

## Corneille's *Andromède* and Opera: Practice Before Theory

by  
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Il faut pourtant prendre bien garde  
que ces representations soient bien faites,  
& que les machines jouent à propos; autrement  
elles donnent sujet de rire aux spectateurs,  
& gâtent entièrement le succès de la pièce.

Père Méneestrier, *Des Ballets anciens et modernes*

Père Méneestrier's reflection on the appropriateness of stage machinery in the above epigraph invokes a theoretical expectation of classical drama in the French seventeenth century, related to notions like "decorum" and "necessity," but ultimately asserting the significance of vraisemblance. "Jouer à propos," debatably a French translation of Aristotle's discussion of possibility, believability, and history in the *Poetics* (1454b), reflects a rule that had two prongs for academics like Méneestrier: on the level of the plot or the story, the proper machine needed to be paired with its subject matter; on a moral level, stage machinery was supposed to be suitable for the spectators, playing to their general beliefs about the past and about acceptable habits and practices.<sup>1</sup> A driving force behind much of the treatises on theater in classical age France was the tension such expressions as "à propos" generated between these two forms of suitability, one the result of the poet's technique, the other its effect on the spectator, and to what degree they both mattered. In fact, we could argue that the challenge of this tension was what proved to fascinate Pierre Corneille's conception of the stage, not just in a theoretical context as we read in his *Examens* and *Trois discours sur le poème dramatique* from 1660, but also, as the following will explore, in a metatheatrical discourse within the work of theater itself.<sup>2</sup> In *Andromède* (1650), his first machine tragedy, Corneille tested what would later (after 1660) be characterized as his theory of vraisem-

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<sup>1</sup> Corneille himself describes this in "Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter selon le vraisemblable et le nécessaire," *Writings on the Theatre* (e.g., p. 35).

<sup>2</sup> This general view is supported by two other accounts I have encountered. See Lyons, *Kingdom of Disorder: The Theory of Tragedy in Classical France* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999), 18; and Harris, *Inventing the Spectator*, p. 78.

blance by exploring the role of the spectator, who the dramatist staged through the allegorical potential of the play's protagonists. The result, as we shall study, was not only an important example of practice before theory, but also a much less "regular"<sup>3</sup> conception of *vraisemblance* than what the dramatist theorized years later. This irregularity not only opens up a clearer understanding of Corneille's thoughts on spectator belief, but also suggests that we reconsider his views on music and machines in a much more positive light; a rethinking, thus, of the fundamental part he played in the history of French opera.

### **Melpomene as Messenger**

The commission Corneille received just after the mitigated success of two Italian operas in Paris (Giulio Strozzi's *La Finta pazza* in 1645 and Luigi Rossi's opera *Orfeo* in 1647) was to create a tragedy that integrated music by Dassoucy and the elaborate machines made by the Italian machinist and architect Giacomo Torelli. This was a difficult task because proponents of "regular" tragedy were poised to object to these additions as ornamental, *invraisemblable*, and unfortunately related to the unpopular politics of Mazarin, who the French public thought was emptying the French State's coffers in order pay for Italian productions. Corneille had his work cut out for him, then, when we consider that even a twenty-first-century theatergoer would find the 1650 production of *Andromède* opulent and extravagant. To name just a few of its visual, machine-driven highlights: Vénus descends from the sky on a cloud; Eole appears in the air accompanied by eight other winds; Andromède is flown by two winds (acrobats) to her seaside prison; Persée combats the sea monster while riding a flying Pegasus; Sea nymphs abound; Neptune emerges from the waves on his seahorse-driven conch shell; Junon flies through the sky on her float pulled by peacocks; Mercure appears in the air; and finally Jupiter himself comes down from the sky on his golden throne, accompanied by the reappearance of Neptune and Junon.<sup>4</sup> As for music, there were probably as many as nine choral pieces, one air, a developed operatic duet,

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<sup>3</sup> I am taking a cue from John D. Lyons here and referring to regulars and regular tragedy or theater to stay within the seventeenth-century vocabulary for what we now more often call "classical." See Lyons's first chapter, "Regularity: Articulating the Aesthetic" in *Kingdom of Disorder*.

<sup>4</sup> Today, like readers of the seventeenth century, we are also struck by this spectacle through the designs and engravings of François Chauveau, reprinted in the Christian Delmas edition and also accessible through various online resources.

and maybe other instrumental moments that we cannot be certain about since the full score is not extant.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of public reception, *Andromède* was a huge success, a “valeur sûre,”<sup>6</sup> and the years following its premiere saw many different stagings in Paris, in the provinces, and abroad, including performances in which Molière played Persée, as well as an operatic interpretation, *Persée*, by Lully and Quinault in 1683.<sup>7</sup> *Andromède* also enjoyed an important life in print, between programs, the published play, and the seven glorious engravings by François Chauveau, which appeared in an Extraordinaire of the *Gazette* on February 18, 1651. As these publications and as the overwhelmingly positive reception made evident, the public taste for spectacle, for visual marvel and musical accompaniment, risked contradicting the academic interpretation of Aristotle’s stance on theater conventions.<sup>8</sup> But it is likely, evidenced beginning in Corneille’s provocative prologue, that Corneille anticipated his audience’s reaction, while also developing a metatheatrical response to his prospective detractors.

As soon as the opening prologue to the machine play, the justification of “ornaments” becomes a clear objective, in this case a political one that will set the tone for the remainder of the play. In the prologue, Melpomene sounds Corneille’s message about the changing role of extra-poetic arts in tragic drama, and confirms that they are safely defended and lauded by the Sun, Louis XIV’s cosmic counterpart. In the second verse of the Prologue, she says to the sun:

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<sup>5</sup> Christian Delmas breaks down the likely musical line-up as nine choruses, four Airs, and one “Air dialogué.” (*Andromède*, xxvii-xxviii). Although we know where music was probably sung thanks to didascalie and the poetry, all that survives of the *Andromède* score is the music for one “Air à quatre parties” in which the manuscript only preserved the haute-contre, taille, and basse parts (the missing soprano part is what makes it difficult to know what the dominant melody would have been). The score is in *Airs à quatre parties de Sieur Dassoucy* (Paris: Ballard, 1653). For a detailed study of the music in this machine play, see John S. Powell, “Music and Corneille’s *Andromède*” in *L’Esprit français et la musique en Europe: Emergence, influence et limites d’une doctrine esthétique*, 191-207, ed. By Michelle Biget and Rainer Schmusch (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> See Delmas’ introduction in *Andromède*.

<sup>7</sup> For a full account of the reception and initial productions of *Andromède*, see the introduction to Christian Delmas’ edition.

<sup>8</sup> When Aristotle ranks the six essential components of a successful tragedy, melody and spectacle are ranked dead last (Aristotle, *Poetics*, VI).

Mon théâtre, Soleil, mérite bien tes yeux;  
 Tu n'en vis jamais en ces lieux  
 La pompe plus majestueuse:  
 J'ai réuni, pour la faire admirer,  
 Tout ce qu'ont de plus beau la France et l'Italie;  
 De tous leurs arts mes sœurs l'ont embellie:  
 Prête-moi tes rayons pour la mieux éclairer. (16)

The choice of Melpomene, muse of tragedy, refers explicitly to the genre in which Corneille situates his machine play, at least in the initial editions. This is significant, because in using Torelli's sets, *Andromède* might have been categorized in a less "regular" form of theater, a "pièce à machines," similar to the Italian operas, and not a "tragédie" that happens to be "en machines" and "en musique."<sup>9</sup>

Next, Corneille develops the metaphor of the sun as both the light that will illuminate the tragic stage, "Prête-moi tes rayons pour la [la pompe majestueuse] mieux éclairer," and the allegorical representation of the support of the Roi-Soleil, or sovereign favor that might be shown upon Corneille for creating *Andromède*: "Mon théâtre, Soleil, mérite bien tes yeux." Melpomene continues: "Daigne.../Donner un parfait agrément/Et rends cette merveille entière/En lui servant toi-même d'ornement" (16-17). These simple verses provide one clear message: By rhyming "agrément" and "ornement," Corneille emphasized that the ornamental aspects of the play that would follow should be approved of and enjoyed. But Corneille goes one step further when he refers to the sun, a traditional allegory for the sovereign and, in this case, Louis XIV, as the ornament proper ("En lui servant toi-même d'ornement"). This term "ornement" made synonymous with the king is an essential borrowing from Aristotle, who, in the sixth part of the *Poetics*, refers to extra-poetic arts as "ta hédusmata," translated into French as "ornements," "assaisonnements," and in English as "embellishments." The result is a clever rhetorical trick in which the arts of France and Italy, specifically the extra-poetic elements of Corneille's play, are given authority and approval thanks to their intimate association with Louis XIV.

Employing the sovereign to raise awareness about his art, Corneille solidified a tradition of prologue writing (common in composite drama, and perhaps the most developed in early opera) that used a rhetoric of sovereign praise in its opening scene as a kind of safety measure, equating

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<sup>9</sup> As we can see in the epigraph to this essay, the excess of Italian modes were less serious and more likely to provoke laughter and ridicule.

attention to the tragedy with the fealty and devotion subjects owed their king. As a consequence, criticizing the music and the machines by calling them superfluous could be rendered tantamount to treason. This was therefore a perfect opening for a play that would challenge its public to enjoy a tragedy mixed with the machines and music of more modern modes of representation.

But Corneille was not satisfied with simply rendering these ornaments, debatably Italianate, acceptable to his critics. By making his eponymous character an allegory for the French theatergoing public, he proved to have been driven to make *Andromède* contribute not only to the general acceptance of marvelous verisimilitude, but to a more general attitude about *vraisemblance* in which he gives the spectator more credit than Aristotle did to make judgments based on the carefully chosen elements in a well-written play. Indeed, Corneille's *Andromède* should be viewed as a play at the very crux of the history of *vraisemblance*, where the dramatist began to carefully distance himself from his peers' theoretical views, while remaining still attached to many conventions (his insistence upon the tragic genre alone is evidence of his desire to be judged within the context of regular drama). This could be understood as opening the door for the development, only a few years later, of the first French operas, especially because it also puts Corneille at the center of a literary and musical trend that wanted to train the early modern spectator to think with images (imagine)<sup>10</sup> and music in ways that the "regulars" would have rejected as "monstrous."<sup>11</sup> The first sign that the play aims to double as a form of audience training is when it opens with a scene about judgment.

### The Boast of Cassiopeia

Corneille's first important metatheatrical point after the prologue appears in the first scene of the play, in a dialogue between Cassiope and Persée about judgment. One effect of this discourse on judgment is that it recalls Chapelain's piercing opening to the *Sentiments de l'Académie*

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<sup>10</sup> John D. Lyons studied the concept of training the early modern imagination through the novel in these terms in *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> As Joseph Harris explains, "regulars" like Chapelain were even known to argue that music was a helpful aspect for the illusion of a play, but that it was ultimately the challenge of getting an audience to harmonize several forms of representation at once (dialogue, machines, music, dance, and so forth) that posed serious problems to the "impulses" of the spectators (45-47).

*Française sur la tragi-comédie du Cid*, the Academy's 1637 report that highlighted the alleged weaknesses of Corneille's tragicomedy by that name. This official statement from the recently formed Academy begins with the words: "Ceux qui abandonnent leurs ouvrages au public ne doivent trouver étrange que le public s'en fasse le juge" (Chapelain 280). As for the dramatists' reputations: "Ils la doivent attendre des autres et n'estimer leurs travaux bon ou mauvais selon le jugement qu'ils en verront faire" (Chapelain 280). This form of theater critique, specifically as it attempts to use Aristotle and Horace as authorities for a rather recent, seventeenth-century view of rules for the dramatic arts, enraged Corneille enough to write, in 1660, a critique of his own in the *Trois Discours sur le poème dramatique*. For example, in the first *Discours* titled "Discours de l'utilité des parties du poème dramatique," Corneille exposes the cryptic and incomplete nature of ancient texts ("Aristote et Horace après lui en ont écrit assez obscurément") (*Writings on the Theatre* 3) and the therefore highly debatable evidence his contemporary critics are using to form their doctrine, specifically to form a rule of verisimilitude in tragedy. As Corneille argues, Aristotle's use of *vraisemblance* was actually quite vague and broad (*Writings on the Theatre* 1-2). But Corneille's opening scene might also be read as a practical manual for the viewer, its perspective on judgment meant to override the overly conventional guide that academicians like Chapelain promoted.

The judgment we hear about at the opening of the play is specific: Corneille's poetry emphasizes judging based on what one sees or witnesses:

CASSIOPE

Généreux inconnu qui chez tous les monarques  
 Portez de vos vertus les éclatantes marques,  
 Et dont l'aspect suffit à convaincre nos yeux  
 Que vous sortez du sang, ou des Rois, ou des Dieux [...]  
 (24)

Cassiope addresses the matter of Persée's identity by claiming that the sight of him is convincing proof of Persée's valor as the son of a god. But we might also argue that her verses, in a metatheatrical sense, introduce Corneille's views on verisimilitude, specifically as they relate to the use of machines and music. Four keywords point to this metatheatricality, other than the significance in and of itself of being the first lines of Act 1: "éclatantes," "sortez," and the rhyme between "yeux" and "Dieux." As a continuation of Melpomene's message about the royal status of ornaments in the prologue, Cassiope's first four lines reinforce the link between

royalty, godliness, and stunning sights and sounds. In terms of sounds, the choice of “*éclatantes*” brings out the possible inclusion of music into the discourse. As for the machines, the assembling of the words “yeux,” “sortez” and “Dieux” could serve to foreshadow Corneille’s abundant use of the *deus ex machina*. The point of these lines was not only a conventional way of introducing the back story to Ovid’s myth, therefore, but also a brief theoretical sketch on how the audience would need to use their eyes to make judgments about the visual content to come.

After the verdict of Persée’s identity, the judgment to be passed is on Cassiope herself, again a judgment that stems from sight:

Puisque vous avez vu le sujet de ce crime  
 Que chaque mois expie une telle victime,  
 Cependant qu’en ce lieu nous attendrons le Roi,  
 Soyez-y juste juge entre les Dieux et moi.  
 Jugez de mon forfait, jugez de leur colère,  
 Jugez s’ils ont eu droit d’en punir une mère,  
 S’ils ont dû faire agir leur haine au même instant. (24)

Once we have seen the object in question, she explains, it is possible to judge it, which she conveys with the anaphor “jugez” as well as the repetition of semantically related terms such as “criminel,” “victime,” and the etymological figure “juste juge.” She is asking Persée to use his imagination, in the sense of thinking with images (“*puisque vous avez vu le sujet*”), to make his judgment about her transgressions. This part of the myth, which Corneille chooses to have the queen recount to Persée in retrospect, is known as the “Boast of Cassiopeia”: the moment when, vainly comparing her beauty to that of the Sea Nymphs, Cassiope’s daughter and the entire town are punished by the god Neptune. In Corneille’s version, however, the boast is not of Cassiope’s own beauty, but the attractiveness of her daughter, Andromède. As Persée says to Cassiope: “[Neptune] voyait mieux que vous que vous aviez raison./Il venge, et c’est de là que votre mal procède,/L’injustice rendue aux beautés d’Andromède” (29). Her judgment, we learn, is not punished because she is wrong, but more ironically, because Neptune, upon inspecting Andromède for himself, concludes she is right. It is in this sense that the Boast of Cassiopeia, in Corneille’s version, resembles, on a metatheatrical level, Corneille’s own troubles during the judgment of *Le Cid*, a plot also based on truth (historical), but judged *invraisemblable* for the regular tragic stage. Following this parallel between Cassiope and Corneille, Cassiope’s well-known “crime” was about *vraisemblance* or the appropriateness of the truth about her daughter, who was possibly but not believably (factually true but not

*vraisemblant*) as beautiful as the Naiades, not suited, not “à propos” as a mere mortal, to exceed divine beauty.

The judgment at the opening of Act 1 is not only on the level of Ovid's myth, therefore, but also a metatheatrical discourse about Corneille's own struggle with the limitations of overly rigorous “regulars.” Cassiope's speech highlights former errors as a well-known “crime” (her boast) relating herself and her daughter as victims, to Corneille and his work, particularly *Le Cid*. As for Neptune's punishment, if we continue our metatheatrical reading, then judging the Boast of Cassiopeia, which, in Corneille's version, is a boast about the beauty of Andromède, is the equivalent of judging Corneille's tragedy of that same name. This parallel is further supported by the fact that this would not be the first time Corneille referred to the “beauté” of his own verse as the vain praise of a metaphorical child.<sup>12</sup> Rooted in the power of double enunciation, therefore, the Ethiopian queen becomes a doubling of the dramatist, who has also been judged harshly in the past for promoting his work.

What was at stake in this first scene was *Andromède*'s reception: academicians were meant to be roused by the subtle comparison between Cassiope's boast and Corneille's *Le Cid* as a reminder that regularity might be more of a modern ideal than an ancient rule. As for the spectator, he or she had the choice between judging Corneille based on his past transgressions (i.e., lack of verisimilitude in *Le Cid*) or on his new innovations (i.e., what the spectator is currently seeing and hearing). If the audience followed the cues first in the prologue and then given by Cassiope in the first scene, both justifying the elevated status of “ornements” (machines and music), both suggesting that the eyes be the judge, their decision was weighted from the start in favor of the marvelous spectacle to come. As he will later do in his *Discours*, Corneille next turns to strategies that invite the spectator to make up his or her own mind about *vraisemblance*.

### **Andromède as Spectator**

As early as Ronsard, the unjustly victimized Andromeda became a popular (especially iconographic) symbol of the French kingdom in need of rescue from a metaphorical monster in times of war and religious persecution (the myth's sea monster was often the metaphor for Protestantism, for example) (Williams 79–84). The rescue of Andromeda

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, his “Excuse à Ariste.”



generated a commonplace comparison between successful monarchs and Perseus: the just sovereign as “nouveau Persée” or “Persée françois” saved his innocent kingdom from harm. But Corneille’s Persée is different thanks to some small changes to Ovid’s demigod, which in turn reorients the victimization of Andromède.<sup>13</sup> In Corneille’s version, Andromède continues to allegorize the French public, but she trades her passivity and blind allegiance, as I shall argue, for agency, autonomy, and judgment. It is particularly helpful to consider these changes in light of a possible metatheatricity, specifically Corneille’s thoughts on the important role the spectator played in judging matters of theatrical belief.

In Ovid’s fourth book, Perseus saves Andromeda in exchange for her hand in marriage and after the rescue, “claims Andromeda as the prize of his great deed, seeking no further dowry” (IV.759-762). Corneille’s Persée, on the other hand, is not only willing to save Andromède without the guarantee of marriage, but also wants to let her decide for herself if she wants to marry him, or go back to her fiancé Phinée. After he rescues Andromède from the monster, Persée wonders if she could love him the way she did Phinée, to which Andromède responds that her heart follows her father’s orders “aveuglément.” In seventeenth-century terms, we could say she was not using her imagination, since she closes her eyes and attempts to make the decision without images.

Persée counters that he would rather she choose for herself. As the hero says to her, “[although your parents] vous donnent à moi, je vous rends à vous-même” (90). Read with the well established visual history in mind, taking Andromède as an allegory of the French public, Persée encourages both the eponymous heroine and the spectator to decide independently (instead of obeying blindly), an ideological addition to the fable that lends itself quite well to what Corneille was attempting to accomplish with his audience and their taste for the theater. Furthermore, this ‘being given back to oneself’ stands out because it marks the difference between Corneille’s version and his ancient source. The argument for audience autonomy is one Corneille makes in his theoretical work ten years later in tackling the issue of catharsis, when he claims that audience members

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<sup>13</sup> See Gethner on how her “realistic” reaction to her imminent death defies the tragic hierarchy of values “in which self-preservation is never given high priority” (55). This self-preservation is the same inglorious quality that renders Phinée, who chooses not to sacrifice his safety for the sake of his endangered betrothed, unworthy of Andromède’s love. See Gethner (60). Gethner ultimately argues that the etymological sense of “générosité” as “genus” or “race” is at the heart of Corneille’s recasting of the tragic hero in his machine plays as one whose birth dictates their merit, or heroism as preordained.

should decide for themselves if their hearts are touched by moments of pity and fear (*Writings on Theatre* 32).<sup>14</sup> He also hints at this sort of re-imagining in the key passage about *vraisemblance* in the *Discours*, where he suggests that what is possible or impossible (for which Aristotle gives no examples) is a function of the public's cognitive flexibility, that "il y a des choses impossibles en elle-même qui paraissent aisément possible, et par conséquent croyables, quand on les envisage d'une autre manière." (*Writings on Theatre* 58). In this sense, just as Persée ignores the custom of collecting his bride as reward and instead asks her to think about who she wants to marry, Corneille-as-New-Persée refuses to conform to conventions to please the regulars, and instead mobilizes a discourse about the spectator's mind, which can be coaxed by a well-crafted play to suspend certain aspects of disbelief (can be made to 'envision the impossible as possible'). Both Persée and Corneille are perhaps overly confident that their audience will make the right choice.

Challenging his critics, but also encouraging his other viewers, Corneille's exchange between Andromède and Persée reminds the spectator that following blindly is a tyrannical way of thinking about love, but perhaps also a dangerously limited (and unimaginative) way of experiencing the possibilities of the tragic stage. To give more weight to these possibilities without completely divorcing himself from the ancients, however, Corneille uses Cassiope throughout the play as a figure that orchestrates and directs the more spectacular and musical moments. He proves that he can operate within many of the ancient modes of tragedy in addition to using new stage technology and music, what he later refers to as working with goals of "ordre" and "éclat" (*Writings on Theatre*, 144).

### Cassiope as *Chorégos*

"Cassiope" is the very first word we read after letters and titles in the 1650 and 1651 editions. She is also the first one to speak after the Prologue. This is no coincidence since, as we have already seen, Cassiope delivers Corneille's message about judgment in the opening scene to the play. But beyond the play's first scene, Cassiope continues to be the voice of Corneille's theoretical thoughts about the abundant presence of spectacular and musical elements on stage. She is a perfect blend of radical modernism and rigorous "regularity" in that she promotes Corneille's more adaptable theory of verisimilitude, but she does so by playing the role of the ancient Greek theater's *chorégos*, coordinating the machines

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<sup>14</sup> On this point, see also Harris, *Inventing the Spectator*, 77.

and the singers (see *Térence justifié*, 209-211).<sup>15</sup> For example, just before the descent of Vénus in the second scene of Act I, Cassiope commands the Ethiopian people (represented by the *Choeur de Peuple*) to listen: “Ecoutez.” This is of course to ready them for the arrival of the goddess. Next, she tells the people to sing the goddess’s praises, effectively serving as a choral director: “Peuple, faites des vœux, tandis qu’elle descend” (36). Cassiope’s directions to the choir are verisimilar, since it is conceivable that a queen might speak to her people in times of prosperity or hardship. Furthermore, when she asks the people to sing, the ceremonial aspect of celebrating the presence of a god takes the spectator into the realm of what might be mythologically plausible. But I would argue that it is in the regularity Corneille establishes between Cassiope’s intervention, the singing, and the *deus ex machina*, that the dramatist provides a form of audience training in which the three become related and acceptable (à propos). In Act 5, Cassiope again calls upon the people to sing during the flight of the messenger god Mercure: “Redoublons donc nos vœux, redoublons nos ferveurs, / Pour mériter du ciel ces nouvelles faveurs” (127). At this point, the audience would already be prepared to equate the singing of the chorus with the descent or ascent of a godly presence. Moreover, as we will consider in more detail below, and as Corneille himself admits in his *Argument* and *Discours*,<sup>16</sup> the singing of the chorus would happily cover up a good portion of the grinding machines used to make these marvelous moments possible. In this way, Corneille prepared his audience for the potential weakness of the flying machine, minimizing the “shock” of the spectacular entrances and exits. His real innovation is that he was using an ancient technique to attenuate and even promote the new (some might argue renewed from the Greeks) technologies and musicality of the Italians. Cassiope’s role in the first act, doubling the role Corneille played in the face of his critics, is to render the music and the singing verisimilar. The reason this is significant is that Corneille’s theoretical explanation for his use of music and machines in the *Argument* and in the *Discours* does

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<sup>15</sup> For a current definition of this term, see: “Director/directing,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, < <http://www.oxford-theatreandperformance.com> > [Accessed April 20, 2012]: “In earlier ages in the West theatrical production was generally in the hands of the playwright or the actors. The ancient Greek dramatists taught or coached the actors in their texts, while the training and costuming of the chorus were nominally in the hands of the *chorégus* [sic], the wealthy citizen who, out of civic duty, financed the performance.” My thanks go to Corinne Noirot for helping me realize the link between Cassiope and the *chorégos*.

<sup>16</sup> Corneille, *Andromède*, 11 and Corneille, *Writings on the Theatre*, 19-20.

not reflect the extent of his practice in the play. Whereas the treatises will downplay and even criticize the use of these spectacular and musical elements, the play incorporates them both abundantly and rigorously.

Anytime a machine is lowering or lifting a flying god or goddess, the chorus is either instructed to sing, or the spectator is carefully forewarned. The same goes for when the motion of the machine is completed, and the god or goddess is in place for their lines. For example, when Vénus is ready to speak, Cassiope tells the people to be silent and to prepare themselves for Vénus' speech:

CASSIOPE

Silence, et préparez vos cœurs à l'allégresse.  
Elle a reçu nos vœux, et les daigne exaucer;  
Ecoutez-en l'effet qu'elle va prononcer. (I, iii, 37-38)

Addressing the people, but also thereby simultaneously, in a double enunciation, arousing the attention of the spectator-reader, Cassiope-as-*chorégos* is Corneille's ingenious way of combining an ancient tool with modern esthetics, just as we see when Vénus rises back to the heavens:

CASSIOPE

Suivons-la dans le ciel par nos remerciements;  
Et d'une voix commune adorant sa puissance,  
Montrons à ses faveurs notre reconnaissance. (I, iii. 39)

Here Corneille successfully anchors the spectacular presence of machines and gods in the stabilizing presence of Cassiope. Her role averts excessive *invraisemblance* by maintaining unity and decorum. Most importantly, she forms a foundation for how to introduce more and more scenes of great singing into a tragedy, promoting a movement toward a more operatic French stage.

### Corneille and Opera

In his *Argument* and, in 1660, in his *Examen d'Andromède* and *Trois discours sur le poème dramatique*, Corneille claims that he used choral singing simply to please the ears of his spectators while their eyes were occupied by the machines: "je n'ai employée [la musique] qu'à satisfaire les oreilles des spectateurs, tandis que leurs yeux sont arrêtés à voir descendre ou remonter une machine" (11). We have seen this to be factually true: in scenes with machines, even the elaborate battle scene in Act 3, the Chorus of the People "chante cependant que Persée combat le Mon-

stre” (79). But if we look at Torelli’s set design, engraved by Chauveau, for Act 3 of *Andromède*,<sup>17</sup> we notice that there was a lot more at stake than the simple ascending and lowering of a god or goddess. The battle between Persée and the Monster is a scene that included a flying machine for Persée and his flying horse, a wave machine for the sea’s troubled waters, a monster machine for Persée’s opponent, and more flying machines for the winds that transport *Andromède*. As for his claim about music, which he says he only used during these moments of machinery, we also know that at least once in the play, in Act 2, a serenade is sung both offstage (by Phinée’s page) and onstage (in response, by *Andromède*’s confidante) in a lyrical mode, expressing the feelings of the two lovers. With an understanding now of the threat this amount of spectacle and music posed to the regularity of Corneille’s work, to the “regulars” of the Academy, Corneille’s *Andromède* should be analyzed as a crucial moment in the history of his own struggle with what we now term “classicism,” especially as classicism related to the issue of *vraisemblance* and its relationship to the genre of sung tragedy.

Music was at once a practical solution to the improbability and distraction that would be caused by such a great number of machines moving all at once. But in establishing moments when singing was not essential but complementary to the plot, and in effect piling on machines in moments like the great battle scene, Corneille was opening up an opportunity for more singing and more technology to dawn the tragic stage in years to come, not just “regularizing” the machines as Hélène Visentin has argued, but legitimizing and promoting the music as well.<sup>18</sup> In this light, I would argue that we learn more about Corneille’s role in the history of French opera from Cornelian practice, that is to say the facts and realities of the production, than we do from his theory, which downplays his use of both machines and music, and consistently paints the picture of a dramatist who scorned these new modes.

For a theorist who all but spits on what we would now call operatic esthetics, in his *Andromède*, Corneille in practice was paradoxically favorable to the choruses, duets, airs, and machines. Perry Gethner’s argument that the heroic values in *Andromède* represent a transition to a lyrical

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<sup>17</sup> The image is printed in Delmas’ critical edition from which I am citing, just before Act III facing p. 69.

<sup>18</sup> Powell agrees that the music may have played a much more important role than we are led to believe based on the documents surviving today. In Act 2 there is even a scene in which Corneille introduces music for its own sake. See Powell (202-203).

heroism is an essential starting place for what I have tried to argue here:<sup>19</sup> that ten years before the *Discours* and twelve years after the *Querelle du Cid*, the poetry of *Andromède* can be read metatheatrically as a response both to the critique of verisimilitude Corneille endured during the 1630s and as a foreshadowing of the theory of going beyond verisimilitude that he will more modestly and carefully propound in his theoretical work of 1660.<sup>20</sup> As a happy by-product for Philippe Quinault and Jean-Baptiste Lully, a close reading of Corneille's machine play reveals it was a laboratory for lyrical tragedy that proved that in practice, so-called "classical" esthetics could not be reduced to the limited regularity formulated by dramatic theorists.

### Conclusion

Around the middle of the seventeenth century, when France began to see more and more fantastical feats materialize on stage, especially thanks to Cardinal Mazarin's importation of Italian architects and artists, the audience and critics were moderately delighted. Mythological subjects, despite their unrealistic nature, were accepted as a verisimilar source for tragic poets since Aristotle, though "regular" tragedy was supposed to place the most unlikely, surprising, or violent parts of the myth offstage, recounted instead in a *récit*. Ignoring this convention, opera displayed most of the action, violent, divine, or otherwise, on stage, albeit by following a strict adherence to the internal logic of its marvelous and mythological worlds. By the time Corneille theorized the marvelous elements of mythology in the *Discours*, myths were part of popular culture, and could well have been understood as part of the "vraisemblance merveilleuse" (Kintzler 142-143).<sup>21</sup> Before that, as we have seen, Corneille's *Andromède* served as a practical experiment for this new and acceptable translation of verisimilitude. As a musical machine tragedy, it had the advantage of be-

<sup>19</sup> Perry Gethner began this line of argument by suggesting *Andromède*'s lyricism (in its unabashed expression of interior emotions), its rethinking of the tragic hero to include a new definition of "générosité" (as pre-ordained and not self-generated), and its abundance of divine intervention, all pointed to an aspect of Corneille's genius that suggest he was moving in the direction of "operatic discourse." (64-65).

<sup>20</sup> As Joseph Harris argues, the theoretical works, "can certainly be read as an attempt to work through [Corneille's] early clash with authority—not only by proving his "regular" credentials to his critics, but also by wrestling their position of authority from them" (77).

<sup>21</sup> While understanding the stage's relationship to the "true" or the "real" is a critical part of Kintzler's discussion, her argument does not account for the importance of the spectator, as John D. Lyons explains in detail in *Kingdom of Disorder*, 39-41.

ing both a challenge to so-called “regular” tragedy and a French response to Italian opera, just recently introduced to the French stage. While many scholars have explored the significance of this play in the history of theater,<sup>22</sup> most have tended to concentrate on Corneille’s later, theoretical critique of his work in the *Examens* and the *Discours*. The main problem with this perspective is that in those works, Corneille often projects an image of himself as more “regular” than he proves to have been in practice, whereas already in his *Andromède* of 1650, Corneille laid the groundwork for a theory of verisimilitude meant to compliment an evolved theatrical practice filled with new machines and even music, often but not always balancing innovation with strategies based on ancient authority. In this way, he may not have written the first French opera, but he proved how elements we would now call “operatic” could be both believable (thanks to a new spectator) and related to ancient Greece and therefore classicist France, certainly paving the way for the first French operas nine years later.

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<sup>22</sup> See, in alphabetical order, Bolduc, Delmas in Corneille *Andromède*, Ecorcheville, Gethner, Gros, Guarino, Kintzler, Launay, and Powell. While several of these scholars mention *Andromède* as a transitional work before French opera, they use the theoretical work to justify their claims, especially the claim that Corneille hated music. As I show in this article, I think the work of *Andromède* itself paints a slightly different picture driven by the tension of the rules of verisimilitude, but perhaps also revealing a high tolerance for music and spectacular machines.

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