

Dancing King: Louis XIV's Roles in Molière's *Comédies-ballets*, from Court to Town

Until the second half of the twentieth century, Molière's *comédies-ballets* (works which are characterized by the inclusion of music and dance and which were written to be premiered before Louis XIV and his court) remained a misunderstood and unappreciated part of his *œuvre*. The situation is now gradually improving as many scholars of literature, music, dance and theatre are turning their attention towards the genre.¹ The issues at stake have gradually moved from a recognition of the merit of the texts themselves to an understanding of the original context for which they were written and an assessment of the musical and dancing elements of the originals. Among that ever-increasing amount of literature dedicated to the *comédies-ballets*, however, one notes a failure to examine fully an essential aspect of the genre: the court-town dichotomy, whereby the court premieres differed in many ways from subsequent town performances even when the same piece was given by the same troupe – in this case, Molière's troupe.² It is in the light of this court-town dichotomy that Louis XIV's dancing roles in Molière's *comédies-ballets* will be examined here.³

The transferral of a *comédie-ballet* to the public theatre – the Palais-Royal – was an event heavily publicized in advance. Loret, then editor of the *Muze historique*, heralded the arrival at the Palais-Royal of Molière's first *comédie-ballet*, *Les Fâcheux* (1661), in the following terms:

La Pièce, tant et tant louée,
Qui fut dernièrement jouée
Avec ses agréments nouveaux,
Dans la belle Maizon de Vaux,
Divertit si bien nôtre Sire,
Et fit la Cour tellement rire, [...]
O Citadins de cette Ville,
En Curieux toûjours fertile,
Gens de diverses Nations,
Gens de toutes Conditions,

Gens du commun, Gens de science,
 Donnez-vous un peu patience;
 Après le Monarque et sa Cour
 Vous la verrez à votre tour. (27 August 1661)

Loret is anxious to assure the public that they will witness the same entertainment that the king and court had seen previously, and this is one of the recurring features of the advance publicity concerning town productions of the *comédies-ballets*. Molière himself articulated a desire that the Parisian public should enjoy performances as similar as possible to their courtly originals in the 'Au lecteur' to the published version of his *Amour médecin* (1665):

Ce que je vous dirai, c'est qu'il seroit à souhaiter que ces sortes d'ouvrages pussent toujours se montrer à vous avec les ornements qui les accompagnent chez le Roi. Vous les verriez dans un état beaucoup plus supportable; et les airs et les symphonies de l'incomparable Monsieur Lully, mêlés à la beauté des voix et à l'adresse des danseurs, leur donnent sans doute des grâces dont ils ont toutes les peines du monde à se passer.

This is simultaneously a declaration regarding the importance of the musical and balletic portions of the *comédies-ballets* and one upholding the significance for Molière of his town audience.

It is all the more ironic, then, that *L'Amour médecin* was given at the Palais-Royal without the music and dance of the original. Certain modifications were inevitable as *comédies-ballets* were transferred from court to town. Some, owing to financial constraints, were simply shorn of their musical and balletic portions, while others, their music and dancing retained, were given in a form similar to that of their court premieres. But the context for performance was very different. While at court attention was overwhelmingly centred on Louis XIV, whether he performed a dancing role or whether he was simply the principal spectator, his absence from town performances shifted the emphasis onto the theatrical entertainment *per se*. Although Molière's Palais-Royal audience did include some courtiers, it was composed mainly of members of the Parisian bourgeoisie and even the occasional lackey, shop assistant or lawyer's clerk.⁴ Whereas court entertainments, with their lavish costumes and numerous musicians and dancers, displayed an emphasis on spectacle, such extravagance constituted something of a financial risk for Molière's troupe whose main concern was to ensure adequate receipts at the box office.⁵ The courtly emphasis on music and dance is illustrated in the *livrets* (programmes) distributed at court performances of the *comédies-ballets*; these contain the names of the singers and dancers, giving special attention to those members of the court who danced and particularly to Louis XIV. In town, the courtiers' roles were sometimes omitted, sometimes performed by the more proficient members of Molière's troupe or, money permitting, by professional dancers.

In under twenty years, Louis XIV danced around eighty roles in forty major ballets. As Régine Astier remarks, this statistic constitutes something approaching the career of a professional dancer.⁶ Louis XIV's first appearance as a dancer in a court ballet was when he was twelve years old, in *Le Ballet de Cassandre* (26 February 1651). His first appearance in his celebrated role as the sun was in the *Ballet Royal de la Nuit*, two years later. Like a number of court ballets, the *Ballet Royal de la Nuit* has a clear political sub-text: it marked Mazarin's return to power and Louis's return to Paris after the turmoil of the Fronde. It was therefore highly appropriate and significant that Louis should incarnate the rising sun at the end of the work, a role which both symbolized and reinforced his power and authority. The king danced the role of the sun in several other ballets: *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis* (1654), *Ercole Amante* (1662) and the *Ballet de Flore* (1669). Louis XIV's final dancing role was probably in Molière's *Les Amants magnifiques* in 1670.⁷

Garlick writes that Louis XIV 'figured as the leading dancer in *entrées* of suitably royal or godlike subjects'.⁸ This is not, however, strictly accurate as Louis XIV did not always dance the important roles in court ballets. Even the characters with which he was most closely associated in the extensive iconography of his reign – Hercules, Jupiter, Neptune and, most famously, Apollo – were sometimes danced by other people. More surprisingly still, Louis himself sometimes played distinctly unglamorous roles. In the *Ballet de la Nuit*, for example, he played 'une Heure', 'un des jeux qui suivent Vénus', 'un Feu follet', 'un Curieux', and 'un Furieux', before appearing as the glorious Apollo. He played a lowly shepherd in the *Ballet des Plaisirs* (1655), the *Ballet des Arts* (1663) and the *Ballet des Muses* (1666); an Egyptian in the *Ballet des Plaisirs*, *Les Noces du village* (1663) and a Moor in *Le Ballet d'Alcidiane* (1658). Sometimes Louis XIV even played female roles, including a fury and a dryad in *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis* (1654), the goddess Cérès in the *Ballet des Saisons*, a village girl in *Les Noces du village* and a nymph in the *Ballet des Muses*.⁹ This diversity is reflected in a modest way in the few roles he danced in Molière's *comédies-ballets*: an examination of the court *livrets* informs us that he danced the part of an Egyptian in *Le Mariage forcé* (1664), a Moorish Gentleman in *Le Sicilien* (1667) and was certainly intended to dance Neptune and Apollo in *Les Amants magnifiques* (1670). It is with these dancing roles that we are concerned here; they will be examined in chronological order.

Le Mariage forcé

Le Mariage forcé was first performed in the Queen Mother's apartment in the Louvre on 29 January 1664.¹⁰ The context for the ballet entry of *Le Mariage forcé* in which Louis XIV danced is as follows: the protagonist, Sganarelle, is

betrothed to a much younger woman named Dorimène. Sganarelle is afraid of being made a cuckold by his future wife, so he decides to seek advice. After a prophetic nightmare and fruitless consultation with two infuriating pedants, Sganarelle's next encounter is with a group of 'Egyptiens' – two male and four female.¹¹ As was often the case in court ballets, these parts were danced by men only: Louis XIV (who played one of the male Egyptians), two noblemen (the Marquis de Villeroy and the Marquis de Rassan) and three professional dancers (Raynal, Noblet and La Pierre).¹²

The six Egyptians appear on stage dancing to the *Premier air pour les Egyptiens et les Egyptiennes*. The composer of the music, Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–87), makes no apparent attempt to characterize the Egyptians' music as non-European or bohemian.¹³

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a dance piece. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a keyboard accompaniment (bass clef). The first system includes a vocal line with a melodic line and a keyboard line with a bass line. The second system continues the piece with similar notation. The music is in G minor and 2/2 time, featuring simple harmonies and uncomplicated rhythms.

The G minor dance in 2/2 time may have been given exotic colour by the choreography or the costumes, but the music, with its simple harmonies and uncomplicated rhythms, seems rather to evoke the majesty of the real-life people dancing the *entrée*. This would suggest that in the mind of the composer, the fact that the entry was to be danced by Louis XIV was more important than the fact that it was supposed to depict a characteristic social group. As the caption 'Ballet du Roi' and the capitalization of Louis's title in the programme suggest, the courtly audience would, in a similar way, have been more aware of the fact that their king was dancing an entry than of the significance of the entry in terms of character or plot. This principle had been asserted as early as 1653 in an article in the *Gazette*, commenting on Louis's various dancing roles in the *Ballet de la Nuit*:

Les spectateurs auroyent difficilement discerné la plus charmante [des entrées] si celles où nostre jeune Monarque ne se faisoit pas moins connoistre sous ses vestemens, que le Soleil se fait voir au travers des nūages qui voilent quelques fois sa lumière, n'en eussent receu vn caractère particulier d'éclatante Majesté, qui en marquoit la différance. (1 March 1653, pp. 222–3)

Clearly, the presence of the dancing king in *Le Mariage forcé*, just as in the *Ballet de la Nuit*, was of more significance and interest than any attempt at theatrical illusion in terms of character. The *2e Air pour les mêmes*, which we assume followed immediately after the first, is another piece of majestic music in G minor, but in triple time. It would have provided the king and his companions with the opportunity to show off their prowess before the court in another kind of dance. Whilst there is no evidence here of any specific political agenda being put forward, the very act of Louis XIV's participation in *Le Mariage forcé* – performing, being seen and admired – is in itself politically significant.¹⁴

Le Sicilien

Louis's participation in the final entry of *Le Sicilien* was more obviously political than in *Le Mariage forcé* as it constituted not only the end of the *comédie-ballet*, but also the end of the great courtly *fête*, the *Ballet des Muses* which was performed at Saint-Germain-en-Laye several times in the winter of 1666–67. The theme of the Muses provided a context and framework for a series of entertainments (including ballet and spoken theatre) inspired by, and offered to, the king. The fundamental theme of this gigantic *fête* was the intimate relationship between Louis XIV and the arts. As James R. Anthony has documented, the structure and content of the *Ballet des Muses* underwent a number of modifications during its extended performance run at court.¹⁵ It was essentially composed of thirteen entries (Molière's *Mélicerte*, later replaced by his *Pastorale comique*, constituted the third entry, dedicated to Thalia) with *Le Sicilien* as the fourteenth, added for the final performance of the work. It was introduced in the final *livret* as follows:

Après tant de nations différentes que les Muses ont fait paroître dans les assemblages divers dont elles avoient composé le divertissement qu'elles donnent au Roi, il manquoit à faire voir de Turcs et de Maures, et c'est ce qu'elles s'avisent de faire dans cette dernière entrée, où elles mêlent une petite comédie pour donner lieu aux beautés de la musique et de la danse, par où elles veulent finir.

It is clear that *Le Sicilien* was required to provide an appropriately spectacular all-musical and all-dancing conclusion to the final performance of an infinitely larger entertainment. Louis XIV had performed a number of ballet roles earlier in the *Ballet des Muses* (a shepherd in the fourth entry; a

Spaniard in the sixth; Cyrus in the eighth and a nymph in the twelfth) and it is fitting that he should have performed again in the finale.

The plot of *Le Sicilien* is slim: the eponymous Dom Père plans to marry Isidore, his Greek slave, but the Frenchman, Adraste, successfully woos her and helps her to escape from her master's house. The Moors are introduced rather loosely into the final scene of the *comédie-ballet* as members of a troupe of dancers requested to perform a masquerade, for no good reason, by the senator (summoned by Dom Père to sort out his affairs). They are divided into three categories: 'Maures et Mauresques de qualité'; 'Maures nus' (presumably bare-headed) and 'Maures à capot'. Louis XIV and certain members of his court (Monsieur le Grand, the Marquis de Villeroy, the Marquis de Rassin, Madame, Mlle de la Vallière, Mme de Rochefort and Mlle de Brancas) formed, appropriately enough, the first group.¹⁶ Lully's score includes two dances for the Moors: the first, reflecting the participation of the king, is a stately dance in 2/2 time, in G minor. The second is a livelier dance in 3/4 time, also in G minor. The function of the entry, as indicated earlier, is to conclude a large courtly entertainment in a fitting manner. Thus, while being of little dramatic significance, the entry serves an arguably greater purpose: that of promoting the king as patron of the arts, performer, and source of admiration. In the ballet *livret* of the *Ballet des Muses* (but not in Molière's published text of *Le Sicilien*), we find verses for the king and for all the courtly participants in this entry except, curiously, the Marquis de Rassin. These verses were written by Isaac de Benserade (1613–91), principal author of ballet texts under Louis XIV, and were to be read silently by the spectators during the performance. The first stanza of Louis's verses stresses his kingly qualities and his success in war:

Ce Maure si fameux soit en paix soit en guerre
 D'un merite éclatant, & d'un rang singulier
 Pouroit mettre à ses piez tout l'orgueil de la Terre, [...]
 Il ne sçait ce que c'est d'estre sans la victoire,
 Et tous les pas qu'il fait le mènent à la gloire.¹⁷

These verses are eminently in keeping with the laudatory tone of official accounts of Louis's reign which combined to create his authorised kingly image. The second stanza deals directly with the question of such a superlative king performing apparently ordinary roles in ballets (the specific roles mentioned are those taken by Louis XIV earlier in the *Ballet des Muses*):

Lors qu'il fait le Berger il est incomparable,
 Representant Cyrus il prend vn plus haut vol,
 Qu'il se déguise en Nymphé il a l'air admirable,
 C'est la mesme fierté s'il dance en Espagnol,
 Sous l'habit Afriquain luy mesme il se surmonte. (p. 803)

The verses, not without a hint of defensiveness, remind us of the official position, mentioned above, whereby, whatever humble or eccentric role

Louis XIV performed, his distinguished and noble persona was always discernible.

Interestingly, Benserade asserts that the role he plays best is that of the consummate king:

Mais de ces jeux diuers quand il faut qu'il remonte
 A son vray, naturel, & serieux employ,
 Ou pas vn ne l'égale, ou Nul ne le seconde,
 Personne dans le Monde
 Ne fait si bien le ROY. (p. 803)

While Benserade's verses emphasize above all the fact that Louis XIV knows when it is appropriate to abandon his balletic past-times, the comparison of Louis's adopted ballet roles with that of a king is indeed a telling one, for it subtly (and probably inadvertently) suggests that Louis the king was as much a creative and created performance as Louis playing a Moor or Louis playing an Egyptian.

Les Amants magnifiques

Opinion is divided concerning Louis XIV's active participation in Molière's *Les Amants magnifiques* (first performed on 4 February 1670). Did he or did he not dance the roles of Neptune and Apollo? Confusion has arisen largely from the conflicting evidence to be gleaned from contemporary sources. The *Gazette's* account of the first performance of *Les Amants magnifiques* presents a clear case in favour of the belief that Louis XIV did dance:

Huit Pescheurs y font, dans le premier Intermède, vne Dance, qui est suivie de celle du Dieu Neptune, représenté par le Roy, avec cette grace, & cette Majesté qui brillent dans toutes ses Actions, estant assisté de six Dieux Marins, deux desquels sont désignez par le Comte d'Armagnac, & le Marquis de Villeroy. [...] & dans le dernier [intermède], Apollon, encor représenté par le Roy, paroist au bruit des Trompettes, & des Violons, précédé de six Personnes, qui portent des Lauriers entrelassez, avec vn Soleil d'or, & la Devise Royale, en façon de Trophée. (7 February 1670, p. 143)

Another account supporting this argument (it is likely that both were reviews written in advance of the occasion) is given by Robinet in his *Lettre en vers à Madame* (8 February 1670):

Il [le Roi] y parèt le Dieu de l'Onde,
 Et le Dieu de Mont Parnassus,
 Avec tant d'éclat que rien plus,
 Qui fait que tout chacun admire,
 Ce redoutable, & charmant Sire:
 Qui, sans contrefaire ces Dieux,
 Est, par ma foy, bien plus Dieu qu'eux.

However, the above account contains inaccuracies. Robinet had not been present at the first performance of *Les Amants magnifiques*; rather, he had only apparently read the *livret* (which he wrongly attributed to Benserade) and which did, indeed, indicate that Louis XIV was to play the parts of Neptune and Apollo. Robinet did have the grace to admit his inaccuracies in another letter, dated 15 February 1670:

Mais c'est tout ce que j'en puis dire,
 Sinon que nôtre *Auguste Sire*
 Fait danser, & n'y danse point,
 M'étant trompé, dessus ce point,
 Quand, sur un Livre, j'allay mettre,
 Le contraire, en mon autre Lettre.

The previous day, the *Gazette* had also modified its precisions concerning *Les Amants magnifiques*. We read that 'Le Comte d'Armagnac, & le Marquis de Villeroy représentent Neptune, & Apollon, en la place du Roy, qui n'y danse pas' (p. 168). We note that, while Robinet retracts his original statement, the *Gazette* writes of the second performance of the *comédie-ballet* in different terms from the first. Two credible answers to this question present themselves: either, Louis XIV did not dance at all in *Les Amants magnifiques* and people were misled by the *livret* and the knowledge that he was supposed to dance, or he danced only in the first performance and was replaced for subsequent performances. It is impossible now to prove either of these theories and the debate will doubtless continue. It is, however, certain that Louis XIV was intended (and, in all probability, intending) to dance the roles of Neptune and Apollo in *Les Amants magnifiques*, and that the roles were written with him in mind. They may therefore be analysed as examples of Louis's participation in the *comédies-ballets*.

An analysis of Neptune's entry in what is effectively the prologue (although it is labelled 'Premier Intermède') to *Les Amants magnifiques* must include both text and music. This is the only *comédie-ballet* in which Molière himself borrows from *ballet de cour* the tradition of including in the *livret* verses for the courtly participants (see above). Neptune's arrival is announced in recitative by Triton to which the chorus responds with the express aim of celebrating and articulating their joy in music. This is followed by two ballet entries, the first of which was probably a solo for Neptune followed by a dance for Neptune's followers who may thus have expressed in dance their servitude to the king and the esteem in which they held him.

Neptune's dance is in F major, in 2/2 time. Most significant is the second section (B) of this dance which involves an unusual amount of rhythmic interest by the standards of Lully's music for the *comédies-ballets*, including more dotted rhythms than was common, some notes which are tied over the barlines and imitation between parts.

The result is a relatively complicated piece of music, with the dotted notes suggesting lively dance steps. Dotted rhythms have been identified by Philippe Beaussant as one of the most important characteristics of a musical representation of ‘l’idéal éthique de la monarchie’ in French music of the seventeenth century.¹⁸ Similarly, Fiona Garlick notes the significance of dotted rhythms in what she terms the ‘majestic genre’ under Louis XIV.¹⁹ While the majestic genre remains undefined as a genre in its own right, it is quite clear that here in *Les Amants magnifiques*, and elsewhere, Lully does employ dotted rhythms to represent the majesty of Louis XIV.²⁰

The ‘Vers pour LE ROI représentant Neptune’ are transparent in their political purport. In the first and last stanzas, Louis XIV’s message to his people is made abundantly clear:

Le ciel, entre les dieux les plus considérés,
 Me donne pour partage un rang considérable,
 Et, me faisant régner sur les flots azurés,
 Rend à tout l’univers mon pouvoir redoutable. [...]
 On trouve des écueils parfois dans mes états;
 On voit quelques vaisseaux y périr par l’orage;
 Mais contre ma puissance on n’en murmure pas,
 Et chez moi la vertu ne fait jamais naufrage.

The exemplary response to Louis XIV/Neptune is given in the verses for the Marquis de Rassan. Representative of the general tone of such verses, they read as follows: ‘Voguez sur cette mer d’un zèle inébranlable: / C’est le moyen d’avoir NEPTUNE favorable’. The Neptune myth and sea imagery is a thin and convenient veil for a bout of pro-Louis propaganda on a scale unprecedented in Molière’s work.

At the end of *Les Amants magnifiques*, Louis XIV was to have appeared as Apollo. This final entry is even more spectacular than the first. After a series of ballet entries depicting the Pythian games, the build up to the entry of Louis XIV as Apollo begins. There is a remarkable change at this point in several aspects of the music. Extra musical forces are employed: we read in the text that ‘un héraut, six trompettes, et un timbalier, se mêlant à tous les instruments, annoncent, avec un grand bruit, la venue d’Apollon’. It is appropriate both that the special occasion, the arrival of Apollo/Louis XIV, should require extra resources, and that these resources should include trumpets (no fewer than six), the trumpet being an instrument commonly employed to evoke a mood of pomp and ceremony. The use of a drum, combined with the

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a grand orchestral piece. Each system consists of four staves: a top staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#), a second staff with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp, a third staff with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp, and a bottom staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The first system includes a label 'Timbales' above the second staff. The music is characterized by a driving, rhythmic pattern in the lower staves, with frequent sixteenth-note runs and a steady pulse. The upper staves feature more melodic and harmonic lines, often with sixteenth-note patterns. The overall texture is dense and rhythmic, reflecting the ceremonial and pompous nature of the occasion described in the text.

six trumpets, by virtue of its musical texture, sets the music for Apollo's arrival apart from the rest of Lully's score. The notated music of the prelude itself is quite unlike any of the preceding music. It is dominated by a quaver-two semi-quaver rhythmic pattern, alternating between the tonic (D) and the dominant (A), played on the drum and doubled in the bass line.

This is followed by a four-part chorus of Greeks who sing their praise and wonder at Louis XIV/Apollo with bright, stately music. Apollo then dances a ballet entry – 'une danse héroïque' – accompanied by 'six jeunes gens'. The entry is in a stately 2/2 time and in the key of D minor. As for the music for Neptune, this is set apart by virtue of its rhythmic interest and by its regal characteristics (dotted rhythms).

Once again, this would have been an opportunity for Louis to demonstrate his dancing ability and to perform his status as object of admiration and adulation.

The hyperbolic verses 'Pour LE ROI, représentant le Soleil' included in the *livret* read as follows:

Je suis la source des clartés;
 Et les astres les plus vantés,
 Dont le beau cercle m'environne,
 Ne sont brillants et respectés
 Que par l'éclat que je leur donne.
 Du char où je me puis asseoir,

Je vois le désir de me voir
 Posséder la nature entière;
 Et le monde n'a son espoir
 Qu'aux seuls bienfaits de ma lumière.
 Bienheureuses de toutes parts,
 Et pleines d'exquises richesses,
 Les terres où de mes regards
 J'arrête les douces caresses!

This unspoken address is one minor example from among a great wealth of similar propaganda concerning Louis XIV in this period of French history. In this instance, the explicit image created of Louis is of an all-powerful monarch on whom the whole world depends. A more sinister element is added in the following verses for M. Le Grand:

Bien qu'après du soleil tout autre éclat s'efface,
 S'en éloigner pourtant n'est pas ce que l'on veut;
 Et vous voyez bien, quoi qu'il fasse,
 Que l'on s'en tient toujours le plus près que l'on peut.

This message would seem particularly applicable to Louis XIV's noble courtiers. Despite the fact that their power has been reduced and is nothing compared with that of the king, they should, whether they agree with him or not, endeavour to stay close to him. These verses constitute a recipe for success at Louis XIV's court, a recipe which is literally acted out on stage before (and, in some instances, by) the court.

But not so at the Palais-Royal theatre. Louis XIV's dancing presence in court productions of the *comédies-ballets* has been seen to be significant in terms of his agenda as king and to have influenced the form of the *comédies-ballets* and their reception at court. His absence, as either performer or spectator, from the town productions of the same works did not, however, render them meaningless; rather, their meaning was different as an overwhelming and self-conscious focus on a single person and persona was replaced by a shift in emphasis onto the entertainment as a whole.

Our three examples offer diverse models for the transferral of a *comédie-ballet* from court to town. *Le Mariage forcé* was transferred to the Palais-Royal theatre on 15 February 1664. What had at court been a 'Ballet du Roi' (that is how it is described in the *livret*, emphasizing the presence and participation of Louis XIV) became in town, in the absence of the king, a farcical comedy by Molière performed, in the words of La Grange (one of the actors in Molière's troupe, and the troupe's secretary) 'avec le ballet et les ornemens'.²¹ The court production had included, alongside the dancing courtiers, fifteen professional dancers; at the Palais-Royal their number was reduced to nine and the Egyptian originally danced by Louis XIV himself was played by an ordinary professional dancer.²² Whereas at court, the Egyptians' entry would have been set apart from the rest of the work by virtue of its

royal performer, it would, in town, have offered nothing exceptional and blended into the rest of the entertainment as a musical and dancing counterpoint to the connecting scene involving two 'Egyptiennes' played by ordinary members of Molière's troupe.

Le Sicilien was taken to the Palais-Royal theatre on 10 June 1667 where it was no longer the grand finale of a huge court *fête* but one half of a theatrical double bill with Corneille's *Attila*.²³ The significance of the final ballet entry as somehow exemplifying Louis's special relationship with the arts was entirely absent owing to its new and different context. There is no evidence in La Grange's *Registre* of any extra expenses incurred in the town productions of *Le Sicilien*, although Robinet, in his letter of 12 June 1667, noted that 'Il [Molière] y joint aussi des entrées / Qui furent tres-considérées / Dans ledit ravissant Balet'. Robinet mentions both the court and town productions of *Le Sicilien* in rapid succession in his letter and so it is not entirely clear to which version he is referring in this instance. It is likely that the music and dancing, if they were included at all, were on a significantly smaller scale than in the original.

Les Amants magnifiques, on the other hand, was never performed before Molière's paying public. It is no coincidence that this, Molière's most overtly political and courtly *comédie-ballet*, was simply not transferred to the Palais-Royal.²⁴ The hyperbolic affirmation of Louis XIV was clearly considered inappropriate for performance in town. On a more mundane level, such a spectacular work would have been expensive to produce and Molière may have considered it too great a gamble. In any case, the Palais-Royal audience was enjoying, amongst other things, performances of *Tartuffe* and *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*. There was no need to run the risk of producing the most courtly of all Molière's pieces in town, particularly as, in the absence of the king, it would have lost much of its original significance.

We have seen that Molière's *comédies-ballets* were performed both at the French court and in a public theatre during his lifetime and the theatrical experience in each was very different. At court, attention was (officially, at least) concentrated on Louis XIV, either as a spectator sitting in the middle directly in front of the acting area or as a performer who danced with his courtiers, wearing lavish costumes. While it must have been perfectly possible for Louis's courtiers to choose to focus on other aspects of the *comédies-ballets* (such as the plot), this was not, as we have seen, the focus of the official accounts of such entertainments as given in the various *livrets*. In town, the *comédies-ballets* were less spectacular, but arguably, in the absence of the potentially disruptive additional level of reality involving Louis XIV and his political agendas, more integrated in terms of the plot. Whether Louis XIV was playing a mere Egyptian fortune-teller or the great Apollo, he was inevitably the star of the show as, we are told, his majesty shone through any adopted role or theatrical illusion. In his absence, members of Molière's troupe, and usually Molière himself (as he played his own leading roles), became king of the stage.

This investigation of a small aspect of Molière's work has wide-ranging implications regarding definitive versions, or modern 'authentic' productions of Molière's works, for the playwright himself demonstrated a more flexible approach to his own work than is often acknowledged. This is apparent not only in the transferral and modification of *comédies-ballets* as they moved from court to town, but also within various performance runs, as Molière responded to the vagaries of the material world in which he lived, to the demands of his audiences and to the needs and condition of his troupe. Molière was certainly concerned with the aesthetics of theatre, but as a troupe manager in a precarious world he was, by necessity, a pragmatist – something which should be borne in mind when attempting an authentic production of his work. An examination of Louis XIV's dancing roles in the *comédies-ballets* reminds us that the search for an authentic performance remains a valuable exercise, but ultimately one which is impossible to achieve in full.

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Notes

- 1 See Friedrich Böttger, *Die "Comédie-ballet" von Molière-Lully* (Hildesheim, Olms, 1979); Claude Abraham, *On the structure of Molière's Comédies-ballets*, Biblio 17, 19 (Paris, PFSCCL, 1984); Robert McBride, *The Triumph of Ballet in Molière's Theatre* (Lampeter, Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); Charles Mazouer, *Molière et ses comédies-ballets* (Paris, Klincksieck, 1993), and Stephen Fleck, *Music, Dance, and Laughter: Comic Creation in Molière's Comedy-Ballets*, Biblio 17, 88 (Paris, PFSCCL, 1995). In addition to these published volumes, Molière's *comédies-ballets* provide the subject matter for several doctoral theses: Joyce Chumbley, 'The World of Molière's Comedy-ballets' (University of Hawaii, 1972); John Powell, 'Music in the Theater of Molière' (University of Washington, 1982); Ronald Garwood, 'Molière's "Comédies-ballets"' (Stanford University, 1985); Thomas Glasgow, 'Molière, Lully and the Comedy-Ballet' (State University of New York at Buffalo, 1985).
- 2 An example of this may be found in Joan Crow's article 'Reflections on *George Dandin*', in William D. Howarth and Merlin Thomas (eds), *Molière: Stage and Study. Essays in Honour of W. G. Moore* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 3–12, in which she writes of the ending 'with its apparent threat of suicide' (p. 5). Only later in the article does she acknowledge the original context of the work and how the ballet was omitted at the Palais-Royal theatre, concluding that 'the ballet was not specifically part of the ending' (p. 8). If one examines the court *livret* and other contemporary accounts of the premiere of *George Dandin*, however, one learns that it was very much part of the ending of the work. It is true that the ballet is not part of the ending transmitted to us through the published text (from which it was omitted), but this in no way diminishes the significance of the ballet scenes at the court premiere. For a fuller investigation of the

- comédies-ballets* in court-town terms, see my doctoral thesis, 'Molière's *Comédies-ballets*: Court and Town' (University of Cambridge, 1998).
- 3 No dance notation exists for the *comédies-ballets*, so we have to make do with the information available to us in the programmes (or *livrets*), which include brief descriptions of the dances and the names of the dancers, and with the musical scores.
 - 4 See John Lough, *Paris Theatre Audiences in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, OUP, 1957), p. 79.
 - 5 It is the case, however, that on the rare occasions that Molière's troupe did invest in expensive productions in town, these tended to result in excellent takings. The most prominent example is *Psyché*, which was first performed at the Palais-Royal to great acclaim in 1671.
 - 6 'Louis XIV, "Premier Danseur"', in *Sun King: The Ascendancy of French Culture during the Reign of Louis XIV*, David Lee Rubin (ed), (Washington, Folger Shakespeare Library, 1992), pp. 73–102 (p. 78).
 - 7 See below for a more detailed discussion concerning Louis's participation in *Les Amants magnifiques*. If, as many critics believe, he did not dance in it, his last public appearance in a court ballet would have been in the *Ballet de Flore* on 13 February 1669.
 - 8 Fiona Garlick, 'Dances to Evoke the King: The Majestic Genre Chez Louis XIV', *Dance Research*, 15: 2 (Winter 1997), 10–34 (p. 27).
 - 9 While the comic – and occasionally lewd – potential of the cross-dressed ballet dancer is sometimes exploited in the accompanying verses for male courtiers, any homoerotic or comic potential is shunned in the verses for Louis XIV which tend to emphasize his regal characteristics.
 - 10 See La Grange, *Le Registre de La Grange*, ed. by Bert E. Young and Grace P. Young, 2 vols (Paris, Droz, 1947; repr. Geneva, Slatkine, 1977), I, 64.
 - 11 In seventeenth-century France, the term 'Egyptien' not only described the inhabitants of Egypt, but was also employed to designate a gypsy or vagabond.
 - 12 See *Le Mariage forcé Ballet du Roy Dansé par sa Majesté, le 29 jour de Janvier 1664* (Paris, Ballard, 1664) and *Le Mariage forcé*, ed. by Julia Prest, Textes Littéraires, CIX (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1999).
 - 13 All musical quotations are from Henry Prunières's edition of the *Œuvres complètes de J.-B. Lully 1632–1687; Les Comédies-ballets*, vols 1–3 (Paris, Edition de la Revue Musicale, 1931–38).
 - 14 For an introduction to the various ways in which Louis XIV's political agenda was disseminated through, amongst other things, the arts, see Peter Burke's *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992).
 - 15 See James R. Anthony, 'More Faces than Proteus: Lully's *Ballet des muses*', *Early Music*, 15: 3 (August 1987), 336–44.
 - 16 See *Le Ballet des Muses dansé par sa Majesté [...] le 2. Decembre 1666* (Paris, Ballard, 1666).
 - 17 Marie-Claude Canova-Green (ed.), *Benserade: Ballets pour Louis XIV*, 2 vols (Toulouse, Société de Littératures Classiques, 1997), II, 802–3.
 - 18 Philippe Beaussant, *Lully ou Le musicien du Soleil* (Paris, Gallimard, 1992), p. 168.
 - 19 'Dances to Evoke the King: The Majestic Genre Chez Louis XIV', p. 22.
 - 20 Rose A. Pruiksma, for example, has noted, in an unpublished paper, Lully's striking use of dotted rhythms in his music for the entries danced by Louis in the *Ballet d'Alcidiane* (1658).

- 21 *Le Registre de La Grange*, I, 64.
- 22 Joyce Arlene Chumbley provides a table of the dancers and the roles they performed in the court performances of *Le Mariage forcé* and another table, based partly on conjecture, of the possible distribution of roles in the Palais-Royal performances of the same work. See 'The World of Molière's Comedy-ballets' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hawaii, 1972), pp. 454 and 456.
- 23 During its 1667 performance run *Le Sicilien* was also given with *Rodogune*, *L'Amour médecin*, *Le Médecin malgré lui* and *Le Cocu imaginaire*.
- 24 The only other of Molière's *comédies-ballets* not to be performed at the Palais-Royal was the *Pastorale comique* (1667), a minor and incomplete work which replaced *Mélicerte* as part of the *Ballet des Muses*.

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