only from the language itself, as spoken by Platée, but also from its juxtaposition with the higher style spoken by the other characters. If the other characters had engaged in the same language as the main character, the mockery of Platée would be almost pointless. This juxtaposition is deeply subversive in that Platée's language, by its very existence, challenges the effect of heightened speech in tragedy and the noble (and moral) values it represents. Through her language, she defines herself against tragedy, as all parody must.[116] It has, therefore, political overtones in the highly repressive society of eighteenth-century France, and, for this reason alone, Platée must pay a price.[117]

Few eighteenth-century critiques of *Platée* discussed the origins of the work and its connections with Greek comedy, but one exception stands out. Elizabeth Bartlett cites passages from the memoirs of Edmond-Jean-François Barbier, no lover of this opera, and his handwritten remarks on his copy of the printed score: 'There are beautiful musical passages, but the topic, though taken from Aristophanes, is ridiculous and bad.'[118] On the contrary, however, we might say that Rameau's choice of Dionysus, in his role as prime mover and object of mockery in Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, as a partial model for Platée, a character unique in opera, is one of his most original and inspired strokes.

[116] Platter, 36, concerning Greek comedy seems applicable here: 'Comedy both debunks the tragic mystique and, at the same time, defines itself against tragedy. The result, from the perspective of Aristophanes, anyway, is to invert the traditional pecking order between tragedy and comedy, while exploiting tragedy's reputation in order to produce diverse comic effects.'

[117] In this sense, the opera is conservative in that Platée reaps the rewards for not 'fitting in'.

[118] 'Il y a de belles choses dans la musique; mais le sujet en est ridicule et mauvais, quoyque tiré d'Aristophane.' Bartlett, LXI and XXVI.

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