Music and French Baroque Gesture

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We have all been there. The setting is a song recital. A tenor comes onstage dressed in a tuxedo (or worse, a soprano in an elegant gown), and begins singing the opening recitative:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Frondi tenere e belle} \\
\text{Del mio platano amato} \\
\text{Per voi risplenda il fato.}
\end{align*}\]

which roughly translates as ‘tender and beautiful fronds of my plane tree, let fate smile upon you.’ You might wonder why he (or she) is looking straight at the audience when addressing a favorite piece of flora; or maybe an English translation has not been provided with the program. He goes on:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Tuoni, lampi, e procelle} \\
\text{Non vi oltraggin mai la cara pace,} \\
\text{Nè giunga a profanarvi austro rapace.}
\end{align*}\]

which means ‘may thunder, lightning and storms never bother your dear peace, nor may you be profaned by blowing winds.’ He then launches into the old chestnut ‘Ombra mai fu’—and the audience remains blissfully unaware that this love song addresses a ‘vegetable’. Perhaps discreet use of gesture would have made this performance more meaningful, or, if nothing else, pointed up the humorous aspect of the aria.

Gesture is a word that hardly needs to be defined; yet, in the seventeenth century, it held a very specific meaning. According to Richelet’s Dictionnaire françois (1680) gesture refers to ‘movement of the hand,’ and moreover ‘movement of the hand conforming to things one says’. Richelet makes a fine distinction between ‘gesture’ (‘geste’), and ‘gesticulation’—which, he says, is not at all seemly (‘La gesticulation n’est point agréable’, [p. 371]). Gesticulators are of course those who make exaggerated gestures, and Richelet observes that ‘Les Italiens sont de gran[d]s gesticulateurs.’ If one continues to search Richelet’s Dictionnaire for the usage of the term ‘geste’, one again finds, under the word ‘régle’ or ‘réglée’ (p. 283), ‘that which is in order, which is according to the rules, which is reasonable [an orator who has ‘le geste réglé’].’ Further searching turns up another reference to gesture in the definition of ‘Pronunciation’ (‘Pronunciation’, p. 224):

This is the fifth part of rhetoric. It consists of regulating [régler] so well one’s voice and one’s gesture [geste] that they serve to persuade the mind and to touch the heart of those who hear us. [Pronunciation is so useful that one usually calls it the first, second, and third part of eloquence.]

Gesture was allied with rhetoric, the art of oratorical persuasion. In the seventeenth century, training in rhetoric began in school, where the concept was broken down into five parts: inventio (invention), dispositio (arrangement), elocutio (style), memoria (memory), and actio (delivery). In his references to oratory and gesture, Richelet is clearly describing the fifth part (actio), the rhetorical delivery. Molière, the most influential actor of his day, studied rhetoric while a student at the Paris Collège de Clermont (later called Collège Louis-le-Grand, after Louis
XIV visited the school and offered his patronage). Typically, such institutions concluded their academic year with student performances of a Latin play (often accompanied with ballet, and sometimes operatic interludes), which would allow the students to hone and exhibit their rhetorical skills before embarking on careers as lawyers, diplomats, priests—or even playwrights and actors.

Indeed, many of the seventeenth-century's leading French playwrights—such as Pierre and Thomas Corneille—were educated in Jesuit colleges for careers in law, and were well-schooled in rhetoric and oratorical delivery. Oratory gave primacy to the delivery of the spoken word, for which meaningful gesture was widely viewed as an essential concomitant. Consequently, seventeenth-century treatises, which were targeted at orators, preachers, lawyers, princes, and other public speakers provide insight into the oratorical and gestural practices that would have been used on the French stage.

Before continuing, it might be remembered that in their theatrical collaborations, Molière and Lully (rather than Perrin and Cambert) developed the musico-theatrical model that would later become the tragédie en musique. The tragédie-ballet Psyché (1671; spoken text by Molière and Pierre Corneille, sung texts by Molière and Philippe Quinault, music by Lully, dances by Pierre Beauchamps) was the trailhead that led Lully and Quinault to the creation of serious French opera. When Molière began preparations in the spring of 1671 to produce Psyché at his public theatre, the Théâtre du Palais-Royal, French opera singers, as such, did not yet exist. His company hired ordinary singers, who were willing to sing not from latticed boxes (as had been the custom until then), but rather before the public, on stage, and dressed like the actors. It stands to reason that these fledgling opera singers were instructed in proper oratorical delivery, complete with appropriate gesture.

At any rate there was clearly a demand for handbooks on rhetoric and public speaking in the latter part of the seventeenth century. For the purposes of this article, I will refer to a handful of treatises by a variety of contemporary French authorities on oratory and expression—a Protestant preacher, a royal historian and rhetorician, a lawyer, a Jesuit teacher, and a retired actor:

- *Treatise on the Delivery of an Orator, or on Pronunciation and Gesture* (1657) by Michel Le Faucheur, a Protestant preacher active in Montpellier and Charenton. This treatise was frequently quoted in the eighteenth century, and was translated into English, German, Spanish, and Latin.
- *Method for good pronunciation of a speech, and for its lively delivery; a very-useful work for those who speak in public...especially preachers and lawyers* (1679) by the historiographer and rhetorician René Bary, who provides a wealth of advice with regard to facial gestures, hand and arm gestures, and body language to convey various moods and passions.
- *French Rhetoric, or the Precepts of the Ancient and True Eloquence, Adapted to the customs of conversations and of Civil Society: the Courtroom and the Pulpit* (1671), written by a prominent Parisian lawyer, Jean Le Gras.
- *The Eloquence of the Pulpit and of the Courtroom, according to the most Solid Principles of Sacred and Secular Rhetoric* (1689), written by Étienne Dubois de Bretteville, a Jesuit teacher of Eloquence.
- *Reflections on the art of speaking in public by M. Poisson, Actor to His Majesty the King of Poland and Elector of Saxony* (1717). Jean Poisson was the son of the actor and playwright Raymond Poisson (dit Belleroche) of the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

It is noteworthy that the last of these was written by a retired French actor. Interestingly, there are very few written sources that directly address the acting style of the seventeenth-century French stage. After all, the profession of acting was still in its infancy in 1643 when Molière, then aged twenty-one, decided to abandon his studies at the Collège de Clermont to pursue a career on the stage. During his fifteen years of apprenticeship performing in the provinces, Molière, developed a 'new brand' of French comedy—one that featured the vivacity and physicality of the old French farce, tempered by a naturalness of character. Indeed, 'naturalness' became the guiding principle that informed his company's approach to acting: a natural tone of voice, naturalness in gesture and movement, balance, and so on, were required. This was a new approach in a craft that had heretofore valued the robust and flamboyant artifice of French tragedy as practiced by the rival companies in Paris.
Molière's 1663 comedy *L'Impromptu de Versailles* portrays Molière and his actors in staged rehearsal, moments before the players are to act a new dramatic piece before the King (see Fig. 1). During the course of this play, Molière spoofs the gesticulations and mannerisms of the grand actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. The play's moments of mimicry, combined with 'Molière' the character's directorial notes to his troupe, provide a twenty-first century audience with insight into the formal, declamatory acting style of the time. It is a pity that his play does not give more specific details about the gestures that accompanied stage declamation.

In other words, bodily gesture must directly relate to the meaning of the spoken words and the emotions they express. Étienne Dubois de Bretteville, the Jesuit teacher of eloquence, observed (p. 483) that:

In order for this mute language of hands, eyes, face, head, and body to make a powerful impression on the mind and touch the heart vividly, it must have some connection with the subject, the passions, and the figures of discourse.

It stands to reason that that which differentiates gesture from gesticulation is precisely this 'connection with the subject, the passions, and the figures of discourse.' By extension, meaningless gesture (i.e., gesticulation) detracts from meaningful gesture, which, consequently, must be used judiciously. In other words, judicious use of gesture intensifies its effect.

So, what appropriate gestures should accompany oratorical delivery—whether it be a speech, a sermon, an address to the court, a theatrical monologue, or an operatic recitative? Here, we might return to Richelet's dictionary definition of gesture as 'movement of the hand conforming to things one says.' Notice that Richelet does not say 'hands' in the plural. All treatises agree that gesturing was done primarily by the right hand. For example, the lawyer Jean Le Gras stated categorically (p. 177) that: 'All gestures must be made with the right hand, and not the left, which only accompanies or follows the right hand.'

Many hand gestures are dictated by common sense, such as gesturing to a person when addressing or referring to him or her. Bretteville's *The Eloquence of the Pulpit* (p. 490) lists some obvious gestures, some of which enlist the involvement of the left hand:

The movement of the right hand must suit the nature of the actions of which one speaks. For example, one must say 'attract' while drawing the hand into itself; 'repel' while pushing the hand away; 'rear away' while separating the hands; 'unite' while joining them together; 'open' while opening them; 'tighten' while clasping them together; 'to raise' while raising them; 'to lower' while lowering them, etc. . . . One must raise the [right] hand while vowing an oath.

Most authors agreed that gesture must be confined to an imaginary frame that does not, in general, extend higher than the eyes or lower than the stomach. According to the actor Jean Poisson (*Sept traités*, ed. Chaouche, 417):

![Figure 1. Engraving for Molière, *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (1663)](image-url)
Another death scene, this one in Racine’s *Britannicus*, takes place off-stage, but is narrated onstage by Burrhus (Act 5, scene 5). Interestingly, François Chauveau’s vivid frontispiece depicts this off-stage action, and is instructive from the point of view of gesture (Fig. 11):

The plot was carried out less openly. / Emperor Nero had hardly seen his brother arrive; / He rose, embraced him, there was silence; suddenly / Caesar [Nero] first took a cup in his own hand: / ‘To end this day with better auspices, / My hand pours the first-fruits from this cup,’ / He said; ‘You gods, whom I thus invoke, / Come and look favorably on our reunion.’ / Britannicus bound himself by the same vows; / The cup in his hand was filled by Narcissus; / His lips, however, had hardly touched the rim, / A sword could not have worked more suddenly, / Madam: the light was snatched from his eyes; / He fell upon his couch lifeless and cold. / Imagine how this shock struck everyone: / Half of those present, stunned, cried out and left; / But those who knew the court better, stayed / And, watching Caesar’s face, mended their looks. / Meanwhile, he remained bending over the couch; / He showed no trace of astonishment: / ‘This attack,’ he said, ‘which seems so violent, / He often suffered in childhood, without danger.’ / Narcissus tried in vain to look troubled: / The traitor could not help showing his joy. / As for me, whatever the emperor might do to me, / I made my way through the crowd in this odious court; / And I went, crushed by this assassination, / To mourn Britannicus, Caesar, and the whole state.

The three main characters form a triangle, with Britannicus splayed out on the couch, Caesar above him behind the table and gesturing with his right hand, and Narcissus to the right—with a beaker in his left hand and his right hand making a gesture of feigned horror. The other figures clearly show their surprise and distress, with their hands raised and fingers spread, and impart a kinetic energy to this dramatic tableau.

The gesture of surprise, with hand raised and fingers spread, appears in many frontispieces. Chauveau’s 1669 engraving of a scene from Molière’s *Tartuffe* (Fig. 12) captures the moment in which the sanctimonious hypocrite is caught in the act of trying to seduce Elmire, the wife of Orgon. However, Orgon has been eavesdropping on their interview and, no longer able to control his boiling indignation, jumps out of his hiding place to denounce the hypocrite. Tartuffe, taken aback literally, shifts his body weight away from the emerging Orgon, who gestures toward him with his right hand.

Figure 11. Engraving by François Chauveau for Racine, *Britannicus* (1669)

Figure 12. Engraving (1669) by François Chauveau for Molière, *Tartuffe* (1664)
Corporeal expression, of course, is not confined solely to the hands. Body posture, the torso, the head, the brow, and eyes—all contribute to convey nonverbal meaning. If the head is inclined to one side, it expresses languor; if it is stiff and immobile, it conveys a brutality of character. Hunching one’s shoulders is a common expression of fear, surprise, deception, pretense, or baseness. In Molière’s comedy *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, Octave admits that he is anxious about meeting his father; to appear bold Scapin instructs to raise the head:

Sca. (to Octave). You must prepare yourself to receive your father with firmness.
Oct. I confess that this meeting frightens me beforehand, for with him I have a natural shyness that I cannot conquer.
Sca. Yes, you must be firm from the first, for fear that he should take advantage of your weakness, and lead you like a child. Now, come, try to school yourself into some amount of firmness, and be ready to answer boldly all he can say to you.

Oct. I will do the best I can.
Sca. Well! let us try a little, just to see. Rehearse your part, and let us see how you will manage. Come, a look of decision, your head erect, a bold face.
Oct. Like this.
Sca. A little more.

The instances in which a play’s characters address the craft of acting are extremely useful in understanding period acting styles. We are reminded of Hamlet’s instructions to the players: to pronounce their lines ‘trippling on the tongue’ rather than in exaggerated declamation, and not to ‘saw the air too much with your hand’ and commit the sin of gesticulation. ‘Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature.’ Similarly, simplicity and ‘naturalness’ were the essence of Molière’s own style of acting, which stood in stark contrast with the exaggerated ‘Cornelian’ declamation of his rivals (Beauchâteau, Hauteroche, Villiers, etc.) at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

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Figure 13a. Illustrations from Charles Le Brun, *Lecture by Monsieur le Brun, first Painter to the King of France, Chancellor and Director of the Academy of Painting and Sculpture, on Expression both General and Specific; enriched by Figures engraved by B. Picart* (1698)
In his comedy *Le Poète basque*, the playwright and actor Raymond Poisson (father of the aforementioned Jean-Poisson) put in the mouth of his title character instructions for bringing all expressive resources to bear while onstage. Here, the Basque poet addresses an acting troupe which is preparing to perform his play (scene 9):

> I will at present discuss the subject, and this will be for you like a tablature (i.e., a score). I will indicate there tones, and mutations, the facial gestures above all with the actions: When I say nothing, observe my face, you will see me pass from love to rage, then, with marvelous art and with a surprising return, I will then pass back from rage to love. In short, I will demonstrate to your satisfaction, and what a great actor is obliged to do, do not overlook my smallest movement, for the least merits an applause.

Here, the poet emphasizes that the vocal inflections and facial gestures must be coordinated with the 'actions'—presumably body and hand gestures. In order to gain a clearer idea of seventeenth-century facial expression, we turn to the visual arts. Charles Le Brun (1619–90), head of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, was deemed by Louis XIV 'the greatest painter of all time.' For Le Brun, a painting or sculpture was a story that could be 'read' by means of costumes, symbols, and hand and facial gestures. His treatise, *Lecture by Monsieur le Brun ... on Expression both General and Specific; enriched by Figures engraved by B. Picart* (1698), was intended mainly for painters and sculptors, rather than orators. Yet, his illustrations of facial gestures are instructive for actors, dancers, pantomimes, singers, and basically anyone who is interested in the seventeenth-century portrayal of the passions (Fig. 13).

Much facial expression comes from the eyes, as was asserted by our retired actor Jean Poisson (pp. 29–30):

> The action and force of the declamation are conveyed via the eyes of the actor. A vacillating eye, in which the looks are neither firm nor steady, and which as no expression, exerts no passion and does not move the heart of the listener.

> The movement of the face without the eyes are useless, and make no impression. The eyes must speak in the speaker, since the eyes are the mirrors that represent what is happening in our soul.
Consequently, the expression of the eyes is critical to the dramatic action. Bretteville recommends that the orator lower the eyes as a sign of modesty or shame, or when one evokes the earth, and to raise the eyes when one speaks of the heavens. In the ‘petit opéra impromptu’ of Molière’s *Le Malade imaginaire* (Act 2, scene 5) Angélique sings to her beloved Cléante (to music by Charpentier; see Ex. 1).

![Ex. 1. Charpentier/Molière, extract from *Le Malade imaginaire* (Act 2, scene 5)](image)

Surely, Angélique (a role created by Armande Béjart, *née* Mlle Molière, wife of the playwright) raised her eyes to the heavens, and then looked upon Cléante (a role played by the veteran actor La Grange), and brought her right hand to her chest as she heaved a sigh. Mlle Molière was known for the believability of her acting, especially in such scenes with the veteran actor La Grange.¹⁶

Has not this lovely scene from *Le Malade imaginaire* ... always had on the stage of the Guénégadou theatre a charm that it would never have on that of the Opéra. Mlle Molière and La Grange, who sing it, admittedly do not have the loveliest voices in the world. I even doubt that they have a fine understanding of music, while they sing correctly enough, it is not their singing that has been so highly applauded. Rather, they know how to touch the heart and paint the passions. Their portrayal of human feeling is so convincing and their acting so well hidden in naturalness, that one cannot distinguish reality from mere appearance. In short, they understand exceedingly well the craft of theatre, and their roles never succeed as well when performed by others ... I have often noticed that Mlle Molière and La Grange show much judgment in their delivery, and that they continue to act, even when their speeches are finished. They are never inactive on the stage. They play almost as well when they listen as when they speak. Their glances never wander. Their eyes do not scan the boxes. They know that their auditorium is filled, but they speak and act as if they saw only those who share the stage with them.

Often, characters in the play judge another character’s state of mind through facial expression. In Pierre Corneille’s *La Venise*, Chrysante advises Gérón to flee when seeing Philiste arrive unexpectedly, whose ‘glances are filled with rage.’ In *La Sophonisbe* of Mairret, Phenice refers to the ‘ languishing glances’ of her love-smitten queen. ‘See, Madam, see where the Prince appears’ says Belinda in Nahum Tate’s *Dido and Aeneas* (Act 3, scene 3); ‘such sorrow in his looks he bears as would convince you still he’s true.’ One can well understand why the eyes have such importance in discourse, since they represent the prime indicator of mood and emotion.

So far we have looked only to frontispieces to spoken plays for evidence of theatrical gesture. But what about operatic gesture? A survey of around 60 frontispieces published with opera *livrets* revealed that many illustrate characters in a particular scene making hand gestures and bodily postures. However, there seems to be a fundamental difference between play frontispieces, which usually depict the interaction of characters in a key dramatic moment, and frontispieces that aim to depict a spectacular scene in an opera. A case in point is Quinault’s *Persée*. Fig. 14 illustrates two frontispieces for this opera. In discussing them, Benoit Bolduc observes:¹⁷

Placed at the head of the book, the tableau reads as an emblem revealing the allegorical and political scope of Quinault’s *tragiédie en musique*. We recognize the seaside décor, its sheer rocks upon which the waves are breaking, without however achieving the symmetrical arrangement that Italian scenography imposed. This asymmetry prevents reading the engraving as a reconstitution of the whole of the implantation of the scene; Bérain has chosen a fixed angle to give his composition a dynamism and symbolism that responds better to the exigencies of the engraving ... The costumes worn by Météore, Cassiopée, and Persée are indeed opera costumes ... But what are we to make of the nearly complete nudity of the victim? The presence at the heart of the image of this nude Andromède ... is more in line with the pictorial tradition of the myth than with its scenic depictions. Did Bérain mean to anchor this archetypal depiction at the heart of his frontispiece in order to underscore the return to the Ovidian source of the myth that characterizes Quinault’s *livret*?
Clearly, such frontispieces were not intended to be a realistic depiction of the stage décor, but rather a composition of the various scenic elements that inform Act 4, scene 6 of Quinault's *l'Île de France*. To the left of Fig. 14, on the shore, are Céphée and Cassiopée (Andromède’s mother and father) and several unidentified figures. Two female figures face toward Andromède—one (presumably Cassiopée) making a gesture of alarm, the other the gesture of entreaty. The former was described in more detail by Bary (pp. 102–3):

The Horrific requires that one open extraordinarily wide the eyes and the mouth, turn the body a little toward the left side, and extend the two hands as in defense ... for those who are on the brink of suffering the final cruelties seek everywhere with the eyes the means of avoiding death; that fright stifling the heart by the retreat of spirits forces the mouth to give a wider passage for air; and that this same fright that grips the heart, expands the mouth, turns the body, and extends the hands.

We also see the two tritons (right of Fig. 14) who have chained Andromède to the rock and, in the background (seen through the grotto) three nereides—apparently also making gestures of entreaty. On the rocks above are a group of Ethiopians who have come to witness the sacrifice, while, across from them, we see Persée flying to the rescue. To the far right is Mérope, Andromède’s rival for Persée’s affections, who looks on (perhaps gloating?) from a safe distance. Notice that in the Amsterdam copy the scene has been compressed, the characters enlarged, and their hand gestures and bodily postures enhanced.

In closing, let us return to our tuxedoed tenor singing the opening aria of Handel’s *Seraf*:

Frondi tenere e belle
Del mio platano amato
Per voi risplenda il fato.

Xerxes is clearly enamored with the plant, and the tenor’s face might express the ‘simple love’ illustrated in Le Brun’s treatise (see Fig. 13a, row
2, image 2). Whether or not there is a plane tree onstage, the singer needs to imagine that there is one—turning his body while addressing it, and outstretching his hand (or hands) in its direction. Every lover worries about the well-being of his beloved, and Xerxes is no exception.\footnote{1}

Tuoni, lampi, e procelle
Non vi oltraggio mai la cara pace,
Nè giunga a profanarvi austro rapace.

The 'thunder, lightning, storms, and blowing winds' arrive from the heavens, and therefore the singer's eyes should be upraised and express fear—while fixing his gaze at various places in the balcony where these natural threats might suddenly appear.

Now comes the long, slow orchestral introduction to the aria. There are only a limited number of actions appropriate to this introduction: gaze upon the tree with love, or walk around the tree and admire its charms. Modern directors might think it amusing to have the singer prune the tree and play with its branches, or to lie down in the shade of the tree; the former is a mimetic action that is discouraged by the aforementioned authors on public speaking,\footnote{2} whereas the latter posture would have been considered indecent and therefore contrary to historical practice. Then Xerxes launches into his love-song: 'A shade there never was, of any plant, dearer and more lovely, or more sweet.' The singer might express on his face a succession of emotions illustrated in Le Brun's treatise (veneration, simple love, and rapture), all with appropriate body postures and (right) hand gestures. The long postlude would provide yet another opportunity to give outward expression to his dendrophilic obsession.

Granted, 'Ombra mai fu' is a very silly example, and such a performance would quickly knock this aria off its iconic pedestal. Yet it shows the potential for facial expression, body posture, and gesture to enhance and illustrate the sung word. Furthermore, authentic seventeenth-century gesture should rightly be considered an extension of Baroque performance-practice. Were such facial expressions, body postures, and hand gestures actually used during the seventeenth century in performances of operas, cantatas, and solo songs? This is a moot point, for we will never know for sure—although printed frontispieces suggest that they were. Perhaps the question should be 'would historic gesture enhance early-music performance?'

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\footnote{1}{I confess that I had a specific performance in mind: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_oeKld3zxc> (countertenor David Daniels - Ombra mai fu - Xerxes).}

\footnote{2}{Pierre Richelet, Dictionnaire françois (Jean Herman Widerhold: Geneva, 1680), 371; consulted on Google Books. 'Geste, s. m. Mouvement de la main. Mouvement de la main conforme aux choses qu'on dit. [Orateur qui a le geste beau. Faire des gestes].' }


\footnote{4}{Modern editions of two of these treatises may be found in Sept traités sur le jeu du comédien et autres textes de l’action oratoire à l’art dramatique (1657–1750), ed. Sabine Chaouche (Paris, 2001); many of the original editions used in this research may be found online at the Gallica website <gallica.bnf.fr>}

\footnote{5}{TRAITÉ DE L’ACTION DE L’ORATEUR OU DE LA PRONONCIATION ET DU GESTE À PARIS. Chez Augustin Courbé, au Palais, en la Galerie des Merciers, à la Palme. M. DC. LV/II. Avec Privilège du Roi. (Reprinted in Sept traités, ed. Chaouche.)}

\footnote{6}{MÉTHODE POUR BIEN PRONONCER UN DISCOURS, ET POUR LE BIEN ANIMER. Ouvrage très-utile à tous ceux qui parlent en public; & particulièrement avec Prédicteurs, & avec Advocats. Par RENE BARY, Historiographe du Roy. À PARIS, Chez Denis Thierry, rue S. Jacques, à l'enseigne de la Ville de Paris. M. DC. LXXIX. AVEC PERMISSION. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k618490>}

\footnote{7}{LA RÉTHORIQUE FRANÇOISE, OU LES PRÉCEPTES DE L’ANCIENNE ET VRAYE ÉLOQUENCE. Accommodez à l'usage des conversations & de la Société civile: Du Barreau: Et de la Chaire. Par le Sieur LE GRAS. À PARIS, M. DC. LXXI. AVEC PRIVILÈGE DU ROY. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k507556>

9 RÉFLEXIONS SUR L’ART DE PARLER EN PUBLIC. Par M. POISSON, Comédien de Sa Majesté le Roi de Pologne, & Électeur de Saxe. M. DCC. XVII. (Reprinted in Sept traités, ed. Chaouche.)

10 J. L. de Gallois, Sieur de Grimarest, Addition à La Vie de Monsieur Molière contenant une réponse à la critique que l’on en a faite, in La Vie de M. de Molière ... Réimpression de l’édition originale (Paris, 1705) et des pièces annexées. Avec une Notice par A. P. Malassis et une figure dessinée et gravée à l’aquarelle par Ad. LaLauze (Paris, 1877), 223–24. [Le Comédien doit se considérer comme un Orateur, qui prononce en public un discours fait pour toucher l’Auditeur. Deux parties essentielles lui sont nécessaires pour y réussir: l’accent et le geste. Ainsi il doit étudier son extérieur, et cultiver sa prononciation, pour savoir ce que c’est que de varier les accès, et de diversifier les gestes à propos, sans quoi il ne réussira jamais. D’où vient que nous voyons des Acteurs, qui semblent tranquilles, quand ils contestent; en colère, quand ils exhortent; indifférents quand ils remontrent; et froids quand ils inventivent? C’est là ce qu’on appelle communément, ne pas savoir, ne pas sentir ce que l’on dit, n’avoir pas d’entrailles.]

11 I am reminded of the 2004 Opéra Atelier production of the Quinault/Lully tragédie en musique Persée, in which constant gesticulation marred what was otherwise a lovely performance. The 2005 DVD of this production is one of the few period performances available of French Baroque opera; an excerpt illustrating this uninformed style of gesture may be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDRqer1LYnY&feature=related> (Lully - Persée, Act II, Scene 2).

12 This was another failing (or flailing) of the Opéra Atelier production of Persée, in which nearly all gestures surpassed the imaginary frame.

13 See Roger W. Herzel, ‘The Décor of Molière’s Stage: The Testimony of Brissart and Chauveau,’ Publications of the Modern Language Association 93/5 (Oct. 1978), 925–954 (at 926). According to Herzel, ‘There is reason to believe that Molière himself, near the end of his life, had contemplated some such illustrated edition of his works but had abandoned the idea because of the cost.’

14 La Princesse d’Église premiered on the seconde journée of Les Plaisirs de l’Île enchantée on the evening of 8 May 1664.


16 ‘Cette belle scene du malade imaginaire, que Celimde vient de nous citer, poursuivait Berelie, n’a-t-elle pas toujours eu, sur le theatre de Gueneegad, un agrément qu’ils n’euroient jamais sur celuy de l’Opera. La Moliere & la Grange qui le chantent, n’ont pas cependant la voix du monde la plus belle. Je doute mesme qu’ils entendent finement la musique, & quoy qu’ils chantent par les regles, ce n’est point par leur chant qu’ils attirent une si generale approbation. Mais ils scavent toucher le cier, ils peignent les passions. La peinture qu’ils en font est si vray semblable & leur jeu se cache si bien dans la nature, que l’on ne pense pas à distinguer la verité de la soule apparence. Un en mot, ils entendant admirablement bien le theatre, & leurs rôles ne reussissent jamais bien, lorsqu’ils ne les jouent pas eux-mêmes ... J’ay remarqué souvent, que la Moliere & la Grange font voir beaucoup de jugement dans leur recit; Et que leur jeu continue encore, lors même que leur rôle est fini. Ils ne sont jamais inutiles sur le theatre. Ils jouent presqu’aussi bien quand ils ecouteront, que lors qu’ils parlent. Leurs regards ne sont pas dissipez. Leurs yeux ne parcourent pas les loges. Ils scavent que leur sale est remplie, mais ils parlent & ils agissent, comme s’ils ne voyoient que ceux qui ont part à leur rôle & à leur action.’ Entretiens galans, ou conversations sur la mode, la musique, le jeu, les loisangers, ii, 42-47 (Ribu: Paris, 1681); available online at <http://cesar.org.uk/cesar2/imgs/images.php?fc=edit&image_UOID=334000>

17 Placée en tête de livre, l’image d’action se lit comme un emblème relevant la portée allégorique et politique de la tragédie en musique de Quinault. On y reconnaît le décor marin, ses rochers escarpés où viennent se briser les vagues, sans toutefois retrouver la disposition symétrique qu’impose la scénographie à l’italienne. Cette symétrie empêche de lire la gravure comme une reconstitution de l’ensemble de l’implantation de la scène; Bérain a choisi un certain angle pour donner à sa composition un dynamisme et un symbolisme qui répondent mieux aux exigences de la gravure ... Les costumes que portent Mérope, Cassiopée et Persée sont bel et bien des costumes d’opéra ... Mais que dire alors de la nudité presque intégrale de la victime? La présence au coeur de l’image de cette Andromède nue est plus en accord avec la tradition picturale du mythe qu’avec ses représentations scéniques. Bérain a-t-il voulu énchâsser au coeur de son frontispice cette représentation archétypale pour mettre en valeur le retour à la source ovidienne du mythe qui caractérise le livret de Quinault? Benoît Bolduc, Andromède au rocher; fortune théâtrale d’une image en France et en Italie, 1587–1712 (Olschki, 2002), 85; available online at <http://cesar.org.uk/cesar2/imgs/images.php?fc=edit&image_UOID=334000>
18 The 2000 staged production of *Serre* at the Semperoper in Dresden, with Les Talens Lyriques (cond. Christophe Rousset), presents this scene with a religious solemnity and devoid of nearly all gesture. *Serre* (Paula Rasmussen) opens the scene seated and facing upstage before a plane tree in a terrarium to deliver her recitative, raising her arms to the heavens on 'Tuoni, lampi, e procelle'. She then stands, steps up to the terrarium, and slowly turns to face the audience on the orchestral introduction, and sings the aria with arms outstretched and resting on a ledge of the terrarium; her facial expression seems to begin with Le Brun's 'simple love' (Fig. 13a, row 2, image 2) and to end with 'rapture' (Fig. 13a, row 1, image 2). Philip Behren's film of this production is available for viewing online at Medici.tv.

19 About such mimetic actions, Le Faucheur states 'There are particular actions that you must never try to represent with the hand, nor put yourself in the posture of those who do them: such as fencing, drawing a bow, firing a musket, playing musical instruments ... as if you had a spinet under your fingers or a harp between your hands' (see *Sept traités*, ed. Chaouche, 135.)

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