

THEATER AS MACHINE, THEATER OF MACHINES IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY
FRANCE

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ABSTRACT

Catherine A. Viano: Theater as Machine, Theater of Machines in Seventeenth-Century France
(Under the direction of Ellen R. Welch)

According to traditional historiography, seventeenth-century French theater is characterized by a pure, unified, classical and disciplined aesthetic known as Classicism. However, several theatrical pieces resist this Classical ideal with special effects and the use of theater machines. My dissertation examines this “spectacular aesthetic” that plays a fundamental role in theater production throughout the century. I show that theater machines were used across genres, in tragedies, comedies, tragi-comédies, comédie-ballets, ballets de cour and operas. The ubiquity of machine effects in all kinds of dramatic entertainment testifies to the power or popularity of the spectacular throughout the Classical period. This project also examines how playwrights and engineers use machines to stage powerful acts or perhaps undermine the authority behind those acts. My dissertation unfolds in three chapters, each devoted to exploring the efficacy of dramatic spectacle from aesthetic, critical and cultural early modern perspectives. By focusing on the value playwrights, machinists, and actors had for the effects theater machines produced, I will expand upon our understanding of how dramatists interpreted the range of affective responses to theater, including but not limited to Aristotle’s catharsis. Moreover, by comparing seventeenth-century approaches to the spectacular with more recent thinking about the role of technology in producing wondrous effects in entertainment, the dissertation compares seventeenth-century notions with today’s understandings of the affective responses to spectacle.

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INTRODUCTION

The tragedy with machines *La Cheute de Phaëton* (1639) by L’Hermitte de Vozelle opens with an address “A Qui Lit” in which the author exhibits a level of hubris comparable to that of the play’s mythological hero. Although he begins the preface with a modesty trope, (“c’est une production qui a plus besoin d’indulgence que de justice”), he then boasts:

Si j’avois peu combattre l’inclination que j’ay d’escrire, je n’aurois point produit cet ouvrage, & si j’avois peu vaincre les prieres de mes Amis je ne l’aurois point mis au jour. Excusez donc de grace les fautes que je n’ay faites que par foiblesse & par violence.”¹

In this self-presentation, the author cannot vanquish his burning creative ambition, despite the risk of failure.²

The play expands on the themes of creative desire and ambition introduced in this preface. After Jupiter’s son insults his lineage Phaeton resolves to visit his father the Sun. The goddess Diane promises to help him satisfy “le beau feu qui te brusle le sein.”³ With her help, Phaeton travels to the sky and meets the Sun, who describes to him in exquisite detail the finely manufactured treasures of heaven:

¹ L’Hermitte de Vozelle, *La Cheute de Phaëton*, (Paris: Chez Cardin Besongne, 1639).

² We do not know for sure who authored *La Chute de Phaëton* (1639). It is possible that Tristan l’Hermitte de Vozelle is the known playwright Tristan (François) l’Hermitte de Vozelle. However, the Parfait brothers claim that Tristan l’Hermitte de Vozelle is the brother of the playwright Tristan (François) l’Hermitte de Vozelle. They write: “Tristan l’Hermitte de Vozelle, Auteur dramatique, n’est pas connu que par la pièce suivante. *La Chute de Phaëton*, Tragédie, 1639.” The Parfait brothers then explain that Tristan (François) l’Hermitte de Vozelle authored the following original plays: *La Mariamne* (1636), *Panthée* (1637), *La Folie du Sage* (1644), *La Mort de Sénèque* (1644), *La Mort de Chrispe, ou Les Malheurs Domestiques du Grand Constantin* (1645), *Le Parasite* (1654). Tristan (François) l’Hermitte de Vozelle also augmented and added to the work of *Amarillis, ou La Célimene* (1652) by Jean Rotrou. Claude Parfaict and François Parfaict, *Dictionnaire des théâtres de Paris*, Tome cinquième, (Paris: Chez Lambert, 1756), 564.

³ L’Hermitte de Vozelle, *La Chute de Phaëton*, 19.

Là sur des trosnes d'or la Nature & le Temps,
Achevent tous les jours cent projets importants
Là mille diamans viendront à l'imporveuë
Te satisfaire l'ame et de frappant la veuë;
Mais tout cela n'est rien à l'esgal du tresor
Qui brille sur mon char, le timon en est d'or...
Mais mon enfant suy-moy, cet artifice extreme
T'apprendra quel il est beaucoup mieux que moy-mesme."⁴

The dialogue inflames Phaeton's desire to see these marvels. Although he recognizes his error, denouncing "Guide Aveugle & Brutal, Ambitieux Desir," Phaeton drives the Sun's chariot and falls.⁵

With its compelling story of burning desire to see marvelous creations, and the tragic consequences of that desire, *La Cheute de Phaëton* is a good starting point for exploring seventeenth-century France's ambivalent attitude toward spectacle. Several theatrical critics of this time denigrate the spectacular dramatic aesthetic. For example, in his *Poétique* published in the same year as *La Chute de Phaëton*, Hippolyte-Jules Pilet de la Mesnardière explicitly denounces plays with theater machines: "Les Ouvrages dont la beauté est attachée aux Machines, sont des corps défectueux."⁶ Comparing spectacular pieces to defective bodies, he implies that special effects do not fit in seamlessly with theatrical illusion. According to La Mesnardière, theatrical machinery fails to conform to tragic aesthetics because the decorators or machinists lack understanding of how theater should work: "nos Décorateurs de Scènes sont bien loin de sçavoir l'Art de les composer d'eux-mesmes selon le dessein de la Fable, puisque mesme ils ne sçavent pas les choses les plus ordinaires qui

⁴ Ibid., 31-32.

⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁶ Hippolyte-Jules Pilet de la Mesnardière, *La Poétique*, (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 2011), 419.

concernent le Théâtre.”⁷ La Mesnardière suggests that theater machines can only interfere with the unfolding of a perfect, unified action on stage due to the machinists’ ignorance. Theater machines can be visually pleasurable: “Il est vrai que ces artifices [machines] plaisent quelquefois à la veüe”; but they break the illusion of representation as reality.⁸

Similarly critical of those who incorporate theater machines into productions, François Hédelin, dit l’abbé d’Aubignac also denounces the use of theatrical machinery:

En un mot, tous les effets d’une puissance surnaturelle, tous les miracles de la Nature, tous les Chefs-d’oeuvre de l’art, et tous les caprices de l’imagination ont formé ces beautés et ces ornements, qui firent tant de fois les plus doux amusements des Grecs et des Romains... bien que la Cour ne les ait pas désagréables, et que le peuple fasse foule à toutes les occasions de voir quelque chose de semblable, je ne conseillerais pas à nos Poètes de s’occuper souvent à faire de ces Pièces de Théâtre à Machines: Nos Comédiens ne sont ni assez opulents, ni assez généreux pour en faire la dépense; et leurs Décorateurs ne sont pas assez habiles pour y réussir : j’ajoute que les Auteurs mêmes ont été si peu soigneux de s’instruire en la connaissance de ces vieilles merveilles.⁹

A contemporary of La Mesnardière, d’Aubignac depicts the aesthetic of theater machines as outdated-- “ces vieilles merveilles,” and he denigrates the work of actors and decorators.

D’Aubignac privileges the dramatic taste of his contemporaries, focused on the work of the poet, over those of the Greeks and Romans, who were amused by special effects.

La Mesnardière’s and d’Aubignac’s taste for perfect tragedy builds on earlier expressions of dramatic theory that underlined the importance of dramatic verisimilitude in effective theater. In his “Lettre sur la règle des vingt-quatre heures,” critic Jean Chapelain articulates the importance of the complete absence of artificiality on stage to ensure that spectators are completely convinced by the representation:

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 418.

⁹ François Hédelin, dit l’abbé d’Aubignac, *La Pratique du Théâtre*, ed. Hélène Baby, (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), 484-485.

on ne cache la personne du poète que pour mieux surprendre l'imagination du spectateur et pour le mieux conduire sans obstacle à la créance que l'on veut qu'il prenne en ce qui lui est représenté. A ce dessein seul la judicieuse antiquité, non contente des paroles qu'elle mettait dans la bouche de ses historions, et des habits convenables au rôle que chacun d'eux jouait, fortifiait l'énergie de la représentation, la démarche pleine d'art et la prononciation harmonieuse, le tout pour rendre la feinte pareille à la vérité même.¹⁰

Chapelain explains that a poet's true glory comes from the invisibility of his efforts; the spectators forget that they are even watching a play at all. The minute a spectator stops to reflect on what he or she is watching, the experience is disrupted and the piece is therefore unsuccessful. Chapelain further elaborates this narrow interpretation of *vraisemblance* in his critique of Corneille's *Le Cid* in 1636; in the context of the play, it is inconceivable that a young woman would marry her father's murderer. Through the contributions of critics and academicians such as Chapelain, the critical notion of *vraisemblance* developed over a period of time, and it became for some experts, such as La Mesnardière and d'Aubignac, a restrictive category which precluded the use of machines.

Despite such disparagement by critics and academicians, and even despite technological limitations, plays with machine effects remained popular throughout the seventeenth century. *La Cheute de Phaëton* was one of the first plays with a machine to appear on the seventeenth-century stage. Spectacular productions based on mythological tales increased in number and in popularity throughout the century. Italian machinist Giacomo Torrelli's arrival in France inspired several high-profile productions including *Orfeo* in 1647 and Pierre Corneille's *Andromède* in 1650.

As a dramatist who wrote both machine plays for royal commission and "regular" tragedies for the Parisian stage, Corneille worked to reconcile the spectacular genre with neo-

¹⁰Jean Chapelain, "Lettre sur la règle des vingt-quatre heures," in *Opuscules critiques*, ed. by Anne Duprat, (Genève: Droz, 2007), 224.

Classical aesthetics. For example, in the *Argument for Andromède* he declares: “elles [ces machines] en [dans cette tragédie] font le noeud et le dénouement, et y sont si nécessaires que vous n’en sauriez retrancher aucune, que vous ne fassiez tomber tout l’édifice.”¹¹ Here, Corneille adheres to the neo-Aristotelian notion of the primacy of plot by suggesting that the play’s action would crumble without the use of theater machines. Despite his efforts to rationalize the aesthetics of machine plays, Corneille maintained that they were inferior to drama that relied on poetry alone. A work such as *Andromède*, “n’est que pour les yeux.”¹² In his commentary on Corneille’s 1669 machine play, *La Toison d’Or*, Samuel Chappuzeau echoes this sentiment:

Mais enfin ces beaux spectacles ne sont que pour les yeux et pour les oreilles, ils ne touchent pas le fond de l’âme, et l’on peut dire au retour que l’on veu et ouï, mais non pas que l’on a esté instruit. D’où l’on peut conclure, ce me semble, que la Comedie italienne n’a pas tout à fait le même objet que la nôtre de divertir et instruire, ce qui est la perfection du Poëme Dramatique.¹³

Chappuzeau adopts Corneille’s conviction that spectacularity is a lesser form of drama, one that is only sensationally pleasurable at best because it does not engage the intellect.

What accounts for the persistence of machine plays in the seventeenth-century repertoire in spite of such critical disdain? Although critical texts and prescriptive works on dramaturgical poetics fail to account for the appeal of spectacular plays, machine plays themselves often contain the seeds of an alternative “machine aesthetics” to explain the power and value of this kind of drama. *La Cheute* begins to suggest the dramatic appeal of spectacle that was not verisimilarly perfect but nonetheless frightening, impressive or awe-

¹¹ Pierre Corneille, “Andromède,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 of 3, ed. by Georges Couton, (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 448.

¹²Ibid., 449

¹³ Samuel Chappuzeau, *Le théâtre françois*, (Germany: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 2009), 86.

inspiring due to the use of theater machine effects and the creative expression of the playwright. For example, although the machine--the chariot--in this play is undeniably a tool of divine authority, it also functions to remind the audience of how humanity can disrupt divine will through its imposition on natural order. As the sun describes to Phaeton what he will see upon his chariot he declares:

La mere humide & froide environne la terre,
Et l'air humide & chaud prend le rang du tonnerre,
Au dessus de l'ouvrage on void cent feus errans
Suivre un mesme sentier par des tous differens,
L'artisan a reduit sous de petits espaces
Leurs orbres, leurs maisons, leurs rencontres, leurs places,
Leurs destours, leurs aspects, leurs exaltations,
Leurs routes, leurs progresz, & leurs conjonctions ;
D'un autre part l'ouvrier d'un burin admirable,
Montre ce que la terre a de plus remarquable.¹⁴

Comparing the world's creator to an admirable artisan, the rhetoric of the passage conflates natural and manufactured wonders, the stage set and the elements of nature it represents. It disrupts the dramatic illusion by calling attention to the creation of the stage design and by creating a desire to see it. It also places man-made special effects on the level of divine creation.

In the work that follows, I explore how several seventeenth-century French playwrights understood the dramatic function of spectacular elements by examining their plays and paratexts. Like l'Hermite de Vozelle's *La Cheute de Phaëton*, the pieces examined here have been marginalized by traditional scholarly discourse on the period because they use special effects and stage technology. I question: If neo-Aristotelian dramatic critics deemed special effects to be unnecessary for or extraneous to good drama then why did so many playwrights use them? With this query in mind, I examine the variety of ways in which

¹⁴ L'Hermite de Vozelle, *La Chute de Phaëton*, (Paris: Chez Cardin Besongne, 1639), 32.

theater was deemed to be effective in the seventeenth century, with particular attention to what I will call the “machine aesthetic.” As I will show, seventeenth-century French theater included a diverse array of dramatic styles, from strictly neo-Aristotelian tragedies that purported to absorb spectators in a verisimilar illusion, to overtly theatrical works brimming with special effects. This diversity of dramatic styles entailed varied understandings of how audiences responded emotionally to theater. Certainly, most dramaturgical writing focused on tragedy’s creation of pity and terror, expounding on Aristotle’s account of catharsis. Playwrights and producers of machine plays, however, described other forms of spectator response rooted in experiences of awe or wonder.

Finally, early modern playwrights and engineers used theater machines to reflect on the power of art. On stage, spectacular effects were often used to represent the power of mythological divinities, magicians, or others with supernatural abilities. Meanwhile, machine plays were often initially commissioned by the court to demonstrate the technological prowess of the kingdom as a reflection of monarchical might. To what extent did the machinist, with his ability to create awe inspiring special effects, serve as a substitute for divine or royal power?

This dissertation aims to establish a seventeenth-century theory of machine-effects. Building on bibliographical and archival work on machine plays by H el ene Visentin and Jan Clarke, I analyze the aesthetic of plays with machines and situate these aesthetics within the context of contemporary dramatic theory and practice. By focusing on the *value* playwrights, machinists, and actors attributed to machine-effects, I argue that some early modern playwrights included “awe” or “enchantment” in their understanding of the range of affective responses theater could produce.

My argument begins by tracing the value of these effects back to their earliest origins in sixteenth-century masquerades and courtly ballets. My first chapter shows how the theatrical space of “the grotto” gave rise to a mythology of the monstrous power of creativity. Across several theatrical genres, the grotto served as a space for the spectacular and for elements that resisted the imposition of Classical aesthetics as they began to gain dominance in seventeenth-century French theater. This chapter first examines grotto scenes, grotesque figures, and theater machines that were sensationally ominous, frightening, and awe-inspiring in *Ballet de la délivrance de Renaud* (1617) and *Ballet de Tancrede* (1619). Next, I examine the way Corneille retools the frightening space of the grotto in *L'Illusion comique* and *Médée* to show the awe-inspiring power of theatrical illusion that appears when the poet or the sorceress expresses his or her creative agency. More than any other playwright of the time, Corneille understood that the grotesque aesthetic championed the power of creativity and artifice, allowing irregular and monstrous forms, making space for the artistic power of unpredictability. In fact, Corneille often chose grottoes as the settings for his plays, including *Médée*, *L'Illusion comique*, *Andromède* and *La Toison d'or*, inspiring horror, but also awe, through the spectacle of the magician or sorcerer who has conjured up the illusion within the grotto's space. To that end, this chapter re-examines the grotto as a metaphor for theater and the magician or sorcerer in the grotto as an avatar for the artist.

Chapter two turns its attention to a more practical and pragmatic discourse about the power of spectacle and machine effects that began in the 1640s. Narrative texts called *desseins* which often accompanied mid-seventeenth-century plays with theater machines show the centrality of spectacle and wonder to the Classical period's theatrical culture. *Desseins* are descriptive accounts of the pleasurable effects of the visual and musical parts of

the performance, and they are an excellent source for understanding the aesthetics of theatrical machinery. The purpose of this chapter is to extract an aesthetics of machine effects from the *dessein* genre, which have never been studied as a corpus until now. This chapter focuses on the two earliest surviving *desseins*, one for Chapoton's *La Grande journée des machines: La Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers* in 1647 and the other for Rotrou's *La Grande Piece des machines de la Naissance d'Hercule* in 1649. From these largely overlooked archival texts, we can develop an explicit theory of machine effects and the multiple affective responses to those effects by the spectators.

My final chapter examines an implicit theory of theater machine effects by examining meta-theatrical machine plays. In these works, the reaction of fictional spectators to theatrical machinery on stage illuminates how playwrights may have understood the response of theater audiences to similar spectacular elements. In Rotrou's *Le Véritable Saint Genest*, Brosse's *Les Songes des hommes esveillez* and Thomas Corneille's *La Devineresse*, we see that playwrights represented a range of spectator responses to machine effects, including confusion, fear, and religious experiences. These plays, through their meta-theatrical staging of spectator characters, offer another source for analyzing seventeenth-century assumptions about the effects of machine-enhanced spectacle on viewers.

Ultimately, this dissertation aims to show that playwrights and producers used theater machines, in spite of the dramatic theorists that deemed them unsuitable, due to their powerful dramatic effects. Exploring how writers invested machines with the ability to provoke wonder, awe, amazement, fright, and horror, and delightful surprise in audiences, the dissertation adds nuance to our understanding of seventeenth-century notions of affective responses to theater. By proving that the spectacular was not aesthetic interloper to the

period's dramatic scene, we can reexamine the Classical canon to include alternative works that were also popular at the time.

CHAPTER 1: THE GROTTO, THE GROTESQUE, AND THE SPECTACULAR

Ballet des deux Magiciens qui par leurs experts enchantemens se sont resolus de faire admirer leurs sciences, & de faire advoüer que la Nature pour vue qu'elle soit aydee par l'art, produit des effets beaucoup plus admirables, que lors qu'elle est contrainte à travailler d'elle mesme, & sans aucune assistance.

[The ballet of two magicians who by their expert spells resolve to make others admire their sciences, and attest that nature when aided by art, produces much more admirable effects, then when it works alone, without any help.]

-Sujet de ballet, *Ballet des deux magiciens*, A Paris, chez David Chambellan, demeurant rue de la Harpe, à l'enseigne de l'Escu de France, 1636.

The word “grotto” comes from the Latin word *crypta* and the Italian word *grotta*. It is linked by history to the word grotesque.¹ In the fifteenth century a group of Romans unearthed Nero's *Domus Aurea* (Golden House), a set of rooms decorated with frescoes depicting fantastical, serpentine ornamentation.² The discoverers named the frescoes “grotesques” because they were found in grotto-like structures, as the rooms of the *Domus Aurea* had become over time. The grotto's cave-like exterior hides what is so special about it on the inside; the grotto is a sanctuary for artistic ingenuity and dissimulation. The provocative frescoes inside the *Domus Aurea* featured hybrid, fantastical characters, such as an animal that is half tiger and half snake, and they inspired early modern artists with their irregular forms.³ Beyond providing a new aesthetic for artistic production, the grotto also

¹ Hans Adler, “Le grotesque et le sublime : Deux aspects de l'impossible au XVIIIe siècle.” In *Le sublime et le grotesque*, edited by Jan Miernowski (Genève: Droz, 2014), 216-17.

² Isabelle Ost, “Introduction,” in *Le grotesque: Théorie, généalogie, figures*, directed by Isabelle Ost, Pierre Piret, and Laurent Van Eynde, (Bruxelles: Publications des Facultés universitaires SaintLouis, 2004), 8.

³ Connelly writes, “At a minimum, the *Domus Aurea* grotesques revealed another form of classicism, one radically different than that which first inspired the artists of the Renaissance. To some, these bizarre

became a kind of metaphor for the union of natural and human creation. In the theater, in particular, grottoes became a key setting for sometimes monstrous, sometimes wondrous fusions of nature and artifice. These fusions are key to understanding the machine aesthetic because they show how the spectacular troubles the boundary between human artistry and divine creation, between the dazzling and the horrifying, between wonder and terror.

Although the words “grotto” and “grotesque” are etymologically related, they also share associations because artists relate them both to ornamentation. When created together and separately, grottoes and grotesque forms often symbolize artistic fancy and whimsy. As Frances Connelly explains, “the abject, the monstrous, and the demonic are the expressions that contemporary viewers most readily associate with the grotesque.”⁴ In the early modern context, however, the grotesque aesthetic often relates back to artistic virtuosity. Indeed, early modern decorative grottoes in both theater and gardens exhibit a nuanced grotesque aesthetic, one that is not exclusively frightening, horrific, or repulsive, but also delightful, humorous, and awe-inspiring. Furetière’s 1690 dictionary defines “grotte” as “Creux large ou profond qui se trouve fait naturellement dans une montagne, ou dans un rocher...Grotte se dit aussi des petits bastiments artificiels qu’on fait dans les jardins, qui imitent les grottes naturelles, qu’on orne de coquillages, et ou on fait plusieurs jets d’eau.”⁵ Early modern architects such as Salomon de Caus decorated gardens with artificial grottoes and adorned

improvisations seemed a complete contradiction of the core values of the classical tradition; to others, they opened up exciting new possibilities for reinventing the tradition in startling ways.” Frances Connelly, *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture: The Image at Play* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 49.

⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁵ Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel* vol. 2 (1690; Paris: SNL-Le Robert, 1978).

them with grotesque forms such as automatons of mythological figures.⁶ For example, in one of De Caus's grotto designs the mountain god Tmolus from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* plays a mechanical harp in his grotto activated via organs and a wheel.⁷ In another design, Orpheus is automated to play music.⁸ Although De Caus's mechanical forms are intended for gardens grottoes, T.E. Lawrenson likens them to stage machines: "[De Caus] seems conscious of no theatrical application of his art, and yet some of his contrivances are theatrical and undoubtedly intended for use in fête or court ballet."⁹ In theater, machine effects often originate in grottoes, where sorcerers conjure up spells inside the dark, hidden space.

The adjective "grotesque" is similarly associated with excessive artifice. Furetière defines it as "quelquefois subit. Figure capricieuse de Peintre, de Graveur, de Sculpteur, qui a quelque chose de ridicule d'extravagant, de monstrueux, telles que sont celles dont on pare les grottes." Furetière identifies the grotesque by its excessive quality and its surprising effect. The grotesque and the supernatural events inside theatrical grottoes feature creation that is not traditionally Classical. Like the serpentine shapes of the *Domus Aurea*, it lacks unity and order and goes against the rules of nature presumed by Classicism.

⁶ Salomon de Caus. *Les Raison des forces mouvantes*. 4 livres (Paris: C. Sevestre, 1624), livre second Probleme XXIII. de Caus adorned a garden replica of Mount Parnassus with grottoes in his description, "Desseing d'un Mont Parnasse, ou l'on pourra faire quelques grottes dedans." De Caus writes, "Ce Mont Parnasse est fort à propos pour orner un Jardin Royal, ou il y auroit abundance d'eau, & dedans le dit Mont, l'on pourroit faire quelques grottes artificielles."

⁷ Ibid., livre second. Probleme XV. De Caus describes Mount Tmolus and the machines inside the grotto: "cette fable peut estre fort bien representee, en la grote qui pourroit estre dedans le dit mont Tmolus: j'en ay mis icy un desseing à propos pour cest effect, & quant aux machines pour représenter la musique de la Lire, elle se sera avec deux registres de tuyaux d'orgues sçavoir l'un d'un trois pieds bouche, & l'autre en son octave ouvert, comme sera enseigné au troisieme livre, &...le mouvement des figures se pourra faire facilement par le moyen de la rouë musicale..."

⁸ Ibid. livre second, On the automaton of Orphée, De Caus writes that the figures moves to replicate the playing of music: "C'este fable d'Orfee, vient encores fort à propos, pour une grotte, laquelle se pourra faire dans la grande figure precedente, & le mouvement de la Musique, se fera derriere la figure, en sorte qu'il semble, que se soit elle qui jouë." Probleme XVII

⁹ T.E. Lawrenson, *The French Stage in the Seventeenth Century* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1957), 174.

The grotto is a commonly represented space in many plays and spectacles that incorporate the spectacular aesthetic. This chapter investigates how the grotto functioned as a literal and metaphorical space of reflection on the spectacular, human creation, and artifice. Theoretically, playwrights re-appropriate the reception of the whimsical designs of the *Domus Aurea* in their speculations that the irregular creations emanating from grottoes would inspire fright, shock, awe, repulsion or delight. Theater machines often accompany this aesthetic to heighten the sensorial experience of the audience.

Many seventeenth-century French critics derided the grotesque aesthetic in various forms of art and literature. For example, in *l'Art poétique* Nicolas Boileau denounces the irregular verses and excessive descriptions of early modern poets such as Saint-Amant and Scudéry. He writes:

La plupart, emportés d'une fougé insensée,
Toujours loin du droit sens vont chercher leur pensée
Ils croiraient s'abaisser, dans leurs vers monstrueux,
S'ils pensaient ce qu'un autre a pu penser comme eux.
Évitons ces excès: laissons à l'Italie,
De tous ces faux brillans l'éclatante folie.
Tout doit tendre au bons sens: mais pour y parvenir, Le chemin est glissant et pénible
à tenir.¹⁰

With the image of a slippery road, Boileau commands discipline and caution from neo-Classical poets; they must ignore their creative urges to be excessive and whimsical in the name of order and reason. His critique of the “brillans” and “l'éclatante,” moreover, announces the suspicion of the excess of spectacle that fed the condemnation of theater machines.¹¹ Theorists of theater presented a similar story about the improvement of style

¹⁰ Nicolas Boileau, *L'Art Poétique*, (Genève: Slatkine reprints, 1970), ed. Victor Delaporte, Chant I.

¹¹ Some key words and expressions poets used to describe the effect of machines include “les choses merveilleuses,” “éclat,” and “tant de plaisir à la veüe,” among many others. Étienne Gros, ed., “Naissance d'Hercule ou Les Sosies de Rotrou transformés e pièce à machines,” *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres en Aix*, XVI, (Aix-en-Provence: Imprimerie Universitaire E. Fourcine, 1932). 8.

through curbing the excesses of the past. In *La Pratique du théâtre*, for example, d'Aubignac criticizes the ancient tragedies of the Greek poet Thespis, the father of tragedy according to Aristotle. According to d'Aubignac, although Thespis's tragedies began to focus on character-driven plot, they remained inferior to later tragedy because they continued to have a chorus that performed songs, grotesque dances, and farces in the intermissions.

D'Aubignac writes:

Et quand dans les derniers siècles, la tragédie s'est relevée sans toutes ces bouffoneries, chants de musique, ny danse grotesque, s'est-on jamais avisé de dire, qu'elle estoit par ce defect tres-imparfaite, et qu'on l'eust rétablie dans son premier lustre, en luy rendant ses ridicules intermédes ?¹²

The rhetorical question undermines Thespis's authority as an ancient poet; it has the effect of showing the reader that more recent tragedies are less "imparfaite" than those of the Greek playwright, which contained "bouffoneries." Like Boileau, d'Aubignac shuns the grotesque and privileges a dramatic taste based on regularity, to be evaluated exclusively by an educated elite.

In spite of their embodiment of artistic creation incompatible with neo-classical restraints and dramatic verisimilar illusion, grotesque forms, enabled by theater machines, appeared frequently on the seventeenth-century French stage. Throughout this period of aesthetic transition, the grotto remained a space of excess, irregularity, and creativity – the space where machine effects can take place. This chapter explores the interrelations of the machine aesthetic and the grotesque throughout the seventeenth century in several theatrical genres. It first examines grotto scenes, grotesque figures, and theater machines that were sensationally ominous, frightening, and awe-inspiring in (pre-neoclassical) early seventeenth-century *ballets de cour*. The court spectacle, especially the ballet, was a key site for the

¹² François Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac, *La Pratique du théâtre*, ed. Hélène Baby, (Paris: Champion, 2001), 272-273.

development of special effects because of the wealth and resources available. In the early seventeenth century, the influence of Italianate style on the French ballet favored the use of special effects to evoke a grotesque aesthetic.¹³ The discussions of grottoes and the grotesque in *Ballet de la délivrance de Renaud* (1617) and *Ballet de Tancredi* (1619) set up the tradition of representing these elements in dramatic spectacles. Next, this chapter demonstrates the way Corneille retools the frightening space of the grotto in *L'Illusion comique* and *Médée* for sometimes delightful and sometimes frightening dramatic effects. More than any other playwright of the time, Corneille understood that the grotesque aesthetic championed the power of creativity and artifice, allowing irregular and monstrous forms, making space for the artistic power of unpredictability. Furthermore, Corneille's reworking of tropes often found in the *ballets de cour* show how the spectacular aesthetic affords artistic agency to playwrights when applied to straight drama, even at a time when dramatic rules of decorum gained more and more favor. In fact, Corneille often chose grottoes as the settings for his plays, including *Médée*, *Andromède* and *La Toison d'or*, inspiring horror, but also awe, through the spectacle of the magician or sorcerer who has conjured up the illusion within the grotto's space. To that end, this chapter re-examines the grotto as a metaphor for theater and the magician or sorcerer in the grotto as an avatar for the playwright. Focusing on the grotto as a fictional space in which magical or wondrous things are permitted to happen helps us to understand the mutability of the machine aesthetic that is so closely interwoven with the grotesque. As Jacques Scherer shows, the strict tenets of Classicism take shape

¹³Marie-Claude Canova-Green implies that the "shared" spectacular aesthetic, originating in Italy, and then passed back and forth between the French and English courts was the aesthetic of the grotesque. Canova-Green writes: "parce qu'ils (les antimasques) sont la reconnaissance implicite, sinon explicite, de l'existence d'un modèle français qui vient ainsi concurrencer, et parfois remplacer les modèles italiens traditionnels, ces emprunts par le masque concrétisent les aspirations de Richelieu ou de Louis XIV à une hégémonie française dans le domaine artistique comme politique." Canova-Green, *La Politique-spectacle au grand siècle: les rapports franco-anglais*, (Paris: Papers on Seventeenth-Century French Literature, 1993), 26.

during Corneille's career.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the public's appetite for spectacle, as it appeared in the *ballets de cour* (dancing, singing, elaborate costumes and machine effects), remained.¹⁵ Looking at the space of the grotto and the grotesque aesthetic in the context of this tension reveals the continuity of a spectacular theatrical aesthetic that never lost favor, in spite of a budding dramatic theory that deemed it controversial.

The Grotto and the Grotesque in Early Seventeenth-century *ballets de cour*

Seventeenth-century machine theater has roots in medieval and Renaissance public theater in representations called *mystères* which used tapestries, music, and machines to depict biblical stories or tales honoring the king.¹⁶ In these plays, machines often enhanced representations of hell, associating machines with a dark, grotesque aesthetic. Indeed, Margaret McGowan's study of the ballet *Paradis d'amour* from 1572 shows that the audience expected equally spectacular displays of heaven and hell based on *Représentations de la Passion* from earlier in the century.¹⁷ Furthermore, T. E. Lawrenson explains the parallel between the machinists of the *mystère* and the baroque stage. He writes:

A mystery machine was called a *secret*, and the person later referred to as a *machiniste* was a 'facteur ou conducteur de secrets.' He was supplied before the play

¹⁴Jacques Scherer writes, "On assistera au cours du siècle au renforcement de la tendance à l'unité de lieu qu'imposera la doctrine classique, mais aussi au développement de la passion du spectacle, qui ne s'avouera jamais vaincue. Ces deux forces, après avoir lutté assez confusément pendant la période pré-classique, concluront une sorte de partage de zones d'influence : la tragédie éliminera presque tous ses éléments spectaculaires pour s'efforcer d'observer l'unité de lieu, tandis que les beautés de spectacle s'épanouiront dans la «pièces à machines» et dans l'opéra." *La Dramaturgie classique en France* (Paris: Nizet, 1950), 160.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ T.E. Lawrenson, *The French Stage in the Seventeenth Century*, 19.

¹⁷McGowan describes the spectacular displays of heaven and hell in *Paradis d'amour*: "the lower end of the hall was divided into two parts, separated by a river with Caron and his boat: on the right, paradise was defended by the king and his two brothers; on the left, hell was filled with frightful spectres and devils flitting about a great wheel which turned continuously." In a footnote on the same page she writes, "spectators would have been very familiar with such depictions of heaven and hell; they frequently appeared in *Représentations de la Passion*, such as the one performed in Paris on 13 June 1539." Margaret McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance: European Fashion, French Obsession*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 88.

with a book in which were written all the requirements of the show in terms of machinery: the ‘fainctes’... His tasks were not a wit less varied than were to be those of his baroque counterpart: amongst them would be the fabrication of all sorts of animals, souls, or even plants. Many of the animals had to be mechanically actuated. Flight, ascent and descent, appearance and disappearance, metamorphosis, all were present.¹⁸

Lawrenson’s description of the “*machiniste*” as a “conducteur de secrets” is applicable as well to magicians and sorcerers of theatrical grottoes in the seventeenth century, for the machinist actuates the special effects conjured up by the sorcerer or magician in the magical grotto during the performance. Similar to the variety of scenes Lawrenson describes in the *mystères*, several plays and ballets with theater machines in the seventeenth century contain scenes with underground caves and grottoes, and the various tonalities of these scenes range from dazzling displays of artistry--the proscenium arch covering of the Salle du Bourbon in *Ballet de Noces de Pélée et de Tétis* (1654) is decorated as a large grotto opening, so that the entire production appears to take place inside--to the poignant death of such creative fecundity--the sorcerer Ismen’s rise to the stage from the hell below, in *Ballet de Tancrede* in 1619--that can inspire awe, dread, and fear.

The ballet remained a genre conducive to machine effects throughout the seventeenth century. The court often patronized engineers who innovated stage technology that was later exported to urban theater. Scholarship has typically characterized the machine effects of ballet as related to the projection of power through evoking wonder.¹⁹ While theater machines certainly added to a noble aesthetic in ballet and theater in the seventeenth century, they were more often used to depict shadowy, spooky, monstrous grotesqueries, especially in

¹⁸T.E. Lawrenson, *The French Stage in the Seventeenth Century*, 19.

¹⁹Stephen Orgel explains how the machinery in the English masque fits perfectly into the illusion of divine grace and royal order displayed on stage. Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 87. In the context of *ballets de cour*, Margaret McGowan explains that theater machines were the integral component to the political allegory depicted in *Ballet de Madame* in 1615. Margaret McGowan, *L’Art du ballet de cour en France (1580-1643)*, 89-90.

the early decades of the century. Through closely examining both theatrical grottoes and the grotesque, as they often appear together in courtly ballets, we can better understand and appreciate the role of horror and repulsion in spectacle. In the context of the ballet, the dramatic effects of spectacularly spooky and grotesque creations made on stage in theatrical grottoes at the hand of evil, magical forces make the good forces that defeat them seem more magnificent in the end. Furthermore, the monstrous in some ways is more dazzling, requiring more artistry and more ingenious technology. For example, in *Pratique pour fabriquer scenes et machines de theatre* (1638) Nicolà Sabbatini describes the complicated execution of making hell appear on stage from an opening in the stage floor. The machinist emphasizes that the effect requires four trustworthy men, “de bonnes gens, mettant zèle et honneur à bien faire,” as well as several torches, and techniques using wax to prevent the pitch or resin from exiting the pots holding the flames.²⁰ Sabbatini articulates the careful timing required for the lighting of the wicks when hell opens from the stage floor and the various ways to tend to the flame during the scene. In a final warning Sabbatini reiterates that the effect “ne doivent-elles être exécutées par des personnes sottes et balourdes.”²¹ From Sabbatini’s instructions, we see the care with which machinists executed macabre motifs on stage. Requiring significant resources, time, and energy to execute, grotesque effects were clearly highly valued by the artists who employed them.

In addition, grottoes often decorate the stage of ballets that use theater machines to enhance monstrous or grotesque forms for a frightening and pleasurable, dazzling effect. A key example of this appears in the *Ballet de Tancrède* first performed at the Parisian court on

²⁰ Nicolà Sabbatini, *Pratique pour fabriquer scenes et machines de théâtre*, translated by Melles Maria, Renee Canavaggia and M. Louis Jouvet, (Paris: Ravenne chez Piero de’ Paoli et Gio. Battista Giovanelli, Imprimeurs de la Cour, 1638), 105.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

February 12, 1619 in the Salle du Bourbon at the Louvre, to celebrate the marriage of Louis XIII's sister Christine.²² Based upon an episode of Tasso's epic *Jerusalem Delivered*, the ballet recounts the love story between the Christian knight Tancred and the beautiful pagan woman named Chlorinda, who is also a warrior from an enemy camp. The ballet begins in the sorcerer Ismen's grotto where he conjures up the spirits of hell during an incantation to Pluto. Various sound and visual effects enhance the impression of the grotto as a space of fear in this ballet for a spectacular dramatic experience.

For the audience, Ismen's incantation to Pluto is like a special effect in the way his voice and movement invoke a supernatural event. In this "relation" of the *Ballet de Tancred*, Scipion de Gramont, court secretary and diplomat to King Louis XIII, writes:

Sur le devant de la forest vit Ismen grã Magicié qui s'eslevoit insensiblement par un trou dessus le theatre cõme s'il venoit du profõd de l'enfer; affreux en son aspect, la teste en feu un livre à la main gauche, & une verge à la droitcte... En cest equipage parut cet enchanteur, & d'une voix effroyable chanta ceste invocation.²³

Gramont's impression that Ismen rises "cõme s[i]" (as if) from hell suggests a spectator response of fright. A trap door created on stage makes the special effect of Ismen's rise from below possible.²⁴ Gramont's opening simile and description of Ismen's voice as frightening both contribute to the impression of the hole below the stage as a space of evil and fear in this ballet.

²² Margaret McGowan. *L'Art du ballet de cour en France: 1581- 1643*, 118-119.

²³ Scipion de Gramont. *Relation du grand ballet du Roy, dance en la salle du Louvre le 12 fevrier 1619, sur l'aventure de Tancred en la Forest enchantée*. (Paris: Par Jean Sara, ruë saint Jean de Beauua devant les Escholles de Decret, 1619), 10.

²⁴ Margaret McGowan. *L'Art du ballet de cour en France: 1581- 1643*, 128.

Librettist Porchères's opening verses for the first incantation also contribute to the use of the magician's voice as a special effect and point to evocations of an unsettling spectator response. For Ismen's incantation Porchères writes:

Toy Pluton, qui regis l'infernelle caverne,
Et vous Juges affreux, d'implacable courroux
Demons, hostes cruels des gouffes de l'averne
Accordez à ma voix, je vous invoque tous.
Donnez toute l'horreur dedans de l'Enfer enclose.²⁵

The apostrophe to Pluto conjures the specter of the underworld god and his demons on stage. When Ismen commands the demons to "give all the horror," he signposts to the audience the horrified response they should have to the spectacle that follows. Porchères identifies hell through metaphor, as if to make space for all the diverse forms of evil existing there; through periphrasis, Porchères's verses describe hell with depth, "des gouffes," calling a veritable pastiche of evil to the stage. Using imperative commands to express Ismen's power, the poet evokes a rupture between the natural world and the underworld that unleashes wrath.

While Ismen's voice is itself a sound effect in the first incantation, his character describes other frightening sound effects to depict his power in the second incantation.

Porchères writes:

Vous autres défenseurs du dedans et des rives,
Dedans cette Forest disposez tous de rang,
Animez ses oiseaux de mille voix plaintives,
Ses vents de longs soupirs, & ses arbres de sang.²⁶

Although we lack evidence about what kinds of real sound effects may have been used in this scene, the imagery in this passage evokes a morass of disturbing and unsettling sounds for

²⁵ Scipion de Gramont. *Relation du grand ballet du Roy, dance en la salle du Louvre le 12 fevrier 1619, sur l'aventure de Tancredi en la Forest enchantée*, 11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

the audience. Paradoxically, Porchères's description of frightening and lingering sounds is both a digression from the plot and an engagement with what happens next in the story, a battle. In other words, the verses disengage from the plot by relaying the sense impressions of the sound effects in the present moment, but these same sound effects also foreshadow the violence to come. Porchères's verses show that the evocations of a certain spectator response through imagery serve to move the story along. In this way, the performance is further subsumed by the magician's evil.

While Ismen's voice both delivers and describes sound effects in his incantation scenes, thunder machines and fireworks are the sound effects that enhance the spectator experience in the battle scene between the Christian knights and Ismen's monsters. Margaret McGowan points out that fireworks were used for the first time on stage in this ballet, and Gramont's *relation* describes the sound effects and the intended audience response to them.²⁷ He writes:

Alors on ouït des grands bruits, hurlemens & rugissemes avec tonnerres & esclairs, apres lesquels furent ouïes plusieurs voix plaintives representans les ames qui se separent des corps lesquelles terminerent en cest air lamentable.²⁸

Thunder and lightning align in rhyme to emphasize the loudness on stage during the conflict. Gramont's account indicates that the loud sound effects used in the scene express the desired frightening and unsettling effect on the audience through word choice. Furthermore, Gramont expresses the sound of souls separating from dead bodies with descriptions of lamenting airs, expressed with instruments. We can infer that the depiction of people dying through

²⁷ On the fireworks in this ballet Margaret McGowan writes, "Les Parisiens étaient habitués à voir des feux d'artifice sur la Seine, des palais qui se consumaient en flamme sur la Place Royale, mais c'est la première fois à notre connaissance que les machinists des ballets de cour ont tenté d'en faire autant sur la scène." McGowan, *L'Art du ballet de cour en France: 1581- 1643*, 129.

²⁸ Scipion de Gramont, *Relation du grand ballet du roy sur l'aventure de Tancrede*, 24.

instrumental airs had an unsettling effect on the audience because Gramont twice repeats that the music sounded mournful. As Margaret McGowan points out, the monsters themselves made a squabbling or squawking noise (“chamaillis”), used to cover the noises of the machines when they changed scenery during a scene, a tip from the Italian engineer Sabbattini.²⁹ Finally, Gramont points to the way the sound effects enhanced the spectator’s experience of the battle scene through his specific description; he details more than one type of sound happening at the same time. This cacophony produced by a variety of sound-effect technologies is an example of the excessive, irregular grotesque style.

Gramont’s account of the ballet also expresses that not all of the special effects were exclusively auditory. Visually spectacular magic also took place in Ismen’s threatening forest. For example, when Tancredi encounters a magical Cyprus tree in the haunted forest, Gramont describes the sensory impressions of witnessing it suddenly pop up on stage. He writes: “un grand Cyprez qui s’esleva tout à coup au milieu du theatre comme si quelque demon l’y fut venu porter. Il estoit si bien représenté que la plus part le creurent estre naturel.”³⁰ The relation suggests that the spectators admired what suddenly appeared on stage, probably via the underground trap door responsible for Ismen’s rise in the opening scene, claiming that “la plus part” found the artificial tree natural looking. Gramont also implies that the tree’s arrival on stage spooked the spectators because he explains that the tree arose “comme si” a demon brought it. Next, Tancredi cuts off a branch: “une branche dont sortit du sang, alors comme si le tronc eust esté sensible il poussa hors une voix

²⁹ Margaret McGowan, *L’Art du ballet de cour en France: 1581- 1643*, 130.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26

pitoyable chantant ces vers.”³¹ Gramont amplifies the sense impression of the visual image and sound effects of the tree bleeding on stage through personification—the tree cries as if he feels pain from the cut. Gramont conveys that the visual and the auditory effects work together to “pitiable” effect.

The earlier ballet version of Tasso’s epic *Ballet de la délivrance de Renaud* (1617) foreshadows the dramatic effects of fear and horror present in *Ballet de Tancredi*, and it demonstrates how costumes and stage props anticipated the use of mechanical motion and the grotto later on in the century.³² *Ballet de la délivrance de Renaud* revolves around the Christian knight Renaldo and the witch Armida’s love story in Tasso’s *Jerusalem Delivered*. After the Christian knights and Renaldo resist Armida’s seduction in the magical forest, “Armide exprime sa douleur et par un coup de baguette les monstres sortent de leurs coquilles.”³³ In this scene, six large shelled creatures, including two turtles, two lobsters and two snails move towards the princess Armida at her command to surround her. The dancers under the shells remain completely hidden, and the source of simple motion is unknown until they pop out from under the shells to dance, surprising the audience.

The secrecy of the slow movement’s cause relates back to the hidden space of the grotto that opens the performance. This ballet begins with Louis XIII sitting in a grotto on stage playing the role of the demon king, and his twelve men surround him in the mountain, also in grottoes. Mark Franko has explored the potential political significances of these very

³¹ Ibid.

³² McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance*, 73. McGowan writes, “The technical know-how (well advanced in Italy) had yet to come to France, where costumes still made a major contribution to the richness and understanding of choreographic performances.”

³³ McGowan, *L’Art du ballet de cour en France 1581-1643*, 106.

common grotesque and burlesque styles in ballets under Louis XIII.³⁴ I am interested in the aesthetic significance in terms of the aesthetics of the hidden versus the revealed and the aesthetics of surprise. In Armida's scene, the origin of what propels the large critters remains a secret until the dancers suddenly pop out from under the shells. The surprising and frightening effects on the audience come from the large monstrous creatures, but also the secrecy of their movement's cause, and then its sudden revelation. What is unique to *Ballet de la délivrance de Renaud* is the way the grotto's secret space appears again later in the movement of the characters. It shows how the secrecy of the grotto, the unknowability of the machinations behind the visions it calls forth, contributes to a sense of awe, fear and power.

In the context of the ballet, both sound and visual special effects amplify the spectator's experience of fear in scenes with grottoes and grotesque forms. In her study on the rise of the professional dancer in the early seventeenth-century ballet, Margaret McGowan points out that the irregular, monstrous forms portrayed by professional dancers served as a foil for the heroes danced by nobler characters in the end of the ballet.³⁵ Similarly, grottoes and grotesque forms serve to play up the power of black magic and evil forces so that the heroes will look more heroic in their victory at the end. In the case of *Ballet de Tancredi*, both Gramont's description of Ismen's voice and Porchères's verses for his incantation point to a spectatorial response of fear through metaphor and word choice when describing the scariness of Ismen's voice and eerie instrumental music. Similarly, other auditory effects such as thunder machines and fireworks enhance the sensory experience of

³⁴ Mark Franko. *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 63-106.

³⁵ Margaret McGowan writes, "in Louis XIII's *Ballet de la délivrance de Renaud* (1617) and in the *Ballet de Tancredi*, organized by the king's favourite, the duc de Luynes, two years later, came the climax of the ballets when, on the one hand, the soldiers of Renaud (the king), protected by their own special magic, overcame the monstrous beings fabricated by Armide; and, on the other, the knights of Godefroy (the king) were victorious over the creatures born out of the magic of Ismen." McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance*, 242.

the battle on stage because they are disruptive to the ears. Finally, visual effects including the bloody Cypress tree scene in *Ballet de Tancredè* and Armida's magical scene with monstrous characters from *Ballet de la délivrance de Renaud* evoked a surprising and frightful dramatic aesthetic. In the context of the ballet, feelings of fear, horror, and at times surprise, enhance the spectator's experience of the magical or supernatural creation that takes place in grottoes at the hand of the wicked. The more prodigious the evil forces appear, the more courageous and heroic the nobler forces appear in the end, and theater machines support this notion visually. For example, in the final scene of *Ballet de Tancredè*, after the Christians have won the battle, more characters appear in *gloire* machines than in any other production before.³⁶ The noble imagery enhanced by machines supports the verbal description of the characters. For example Gramont describes the courage of the hero Tancredè as he approaches Ismen's evil forest. He writes, "Mais d'un courage invincible & magnanime, il [Tancredè] entre dedans, l'espée à la main, faict disparoier les Monstres & les Demons."³⁷ Special effects can amplify the audience's sensorial experience of Ismen's evil power, making the effect of Tancredè's eventual defeat of such a force more spectacular.³⁸

Theatrical grottoes are linked to the underworld, monstrosity, and fear in early seventeenth-century ballets in the tradition of medieval and Renaissance public theater. The most spectacular moments in ballets often depict monsters and hell-like grotto spaces; they elicit fear and shock as well as awe at the technical genius of the creators. The macabre

³⁶ McGowan, *L'Art du ballet de cour en France 1581-1643*, 130. "A *gloire* is, simply put, the descent or ascent of characters upon a cloud on stage." Kristiaan Aercke, *Gods of Play: Baroque Festive Performance as Rhetorical Discourse*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 91.

³⁷ Scipion de Gramont, *Relation du grand ballet du Roy*, 7.

³⁸ The role of the grotesque in these ballets could be compared to the Jonsonian antimasque. For references, please see Stephen Orgel's *The Illusion of Power* and *The Early Stuart Masque* by Barbara Ravelhofer.

scenes create a contrast with the heroic moments of the ballets. But, there is more artistic investment in the dark, grotesque sections because artists and engineers show off their power to horrify and revolt the audience. Some of the techniques developed in court ballet then get transferred to the playhouse where they appear in plays, especially by Corneille, that thematize the relationship between the grotesque-spectacular and the power of the artist.³⁹

The Grotto and Artistic Freedom in Cornelian Drama

The discourse on grottoes and monstrous forms in ballet sets up the tradition of representing these elements in dramatic spectacles that depicted some sort of magic or quasi-magical illusion. As Jeffrey N. Peters states, “the grotto, [is] where any self-respecting magician or druid of pastoral origin like Alcandre works his magic.”⁴⁰ Often, the grotto was depicted through use of a *tapissérie*, or backcloth. This is the case in two of Corneille’s plays, including *Médée*, and *L’Illusion comique*.⁴¹ Corneille was particularly drawn to grottoes as spaces synonymous with creation and magic, particularly in his plays performed during the reign of the French tragicomedy between 1630-1640.⁴² Corneille’s magicians and sorcerers, unlike the demonic sorcerer Ismen in the ballet versions of Tasso’s tale, are not

³⁹ Lawrenson describes the sharing of machinery between the French court and the public theaters. He writes, “They [the machine and the flight] are the symbols of the monarch’s identification with the gods...and thence of his absolute power over the material world. It is this that makes them, immediately, the essential of the court function, and it is this message that they pass on to the general public through the machine play at the Marais in particular and at the public performances elsewhere....The early court provides instances of the King lending machines to the Hôtel de Ville for the purpose of entertaining—the King! Thus at the *ballet du roi* in the Hôtel de Ville on the 6th of February 1627, Louis, remarking that there were many machines in his ballet at the Louvre, offered to have them transported to the Hôtel.” *The French Stage and Playhouse in the Seventeenth Century*, 220.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey N. Peters, “The Geography of Spectacle in Corneille’s *L’Illusion comique*,” *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 35, no. 1 (2013), 26.

⁴¹ In his edited edition of Corneille’s earliest works Georges Couton describes the scenery of *Médée*. Pierre Corneille, “*Médée*,” *Oeuvres Complètes*. ed. by Georges Couton 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), vol.1., 1385. A similar backdrop for the grotto is used in *L’Illusion comique*. *Ibid.*, 1428.

⁴² Hélène Baby, *La Tragi-comédie de Corneille à Quinault*, (Paris: Klincksieck, 2001), 26.

figures of pure evil. Instead, they represent agents of artistic freedom and creativity. The sorcerer Alcandre in Corneille's *L'Illusion comique*, for example, conjures up special effects made in his grotto for pleasurable, surprising and less frightening effects. Even in *Médée*, Corneille refocuses the plot away from Médée's wickedness, at times with comic relief.⁴³ In both plays, the grotto and the characters associated with them are linked above all to creativity and the capacity to delight or awe with creation.

In his writing on *L'Illusion comique*, Corneille speculates that the audience's response to his aesthetic reworking of the grotto and the grotesque will be pleasurable and surprising. The text of the play expresses this position, as well. Alcandre ends *L'Illusion comique* stating, "J'ai pris ma recompense en vous faisant plaisir" (5. 6. 1820).⁴⁴ With these words, Corneille conveys a sanguine relationship between theatrical illusion and trickery, and he defends the right to entertain the audience in any way that he chooses. Corneille's early grotto scenes seem especially tied to expressions of artistic authority and to his power as the playwright to move the audience from one emotional extreme to the other, regardless of the rules of dramatic decorum.

The sorcerer Alcandre in Corneille's *L'Illusion comique* serves as a prime example of the rewriting of the cavernous motif in the seventeenth-century. Moreover, Corneille's *L'Illusion comique* assimilates the "magical" space of the grotto to the "magic" of theater. In the opening lines of the play Corneille writes,

Ce grand Mage dont l'art commande à la nature
N'a choisi pour palais que cette grotte obscure;

⁴³ In his article on Corneille's *Médée*, John Lyons illuminates the tragi-comedic elements of the playwright's first tragedy. John Lyons, "Tragedy Comes to Arcadia: Corneille's *Médée*," *Theatrum mundi: studies in honor of Ronald W. Tobin*, 1 (2003), 199.

⁴⁴Pierre Corneille, "L'Illusion comique," *Oeuvres Complètes*. ed. by Georges Couton 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), vol.1. All subsequent references to this play will refer to this edition.

La nuit qu'il entretient sur cet affreux séjour,
N'ouvrant son voile épais qu'aux rayons d'un faux jour
De leur éclat douteux n'admet en ces lieux sombres
Que ce qu'en peut souffrir le commerce des ombres. (1.1.1-6)

In this passage, Corneille refers to the magician's magic as "art." Referring to shadows and false images, he engages with Plato's cave, making it a spooky space. Over the course of the play, Corneille rewrites the neo-platonic notion that the artist's image is harmful by showing that Alcandre's trickery can reveal a pleasurable truth. In other words, an illusion can serve a positive end (Pridament's relief when he discovers his son is still alive--only the character he portrayed has died). Corneille reveals the limit to Plato's claim that images in art are removed from the truth because in the end the phantoms in Alcandre's grotto present a falsehood in order to reveal the reality that they are a working troop of actors. The play-within-a-play structure works like a special effect itself, creating the conditions for the surprising coup de théâtre. It also depicts the grotto as a metaphor for theater (where illusions take place) and shows how art can lead to a truth through pleasant surprise.

In their studies of *L'Illusion comique*, both Peters and Georges Forestier point out the parallel between Alcandre and the playwright. Forestier explores the analogous relationship between Alcandre and Corneille as suggested by the play-within-a-play structure: "Il semble qu'Alcandre crée l'illusion pour Pridament comme Corneille l'a créée pour nous."⁴⁵ Peters examines how Corneille's grotesque mixing of dramatic genres asserts the playwright's creative authority: "This is after all a play in which seams and gaps are of central importance, which Corneille famously described as a strange monster, 'un étrange monstre,' a work sewn together from generic bits and pieces to construct, in proto-Frankenstein

⁴⁵ Georges Forestier, *Le Théâtre dans le théâtre sur la scène française*, (Genève:Droz, 1996), 24.

fashion, a new dramatic body.”⁴⁶ In fact, in the same dedication, Corneille declares that the audience will derive pleasure from this monstrous mixture; he writes, “j’ose dire que la représentation de cette pièce capricieuse ne vous a point déplu, puisque vous m’avez commandé de vous en adresser l’Épître” (614). Corneille’s use of litotes (“ne vous a point déplu”) signposts the pleasurable effect of this play on a particular reader or spectator. He implies that this play is successful in spite of itself, highlighting his poetic originality. Furthermore, Corneille’s understatement juxtaposed with his admission, “j’ose dire,” highlights his own “daring” in presenting a “capricious” play that may not respect good taste but is nonetheless pleasing, as if the play were something monstrous but amazing that he crafted in his “grotto.” The grotesque shape of the play becomes, in other words, evidence of the author’s daring and prowess.

As Christopher Braider has examined, Corneille’s magician figures represent his own approach to creativity and authorship as a mode of poetic genius based on his refusal to conform to the dramatic rules his contemporaries embraced.⁴⁷ Corneille’s tendency to delight the audience as he transgresses the rules of drama is especially strong in his plays with grottoes and magicians in grottoes. Here, Corneille is borrowing from the tradition of understanding the grotto as a space of otherworldly creation to serve his self-fashioning as a playwright and explain his poetic principles (and disrespect for decorum). This becomes clear in his writing on *Médée*, where Corneille subordinates dramatic propriety, including but not limited to his treatment of the eponymous sorceress’s grotto, to the playwright’s right to please the audience in any way he chooses. In *Médée*’s preface he writes that the “goal” of

⁴⁶ Peters, “The Geography of Spectacle in Corneille’s *L’Illusion comique*,” 25.

⁴⁷ Christopher Braider, “The Witch from Colchis: Corneille’s *Médée*, Chimène’s *Le Cid*, and the Invention of Classical Genius,” *Modern Language Quarterly*, 69, no. 3 (2008): 340.

theater “est de plaire, et les règles qu’elle nous prescrit ne sont que des adresses pour en faciliter les moyens au Poète.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, Corneille gives the impression that he is unleashing Médée on the stage without apology: “Je vous donne Médée toute méchante qu’elle est, et ne vous dirai rien pour sa justification. Je vous la donne pour telle que vous la voudrez prendre, sans tâcher à prévenir, ou violenter vos sentiments.”⁴⁹ Corneille gives free reign to the audience to react to his horrifying protagonist “as she is.”

Later in his *Examen* of 1660, the playwright constructs a more robust defense of the character. In the *Examen* to this play Corneille explains that he does not stage the death of King Créon and his daughter Créuse in *Médée* because they are not traditionally tragic subjects. Instead, Corneille expresses their deaths with groans and cries because “ils semblent l’avoir mérité par l’injustice qu’ils ont fait à Médée.”⁵⁰ By displacing Médée’s victims from victimhood, we can infer that Corneille speculates that the spectators will empathize with Médée. As the true victim of this tragedy, Médée, too, suffers from the atrocities she commits to right Jason’s wrongs. Horror arises not only from Médée’s horrific acts of vengeance, but also from the realization that heroes and kings are capable of crimes and injustices that merit such a vengeful response. As John Lyons explains:

The terrifying paradox, for the modern--that is, the seventeenth-century--mind facing the ancient requirements of tragedy is that the personae of tragedy had to be princes and kings and yet the actions of the tragedy had to be serious faults, mistakes, or crimes. These elements seem incompatible, for whether the prince is mistaken or criminal (and thus logically or justly punished) or whether the prince is the victim of actions (and thus insufficiently strong or astute to avoid social disorder and harm)...

⁴⁸ Pierre Corneille, “Médée,” *Oeuvres Complètes*. ed. by Georges Couton 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), vol.1., 535.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 540.

Horror therefore calls into question the very body of the king and traces the boundary where social disorder passes into physical disintegration.⁵¹

In the case of *Médée*, the prince Jason has erroneous judgment because he betrays the sorceress whose creative powers he needed for his own success in the first place. Corneille privileges Médée's justice over the king's, as if she is the true victim of the prince's failings, displacing the divine right of kings for the redemption owed to the scorned sorceress for the use of her charms.

At the same time Corneille appears sympathetic with the sorceress, he also conveys that he will depict her as she truly is. He describes his efforts to make her appear "natural" in the play's dedication:

si elle [la personne] nous en veut faire quelque horreur, ce n'est point par leur punition qu'elle n'affecte pas de nous faire voir, mais par leur laideur qu'elle s'efforce de nous représenter au naturel. Il n'est pas besoin d'avertir ici le public que celles de la Tragédie ne sont pas à imiter, elles paraissent assez à découvrir pour n'en faire envie à personne. (535-36)

With his implication that Médée is so wicked the public would not dare copy her, Corneille points out the limits of the power of perfect dramatic imitation to inspire the audience to act virtuously, which according to d'Aubignac is "[I]a principale règle du Poème Dramatique."⁵² According to d'Aubignac, spectators must see vices punished in theater, which serves as "l'École du Peuple":⁵³ "ils [les spectacles] sont...absolument nécessaires au Peuple pour l'instruire, et pour lui donner quelque teinture des vertus morales."⁵⁴ Here in *Médée*'s dedication, Corneille implies that spectators do not need pedantic moral instruction; if

⁵¹ John D. Lyons, "The Decorum of Horror: Reading of La Mesnardière's *Poétique*" in *Homage to Paul Bénichou*, ed. by Sylvie Romanowski and Monique Bilezikian, (Alabama: Summa Publications, 1994), 29-30.

⁵² "La principale règle du Poème Dramatique, est que les vertus y soient toujours recompenses, ou pour le moins toujours louées, malgré les outrages de la Fortune, et que les vices y soient toujours punis, ou pour le moins toujours en horreur, quand même ils y triomphent." D'Aubignac, *La Pratique du théâtre*, 40.

⁵³ Ibid.,

⁵⁴Ibid., 39.

horrible actions appear naturally, in all their ugliness, no one will want to imitate them. Indecorous, grotesque representations and the horror produced by them are more powerful ways to deter spectators from immorality.

At the same time as Corneille insinuates Médée's righteousness and cultivates sympathy for her, he rewrites the trope of the duplicitous, beguiling grotto by staging Médée's chamber as a sacrosanct space for the creation of "art." For example, Corneille breaks the unity of place in *Médée* because she poisons her rival's dress in her grotto, not the public town space where the rest of the play unfolds. Before soliciting Nérine to join her, Médée describes the consequences of her acts and addresses the sun, whose chariot she will fly off on in the end. Médée declares:

Il faut que par moy-mesme elle te soit offerte,
Que perdant mes enfans j'achepte encore leur perte,
Il en faut un hommage à tes divins attraits,
Et des remerciements au vol que tu me fais.
Tu l'aura, mon refus seroit un nouveau crime,
Mais je t'en veux parer pour estre ma victime.
Et sous un faux semblant de liberalité
Saouler et ma vengeance et ton avidité.
Le charme est achevé. (IV.I.965-973)

Here, Corneille provides an intimate view of Médée in her grotto. This choice departs from Classical precedent: Seneca's version of the Medea story set this same scene in a public place.⁵⁵ Horace cited Medea in his warning against the depiction of visually monstrous images on the stage.⁵⁶ Corneille instead protects Médée from public view, but does not

⁵⁵Ibid, footnote b.

⁵⁶On Medea Horace writes, "Let not *Medea* in Despair and Rage/ Mangle her living Infants on the Stage." Horace. "Ars Poetica" in *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica* (Loeb Classical Library, No. 194) translated by H. Ruston Faircloth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 461.

preclude the public from viewing her.⁵⁷ Indeed, this private moment gives the audience more insight into the workings of her plan for revenge, and the opening line (“Il faut que...”) implicates necessity to her crimes, placating the audience to what she is about to do. Moreover, Corneille chooses a vocabulary of sacrifice and repentance in the scene, and the repetitive forms of “perte,” in the context of her bargaining, suggests that her revenge will boomerang back to hurt her to cultivate sympathy on her behalf. With the grotto as a reflexive space, Corneille destigmatizes it from pure evil. With this scene, Corneille stages the sanctity of Médée’s creative process.

Shortly after the private incantation scene, Médée’s description to Nérine in the grotto evokes a foreboding aesthetic that illuminates her mastery as a sorceress. Médée describes the contents of the poison she has just finished making:

Ces herbes ne sont pas d’une vertu commune
Moi-même en les cuillant je fis pâlir la Lune
Quand, les cheveux flottants, le bras et le pied nu,
J’en dépouillai jadis un climat inconnu.
Vois milles autres venins, cette liqueur épaisse
Mêle du sang de l’Hyde avec celui de Nesse
Python eut cette langue, et ce plumage noir
Est celui qu’une Harpie en fuyant laissa choir. (IV. I. 113-119)

In contrast to the earlier scene where Médée conjures up her spell alone and admits her moral shortcomings to the sun, here, in front of Nérine, she appears unapologetic as she recounts her skill. To that end, Médée lists the stygian ingredients of her potion, such as snake and harpy blood and evokes a scene of horror. However, the audience has seen a side of Médée that the other characters have not and can infer that she is merely performing the monstrous nature other characters perceive her to have. Corneille’s use of dramatic irony further reframes the magical and creative with the personal. However, the presence of evil and a

⁵⁷ In the *Examen* of 1660 Corneille writes, “j’ai mieux aimé rompre l’unité exacte du lieu pour faire voir Médée dans le même cabinet où elle a fait ses charmes” Pierre Corneille, “Examens” *Oeuvres Complètes*, v.2, (536).

foreboding aesthetic remain present during her performance in front of Nérine. With Médée's refusal to allow other characters to see her for who she really is, Corneille depicts Médée's creative powers as misunderstood, not purely transgressive. Médée's grotto scenes show that the grotto can be a private space of creation, but also one of performance, like the theater itself.

In his work on *Médée*, Christopher Braider shows that the titular character emblemizes Corneille's voice as a playwright. For example, in his analysis of the barter scene between Jason and Créuse (Médée's rival) involving the exchange of Médée's magical robe for the pardon of Jason's children, Braider writes:

Even Créuse's gesture of withholding her own request until she has secured Jason's from her father smacks of shared greed and smug self-satisfaction ("je ne veux rien pour rien"). No matter how horrific its fruit, Médée's sense of self-worth looks pure by comparison...the Corneille of *Médée* surrenders the plot to the heroine herself, who literally speaks in his place, giving birth to his distinctive mode of poetry.⁵⁸

Corneille's ability to cultivate sympathy for an infamously atrocious sorceress leads to a dramatic aesthetic that is both frightening and satisfying, in that those who have crossed her get what they had coming to them in the end. In the context of the play, Médée's sense of redemption and expressions of power through her "charmes" override those of the king because she is victorious and the audience may end up siding with her. In his political reading of *Médée*, Louis Marin articulates the way Médée's super powers highlight the frailty of the rules governing nature and society: "elle constate le droit pour lui substituer une loi plus 'glorieuse' qui n'est tirée que de l'interprétation qu'elle se fait de ce droit, loi d'exception ou plutôt l'exception comme la loi."⁵⁹ Through her art, Médée overrides the rules that have held back the truest expressions of her power as a sorceress. Magicians like

⁵⁸ Christopher Braider, "The Witch from Colchis," 355.

⁵⁹ Louis Marin, *Politiques de la représentation*, (Paris: Kimé, 2005), 269.

Médée are heroes for Corneille because their talent is the vehicle of their ultimate creative liberation. The grotesque represents not pure evil, but the sometimes monstrous, excessive, and awe-inspiring power of creativity.

Power Plays of Horror

Corneille rewrites the motif of the spooky grotto in *L'Illusion comique* as a space of illusion and creation, and he uses the grotto's hidden space to cultivate sympathy for Médée in his first tragedy. However, at times in the aforementioned plays and in his later tragedies, including *Andromède* (1650) and *La Toison d'Or* (1660), grotto scenes evoke horror, terror, repulsion and fright. Even the tragicomic *L'Illusion comique* begins with an ominous grotto scene. When describing Alcandre's grotto Pridament states, "Et lui fait un rampart dont les funestes bords/ Sur un peu de poussière étalent mille morts" (I.1.11-12). Alcandre's use of the grotto's space suggests a rapprochement between good and evil and that the dramatic effects of horror and awe are inextricably linked. In *L'Illusion comique*, *Médée*, and the earlier ballets *Ballet de délivrance de Renaud* and *Tancredi*, the grotto is associated both with creativity and the potential for horror. Similarly, in *Andromède*, spectators first encounter the grotto in the opening scene where it is the backdrop for a dialogue featuring Melpomène, muse of tragedy, and then later see it as the site for the predatory sea-monster. The grotto, then, is often associated with dark magic of questionable origins and purposes, as well as with monstrous creations, but also with depictions of the creative power of the magician, or playwright, who conjured up the spectacle.

The association of grotesque magic and power is most obvious in *Médée*. Corneille depicts the sorceress's magic as so powerful it undermines his own authority as the playwright to stop her. Médée summons divine power inside her grotto to enact revenge

against Jason for his betrayal. In Corneille's own words, Médée's dark magic is her "art" and a "spectacle." Her revenge is her "chef-d'oeuvre." She states:

Il faut bien autrement montrer ce que je sais,
Il faut faire un chef-d'oeuvre, et qu'un dernier ouvrage
Surpasse de bien loin de ce foible apprentissage.
Mais pour executer tout ce que j'entreprends
Quels Dieux me fourniront des secours assez grands?
Ce n'est plus vous, Enfers, qu'ici je sollicite,
Vos feux sont impuissants pour ce que je médite.
Auteur de ma naissance, aussi bien que du jour
Qu'à regret tu dépars à ce fatal séjour,
Soleil, qui vous l'affront qu'on va faire à ta race,
Donne-moi tes chevaux à conduire en ta place,
Accorde cette grâce à mon désir bouillant.
Je veux choir sur Cornithe avec ton char brûlant. (1.4. 252-264)

Because early on in the play Médée calls forth the sun she will drive off on in the end, she is her own *deus ex machina* throughout the play. Médée removes the playwright's authority to resolve her problems through divine intervention in the end. Médée's power to deceive is also that of the Gods, and therefore, we can infer that the grandiosity of her plan for revenge evokes an aesthetic of awe. However, Corneille also stages horror by refusing to tame Médée's growing capacity for evil magic. Médée is a creative force, also a generator of horror, and she also inspires awe in the spectator with her divine power.

Médée grafts her supernatural power onto the earthy realm with her magic, or "art," as a performative refusal of Creon's politics. In his chapter on *Médée*, Mitchell Greenburg shows how Corneille depicts the sorceress's participation in the patriarchy of Corinth as precarious, in order to amplify the aesthetic response to expressions of her divine power. Greenburg writes, "With her superhuman powers Médée is a threat to all systems of hierarchy devised by culture. She triumphs by reversing or ignoring, the order the world has

defined as ‘natural.’”⁶⁰ The sorceress expresses her wrath through the creations her supernatural powers make possible. As the poisonous dress is en route to her rival, Médée describes her plan for revenge against Aégée as her “art.” She states, “C’est demain que mon art fait triompher ma haine,/ Demain je suis Médée et je tire raison” (4.5.1262-1264). With these words, Médée implies that who she is today will be different from who she is tomorrow, when she will express her true self and her “art.” Moreover, the expected use of the present tense underlines Médée’s radical autonomy. It is as though she is creating herself at the same time as she carries out this act of revenge through art. Later in the same scene, Médée once again equates her magic to artistic skill stating, “Ma vengeance n’avoit qu’un succès imparfait,/ Je me vange pas si je ne voy l’effet,/ Je dois à mon courroux l’heur d’un si doux spectacle” (4. 5. 1286-1289). Médée destroys with her “spectacle” the life she helped create in her role as Jason’s wife and Créon’s subject. Médée re-performs through her magic to reclaim her divine birthright. Although her authority to disrupt the human world comes from divine power, she repeatedly appropriates her divine magic as art (“art,” “spectacle,” “chef d’oeuvre”), using repetition as a temporal movement. Her creation in this world is no longer of this world.

The figure of Médée returns in Corneille’s later machine play *La Toison d’Or*, where once again grotto scenes play a key role in developing a frightful and horrific aesthetic. Médée mocks the royal order of Aæte after she transforms his kingdom into a macabre scene upon learning of Jason’s true feelings for another. As Médée hears Jason’s confession, Corneille writes in the *didascalie*:

Ce palais doré en un palais d’horreur sitôt que Médée a dit le premier de ces cinq derniers vers, et qu’elle a donné un coup de baguette. Tout ce qu’il y a

⁶⁰ Mitchell Greenberg, *Corneille, Classicism and the Ruses of Symmetry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 25.

d'épouvantable en la nature y sert de termes. L'éléphant, le rhinocéros, le lion, l'once, les tigres, les léopards, les panthères, les dragons, les serpents, tous avec leurs antipathies à leurs pieds, y lancent des regards menaçants. Une grotte obscure borne la vue, au travers de laquelle l'oeil ne laisse pas de découvrir un éloignement merveilleux que fait la perspective. Quatre monstres ailés et quatre rampants enferment Hypsipyle, et semblent prêts à le dévorer. (3.3.1265)

The chimeric vision Médée so quickly displays represents the inverse reality of the beautiful one she experienced before discovering Jason's love for someone else. As she experiences pain and anger, the scenery transforms to depict her wrath--the inverse of the love she had for Jason just moments ago. Corneille lists the various dreadful things that will quickly appear with the wave of Médée's wand. The speedy arrival of this palace's horrific elements, including menacing animals, an obscure grotto, and four winged monsters, complement Médée's impetuosity and favor the audience's shock or surprise.

While the grotto scenes in *Médée* and *La Toison d'Or* display the sorceress's wrath and dark magic, the opening grotto in *Andromède* serves as a metaphor for theater and points to evocations of the poet as the magician. Melpomène, the muse of tragedy, opens *Andromède* at the edge of a grotto near the bottom of a mountain. She states, "Mon Théâtre, Soleil, mérite bien tes yeux,/ Tu n'en vis jamais en ces lieux/ La pompe plus majestueuse" (prologue, 2-3).⁶¹ Through the allegory of the prologue, the entire representation of *Andromède* refers back to the playwright's hand. In the opening didascalie Corneille writes, "Le pied de cette montagne est percé à jour par une grotte profonde, qui laisse voir la mer en éloignement."⁶² Through word choice, Corneille implies that what looks far away inside the grotto will soon appear near the audience, and this visual displacement is possible thanks to

⁶¹ Pierre Corneille, "Andromède" *Oeuvres complètes*. Vol. 2 ed. by Georges Couton, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 459 (prologue, 2-3).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 459.

the work of the play's machinist Torelli. T.E. Lawrensen explains that the scenic changes in *Andromède* took place in the form of perspective backcloths that the machinist recycled from the Italian opera of *Orfeo* in 1647.⁶³ In the context of the machine play, which uses visual special effects in addition to poetry, both Corneille and the machinist Torelli restrain the effects of horror with displays of beauty and order. Although the grotto is associated with the site of the impressively beautiful spectacle Melpomène describes, inside this same grotto awaits a sea monster at the center of the princess's tragic fate. John Lyons explains that the playwright's task is to refrain from allowing horrific elements to overpower the tragedy itself. Lyons writes, "The playwright's challenge is not so much to eliminate horror totally from tragedy as to place it at an appropriate remove in order to temper horror's precedence over the other emotions."⁶⁴ In the case of *Andromède*, both the playwright and the machinist mediate the grotto's atmosphere so that the horrific aesthetic does not take over the tragic one.

While the machinist depicts both horrific and beautiful aesthetics with his sets and machinery, Corneille offers such juxtaposition with his poetry.⁶⁵ Throughout *Andromède*, Corneille highlights the contrast between the title character's extreme beauty and the sea creature's monstrosity. The chorus sings:

⁶³ Lawrenson writes, "The machines and decorations of *Orfeo* pass without visible let or hindrance into Corneille's *Andromède* (1650). Act III of *Orfeo*, for instance, was 'Un desert affreux, des caverns, des rochers, avec un antre en forme d'allée au bout de laquelle à travers l'obscurité se découvrait un peu de jour.' This becomes the prologue of *Andromède* (Fig. 93)... These variations of the three streets on the perspective backcloth: the cut-out upstage in the first act of *Andromède*, creating three vistas along the same sight-line, is obviously the same as that for Act II (Figs. 94 and 95). In fact, Torelli in *Andromède*, seems to have abandoned the three vanishing points for this motif, and to have gone back to a single point throughout..." Lawrenson, *The French Stage and Playhouse* 190.

⁶⁴ Lyons, "The Decorum of Horror," 34.

⁶⁵ In his description of the fifth act of *Andromède* in the *Dessein*, Corneille writes, "Jupiter descend du ciel dans un trône tout éclatant d'or et de lumières, enfermé dans un nuage qui l'environne... Jupiter demeure au milieu de l'air, d'où il apprend à ces princes et à leurs peuples que la terre n'est pas digne des noces de son fils, et que cet honneur appartient au ciel." Corneille, "Andromède" *Oeuvres complètes*. Vol. 2 ed. by Georges Couton, (544).

Peux-tu voir que de la même onde
Il ose naître un tel Monstre après toi,
Que d'où vint tant de bien au Monde
Il vienne enfin tant de mal, et d'effroi
Et que l'heureux berceau de ta beauté suprême
Enfante l'horreur même? (1.3.338-349)

The chorus stages a collective response to this unsettling contrast between aesthetic counterpoints --beauty and ugliness, good and bad, fear and happiness. In the context of the plot, Venus in all of her beauty comes from the same source as the monster that devours the beautiful women of Thebes, and the grotto houses the sea with the monster, but also the kingdom that exists next to that sea. Corneille's words reveal that the subjects are horrified by the metaphysical and physical instabilities of their reality living among the sea monster. Jan Miernowski explains how the presence of both the horrific and the grotesque aesthetics on stage together at the same time lead to a dramatic aesthetic that is excessive, or extreme.

Miernowski writes:

Le moment baroque de travestissement et d'ornementation dans l'excès donne ainsi lieu, dans la dramaturgie comme dans l'effet recherché sur les spectateurs, à la mise en place d'une oscillation sensible et intellectuelle entre le grotesque et l'horreur, et même parfois d'une superposition, ou d'une simultanéité des deux éléments.⁶⁶

In *Andromède*, the aesthetic distortion the chorus describes (the beautiful gives rise to the monstrous), seems paradoxical. According to Miernowski, the chorus's experiences of "effroi," and "horreur" coupled with the dramatic tension of aesthetic opposites result in the sensation of an aesthetic excess. The grotesque aesthetic associated with excess in ornamentation is particularly feminine, as Frances Connelly explains: "The excess of ornament (adornment) was consistently derided as feminine, whereas argument and structure

⁶⁶ Jan Miernowski, ed., *Le Sublime et le grotesque* (Genève: Droz, 2014), 98.

(action) were masculine.”⁶⁷ Although the aesthetic counterpoints (the beautiful and the monstrous) are based on opposite visual qualities, they are both disruptions to reason and order, as the chorus’s experiences of horror and fear reveal. In the context of *Andromède*, the grotto is a space of both monstrosity and extreme beauty. It is a space for the extreme or excessive, which results in horror.

Similar to the earlier ballets in which special effects amplify the impression of evil forces so that the nobler forces appear grander in the end, in *Andromède* the horrific and frightening aesthetics serve as a foil for the hero, Persée, who will come to save the day. On stage, Corneille expresses awe using the hero’s courage to defeat the sea monster, and theater machines enhance the grandeur of Persée’s deeds. At the end of the third act Persée battles the sea monster in the air on his flying horse machine Pegasus. After he defeats the sea monster Persée exclaims:

Venez, Tyrans des Mers, réparer votre crime,
Venez restituer cette illustre victime,
Méritez votre grâce, impétueux mutins,
Par votre obeissance au maître des Destins. (3.3.974-977)

Corneille displays Persée’s power to rewrite the princess Andromède’s destiny with references to the sea tyrant’s new fate under the hero’s control. Theater machines express the grandeur of Perseus’s heroic deeds and inspire awe in the audience. For example, the *didascalie* in Andromède’s liberation scene states that the winds of fate physically free the princess from her shackles on stage.⁶⁸ At the end of the scene, the hero performs an

⁶⁷ Connelly, *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture*, 30.

⁶⁸“*Les Vents obéissent aussitôt à ce commandement de Persée, et on les voit en un moment détacher cette Princesse, et la reporter par-dessus les flots, jusqu’au lieu d’où ils l’avaient apportée, au commencement de cet acte. En même temps Persée revole en haut sur son cheval ailé, et après avoir fait un caracol admirable, au milieu de l’air il tire du même côté qu’on a vu disparaître la Princesse. Tandis qu’il vole, tout le rivage retentit de cris de joie et de chants de victoire.*” Corneille, “*Andromède*” *Oeuvres complètes*. Vol. 1 ed. by Georges Couton, (496).

impressive caracole (a single half turn on a horse) in the air as an expression of magnificence and awe. The space behind the proscenium arch curtain at the Royal Bourbon theatre allowed Torelli to hide the system of weights and pulley's that made flight on stage possible.⁶⁹ Persée's control over the moving winds, and his mastery over his flying horse Pegasus are kinesthetic expressions of his success in reclaiming control of the kingdom.

Grotto scenes in theater that evoke horror often reflect the magician or playwright's skill to command competing aesthetics. In the case of *Andromède*, Corneille tempers horror and monstrosity with Persée's courage and both the princess's and Venus's beauty. Moreover, theater machines amplify the sense impressions of the hero's ultimate defeat of the sea monster, and the allegory of the prologue relays that it is actually the playwright, not the hero or the machinist, who restores order to the people in the end. Furthermore in *La Toison d'or* and *Médée*, visual effects serve to express the havoc conjured up in Médée's grotto. Whether it is the quick change to the macabre scene in her grotto in *La Toison d'Or*, or Médée's victorious escape on her flying dragon in *Médée*, visual effects represent the unraveling of royal order.

Conclusion

The grotto as a physical space represented in theater and the grotesque aesthetic more generally help us to appreciate the spectacular in horror and in those things that make the flesh creep in both nature and art. They create aesthetic diversity through juxtaposition with nobler aesthetics in *ballets de cour*, and playwrights partner them with theater machines in drama to enhance supernatural power through the portrayal of its ability to horrify and frighten. Creation outside of what is *vraisemblable*—and therefore outside the bounds of Classical dramatic poetics--often takes place in grottoes in seventeenth-century French

⁶⁹Lawrenson, *The French Stage and Playhouse*, 209 and 217.

theater. Therefore, the grotto operates as a materialized metaphor for spectacle-oriented theater and for the alternative ways playwrights strove to awe, terrorize, and ultimately delight the audience.

For Corneille, who struggled with the poetic standards of his neo-Aristotelian contemporaries, the dark, spooky space of theatrical grottoes and theater machines were a way to reclaim his artistic authority. He conjures up alternate realities through acts of magic that also serve as metaphors for theatrical creation in *L'Illusion comique*. Moreover, Médée tricks and defeats those who have betrayed her with expressions of her “art” in *Médée*. Furthermore, Corneille’s grotesqueries in certain scenes of *L'Illusion comique*, *Médée*, *Andromède* and *La Toison d’Or* encompass a different variety of tonal registers from the light or comic in *L'Illusion comique*, to those including the monstrous and the horrific. Beyond the on-stage representation of grottoes, Corneille emphasizes a grotesque aesthetic as a counterpoint to the increasingly dominant Classicism in contemporary theater culture. For example, he takes a stand against *vraisemblance* supplanting all other forms of theatrical efficacy in his preface to *Médée*,⁷⁰ and he also highlights the grotesque nature of *L'Illusion comique* in the dedicatory epistle.⁷¹ Irregularity on stage expressed in theatrical grottoes and grotesque forms had a surprising dramatic effect that led to the passionate response of awe and wonder, vindicating theatrical pleasure over critical taste.⁷²

⁷⁰“Celuy de la Poësie Dramatique est de plaire, et les regles qu’elle nous prescrit ne sont que des addresses pour en faciliter les moyens au Poëte, et non pas des raisons qui puissent persuader aux spectateurs qu’une chose soit agreable, quand elle leur desplaît... » Pierre Corneille, “Médée,” *Oeuvres Complètes*, v.1 (535).

⁷¹ “Voici un étrange monstre que je vous dédie” Pierre Corneille, “L’Illusion comique,” *Oeuvres Complètes*, v.2 (613).

⁷²Hélène Merlin-Kajman writes, “contrairement à ce qu’on pense d’ordinaire sur le XVIIe siècle, plaisir esthétique et perfection de la représentation *ne s’impliquent pas nécessairement*.” Hélène Merlin, “Où est le monstre? Remarques sur l’esthétique de l’âge classique” *Revue des sciences humaines* 188:4 (1982): 179-193 (180).

CHAPTER 2: THE GENRE OF “DESSEINS”

The previous chapter showed how the grotto gave rise to a mythology of the monstrous power of creativity. Across several theatrical genres, the space of the grotto was therefore a space for the spectacular and for elements that resisted the imposition of Classical aesthetics as they began to gain dominance in seventeenth-century French theater. This chapter turns its attention to a more practical and pragmatic discourse about the power of spectacle and machine effects that began in the 1640s with the arrival of the Italian engineer Torelli, at Mazarin’s request. Narrative texts called “desseins” that often accompanied mid-seventeenth-century plays with theater machines show the centrality of spectacle and wonder to the Classical period’s theatrical culture. *Desseins* are an excellent source for understanding the aesthetics of theatrical machinery, and the purpose of this chapter is to extract an aesthetics of machine effects from the *dessein* genre, which has received little scholarly attention until now.

In seventeenth-century France, *desseins* (literally, “designs”) were documents published to accompany plays making extensive use of stage design and machine effects. The *desseins* are descriptive accounts of the pleasurable effects of the visual and musical parts of the performance. Spectators often purchased them at the entrance to machine plays and operas and read them during the performance as an aid to follow the plot and appreciate the special effects and stage décor.⁷³ The *desseins* were also souvenirs, and they further

⁷³ Jan Clarke, *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris (1673-1680): The Demise of the Machine Play*, 3rd

served as advertisements of the play for anyone who had not yet seen the show.⁷⁴ The authorship of these documents varied. Sometimes the playwright wrote them, as did Pierre Corneille for *Andromède* (1650) and *La Toison d'Or* (1660), and sometimes the author was the machinist, such as Denis Buffequin of the Marais theater, for the *dessein* of Claude Boyer's *La tragedie des amours de Jupiter et de Sémélé* (1666). Often, the author remains unknown, but is presumed to be an actor or other artisan working for the theater. This is the case for two of the earliest surviving *desseins*: one written to accompany François de Chapoton's *La Grande journée des machines: Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers* (1647) and the other to accompany Jean Rotrou's *La Naissance d'Hercule* (1649), a new production of Rotrou's *Les Sosies* (1638).⁷⁵ A *dessein* also existed in 1648 for Boyer's spectacular production, *Ulysse dans l'île de Circé, ou Euriloche foudroyé*, but it has since disappeared.⁷⁶ It was published by René Baudry, the same publisher of Chapoton's *dessein* and only an account of the *livret* by the eighteenth-century theater historians Claude and François Parfaict remains. These anonymous texts trumpet the magnificence of the visual effects of each dramatic work act by act, and they speculate about the audiences' reception of them. They promise the future spectators experiences of wonder, thrill and excitement when they witness these feats of theater technology during the actual performance. In their anticipation of these responses, the *desseins* also constructed and shaped the audience's response rather than simply reflecting it. The practical and pragmatic discourse about the

of 3 volumes (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2007), 68.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Hélène Visentin, "Le Dessein de la Pièce à machines: Un cas particulier d'inscription du texte spectaculaire," *Texte*, 33/34 (2003): 147.

⁷⁶ Visentin, "Le théâtre à machines: succès majeur pour un genre mineur," *Littératures classiques*, 51 (2004): 217.

power of spectacle and machine effects that the earliest *desseins* offer makes them an excellent source for understanding the aesthetics of theatrical machinery in the early modern period. In addition to serving as a rich source about the productions of particular plays and the history of machine theater in general, the *dessein* genre constructs a theory of wonder as a theatrical affect. We can better understand how producers of spectacle understood the spectator and the value playwrights placed on visual effects in the period by examining these texts closely as a corpus for the first time.

Texts going under names other than “desseins” share similar rhetorical gestures and purposes as the “desseins.”⁷⁷ The explanation of machines in *Andromède* found in the court news circular the *Gazette* of 1650 provides detailed descriptions of the visual and musical effects of the performance and gives a recap of what happens in each act, echoing the structure and expressive language of earlier published *desseins* (more so than the *dessein* Corneille authored for the play itself).⁷⁸ Several dedicatory epistles in plays with theater machines mimic the discursive style of the *dessein* in order to link the spectacular quality of the performance to the monarch’s grandeur. Within the context of the ballet, texts entitled “Discours” describe the visual impressions of the scenery and machine effects.⁷⁹ Finally, Jean Donneau de Visé called descriptions for his machine plays “sujets,” and these *sujets* differ from the *desseins* in length and title only, copying the structure, discourse and purpose

⁷⁷ Visentin adds the following texts to the *dessein* genre: *La Description des superbes Machines, et des magnifiques changements de Théâtre du Festin de pierre ou L’Athée foudroyé de M. de Molière, et La Description des superbes Machines, et des magnifiques changements de Théâtre de l’Andromède, représentée au Petit Bourbon*, “Le Dessein de la Pièce à machines,” 143.

⁷⁸ Theophraste Renaudot, “L’Andromède Représentée par la Troupe Royale au petit Bourbon: avec l’explication de ses Machines,” *Gazette* 27 (1650): 245-260.

⁷⁹ Scipion de Gramont, *Discours du Ballet de la Reyne. Tiré de la Fable de Psyché* (Paris: Par Jean Sara, 1619).

of the earlier *desseins*.⁸⁰ Spectacular pieces without machines also sometimes had descriptive accompaniments; for example, Gillet de la Tessonerie's 1645 political tragicomedy *L'Art de régner ou le sage gouverneur* has a *dessein* describing the "pompe" of each act, followed by an *argument* introducing each act before it opens. Furthermore, Gillet's 1642 play *Les Cinq Passions*, featuring a stoic "enchanteur," has the same organization. The various titles of the aforementioned written accounts highlight how interchangeably the terms *desseins*, "sujets" and "argument" appear, and the catalogue system of the Bibliothèque nationale de France today reflects that.⁸¹ Regardless of the title of any individual text, all examples of this genre have certain qualities in common: they retell the main points of the plot in the playwright's story and recount the visual and musical effects of the play. Written by playwrights and theater professionals, they offer a different perspective on theater's effects than that given by more canonical, academic works by the period's neo-Aristotelian thinkers.

Although descriptive texts about the staging of plays with machines went by various names, the term "dessein" is the most apt label for this genre on account of its rich semantic associations. The 1694 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defines "dessein" as

⁸⁰ Jan Clarke refers to published descriptions of plays with theater machines as "livre de sujet, sometimes known as the *dessein*" in her book *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris (1673-1680)*, 68.

⁸¹ There are seventeen anonymous descriptive texts describing Rotrou's dramatic pieces that are entitled *sujets*, but catalogued as "arguments" in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* system. It is unclear who the author is or when these accounts were written, although some, not all, of them have a stamp on the front page reading, "Don G. Douay 1919." Therefore, it is likely they are from the fonds Georges Donay, and based on the typeface, from the eighteenth and/or nineteenth centuries. Please see the following texts and cotes: *Le Vritable Saint Genest* (1648) GD-22627; *Dom Bernard de Cabrere* (1648) GD-9195; *Veneceslas* [Analyses de] (1648) GD-18883; *La Soeur* (1647) GD-17869; *Célie ou le vice roi de Naples* (1645) GD-7073, *Belisaire* (1643) GD-6218; *Clarice ou l'amour constant* (1644) GD- 7532; *Laure persécutée* (1639) GD-12785 ; *Les Deux pucelles* (1639) GD- 8828 ; *La Belle Alphrede* (1639) GD-6233 ; *La Céliane* (1637) GD-7066 ; *La Pelerine amoureuse ou l'angelique* (1637) GD-15769 ; *L'heureux naufrage* (1637) GD-20758 ; *Les Occasions perdues* (1636) GD-15134, *L'Heureuse constance* (1636) GD-20706, ; *Hercule mourant* (1636) GD- 11498, *La Bague de l'oubly* (1635) GD-5954. Similarly, the written account of Puget de la Serre's 1644 spectacular production *Thésée ou le prince reconnu*, is catalogued as an argument. A "sujet" for Du Ryer's *Scévèse* also exists, but is listed as an "argument" (côte GD-17628).

“Resolution de faire quelque chose, intention, projet, pretention” (Resolution to do something, intention, project, pretention). As this definition suggests, the textual *dessein* expresses a promise of action, of more to come during the actual performance; it advertises a particular theatrical experience that the reader could have.⁸² The *dessein* genre is a future-oriented genre, promising a potential, future experience, as we can see from the words “projet” and “intention” in the definition relate to a future main event. Furthermore, the earliest published *desseins* correspond with the arrival of the Italian machinist Torelli to France and his production of *Orfeo* in 1647, and with the initial developments of *Andromède* of 1650, the machine play Cardinal Mazarin commissioned Pierre Corneille to write using the same machines from *Orfeo*. The publication of the earliest *desseins* provides a textual account of the critical shift in spotlight away from the playwright and towards the machinist and his special effects.

The one exception to the scholarly neglect of the *desseins* is Corneille’s “Argument” for *Andromède* which, although not explicitly labeled a “dessein,” offers a detailed account of the stage design for the “tragedy with machines.” Corneille’s text, however, is exceptional rather than representative of the *dessein* genre, particularly with respect to its attitude toward machine effects. Although Corneille admits that there is pleasure to be derived from the spectacular elements of the machine play, he suggests that it is a lesser pleasure than that offered by traditional tragedy:

souffrez que la beauté de la représentation supplée au manque des beaux vers que vous n’y trouverez pas en si grande quantité que dans *Cinna*, ou dans *Rodogune*, parce que mon principal but ici a été de satisfaire la vue par l’éclat et la diversité du

⁸² Hélène Visentin compares the *dessein* to a modern-day movie trailer. Hélène Visentin, editor, *La Descente d’Orphée aux Enfers* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004), 133.

spectacle, et non pas de toucher l'esprit par la force du raisonnement, ou le cœur par la délicatesse des passions. cette pièce n'est que pour les yeux.⁸³

Using the negative construction, “ne...que,” Corneille implies that visual pleasure is inferior to the intellectual and emotional satisfactions of straight drama, echoing neo-Aristotelian dramatic theorists of the time who trumpeted a pure, absorbing, verisimilar illusion as the highest form of theater.⁸⁴ Even while participating in the creation of a machine play, Corneille asserts the authority of the dramatist over the engineer by depicting the experience of spectacle to be an anti-intellectual one. He replicates the hierarchy of rational over sensual dramatic experiences established by the period’s neo-Aristotelian theorists.⁸⁵ For example, François Hédelin d’Aubignac, one of the foremost interpreters of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, acknowledged that spectacular elements “rendent les Poèmes plus illustres” and that “le Peuple les prend pour les enchantements”; yet, he maintained: “je ne conseillerais pas à nos Poètes de s’occuper souvent à faire de ces Pièces de Théâtre à Machines” because of the difficulty and expense as well as the fact that machines are not “necessary” for a successful play.⁸⁶

⁸³ Pierre Corneille, ‘Andromède’ *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Georges Couton, 3 vols. (Paris : Gallimard, 1980), vol. II, 448.

⁸⁴ I depart from Hélène Visentin’s interpretation of this quote as it appears in the epigraph to the introduction of her doctoral dissertation on machine plays in seventeenth century France. Visentin casts these words in a positive light in terms of the machine play, using them as evidence to set up her argument that Pierre Corneille codified the machine play genre with *Andromède* (1650). Hélène Visentin, “Le Théâtre à machines en France à l’âge classique: histoire et poétique d’un genre,” (PhD diss., Université Paris 4, 1999), 5.

⁸⁵ Aristotle’s *Poetics* laid the groundwork for seventeenth-century thinking about theater’s effects on its audience. For Aristotle, in the case of tragedy, the purpose of drama is to arouse pity and fear in spectators and thereby “purge” or “purify” them of these emotions—a process called “catharsis.” Aristotle describes it as an effect of tragedy, produced when actors perform a unified action in such a way that the spectators feel pity and fear from relating to the “people in action.” One can infer that, in order for perfect imitation and catharsis to take place, the spectators must identify with the characters in such a strong way that they forget the performance is not real. Seventeenth-century theatrical critics interpreted catharsis this way and justified controlling theater, in favor of a simpler theatrical aesthetic, using Aristotle’s theory.

⁸⁶ François Hédelin, abbé d’Aubignac, *La Pratique du théâtre*, ed. Hélène Baby (Paris: Champion, 2011), 483 and 485.

In stark contrast to Corneille’s approach, the authors of earlier *desseins* vividly described the special effects of theater machines as supreme delights. Scholars agree that spectators read the *desseins* before, during, and after the performance, making them useful as descriptive supplements in a variety of different ways (souvenir, guide, advertisement).⁸⁷ I propose a fourth function—the *desseins* are a source for theorizing about the spectator experience and the forms of theatrical affect produced specifically through the engineer. The *desseins* authors use the term wonder (*admiration*) to describe the experience of the spectator upon witnessing the elaborate stage décor and machine effects. With their discussions of machines and mechanics, the *desseins* appealed to readers in a culture that not only appreciated technological innovation, but also used the language of mechanics to understand natural creations. As Jessica Wolfe explains:

Renaissance culture correlates machinery to non-mechanical objects and practices rather than constitute mechanics as a separate discipline. Instead, machinery lurks in the interstices of the Renaissance imagination: its meanings are formed out of an interplay with the culture’s aesthetic and political sensibilities and its philosophical dilemma.⁸⁸

For this reason, in the *desseins* the language of mechanics also becomes a way to reflect on the rivalry between human ingenuity and divine creation. Indeed, the multiple discourses on wonder in these texts dialogue with discourses on wonder in the culture at large—in

⁸⁷ On the functions of the *desseins* see, Visentin, “Le Dessen de la Pièce à machines,” 146, and Clarke, *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris (1673-1680)*, 68. Visentin excludes the “Extraordinaires” of the *Gazette* from the *dessein* genre due to their posterior, or post-performative nature as descriptive accounts. Although, like Visentin, I recognize the promotional, commercial quality of the *desseins* as advertisements, as well as their service as guides to facilitating spectatorship during the production, I also share Jan Clarke’s view that the *desseins* had value as souvenirs, therefore as a “post-performatif” textual mode. For this reason, I include the “Extraordinaire” on *Andromède* in the court news circular, *La Gazette*, in the *dessein* genre.

⁸⁸ Jessica Wolfe, *Humanism, machinery, and Renaissance Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7.

theology, Cartesian philosophy, natural history and aesthetics.⁸⁹ In these ways, the *desseins* make an important contribution to our understanding of early seventeenth-century theatrical aesthetics, supplementing the period's canonical writing on theater.

In this chapter, I argue the aesthetics of machine effects from the *dessein* genre offer scholars a new source for understanding seventeenth-century theatrical aesthetics. In the first section, "Privileging Wonder in the *Dessein* for *La Naissance d'Hercule*," I point out in my analysis of the *dessein* for *La Naissance d'Hercule* by Rotrou from 1649, the different types of wonder at play in these texts, including the ways they share a theory of wonder with Descartes' writing in *The Passions of the Soul* and also differ from it. In my second section, "Spectacle, Technology, and Authority" I will point out the way the machine substitutes for divine authority in the *dessein* for Chapoton's play *La Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers* in 1647. In this way, the machinist becomes a divine-like figure, and in my discussion of Corneille's *Andromède* I will show how Corneille attempts to reclaim the authority of the author, over the machinist, in his approach to a *dessein*. The first and second parts of this chapter detail an alternative theatrical affect to catharsis in the seventeenth-century, one that is based on wonder.

The third section of this chapter, "The Trope of the Jaded Spectator," deals with plays after 1660 that emphasize novelty as a way to produce wonder. I will investigate the ways a text convinces a reader that he or she is seeing something new and address whether or not a *dessein* avoids creating a memory of stage effect before the spectator sees it, either

⁸⁹ I am referring to Descartes's notion of *admiration* as being the first of all passionate responses from *Les Passions de l'âme* (1649). I am also including Pierre Corneille's conception of *admiration* as an alternative to pity as a means to purge the spectators of emotions, which he articulates in the preface to *Nicomède* (1651). Finally, I draw from the type of wonder expressed in the study of the history of natural philosophy that provokes reflection on the divine, often from the visual blurring of the boundaries between the natural and the artificial.

preserving or getting in the way of the spectator's future experience of wonder-producing novelty. Through an analysis of Boyer's *sujet* for *Les Amours de Jupiter and de Sémélé* and Donneau de Visé's *sujet* for *Les Amours du Soleil*, I will show the various ways playwrights struggled to present novelties on stage after 1660. In other words, the new discourse of judgment and discernment that appears in the *sujets*, regarding the spectators' anticipation of machine effects in the "desseins," proves that the experienced spectator threatened the efficacy of spectacular effects according to the previous generation's theory of affect.

Privileging Wonder in the Dessein for *La Naissance d'Hercule*

The *dessein* for *La Naissance d'Hercule* (1649) provides a particularly rich reflection on the spectator's experience of the stage effects for this mythological play. *La Naissance d'Hercule* is based on Rotrou's *Les Sosies*, a version of Plautus's comedy, *Amphitryon*. When *Les Sosies* was first produced at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1636, the stage design included one machine effect, to depict Mercury's descent to the stage.⁹⁰ When the play was revived at the Théâtre du Marais in 1649 as *La Naissance d'Hercule*, a larger number of machine effects enhanced the production, possibly in response to the success of Chapoton's machine play, *Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers* one year earlier.⁹¹ The *dessein* is the only remaining document of this version of Rotrou's play.⁹² Scholars have largely dismissed the *dessein* as being a mere summary of or advertisement for the play.⁹³ The *dessein* does largely

⁹⁰ Jean Rotrou, *Les Sosies*, ed. Damion Charron (Genève : Librairie Droz, 1980), 13.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹² Étienne Gros, ed., "Naissance d'Hercule ou les Sosies de Rotrou transformés en pièce à machines," *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres en Aix*, XVI (Aix-en-Provence Imprimerie Universitaire E. Fourcine : 1932), 7 footnote 13.

⁹³ With regard to the literary value of the *desseins*, see *Les Sosies*, ed. Damion Charron, 14, Étienne Gros, "Naissance d'Hercule ou les Sosies de Rotrou transformés en pièce à machines," 5 and 28, and Hélène Visentin, "Le Dessein de la Pièce à machines," 140.

rehearse the plot and staging of the play with an enticing rhetoric designed to draw in spectators. However, the promotional quality of the document is profoundly revealing, in that it illuminates the kinds of pleasure associated with spectacular theatrical productions.

The primary form of pleasure promised by the author of the *dessein* is that which derives from the experience of *admiration*, or wonder. Wonder was a contested category in the early modern period. Throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, wonder was seen as an appropriate reaction to the world's marvels, a properly humble response to God's miraculous creations.⁹⁴ Attitudes toward this passion evolved in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as natural and man-made wondrous objects became the cultural obsession of all members of European society, as manifested in curiosity cabinets and other collection practices.⁹⁵ For these connoisseurs, the most awe-inspiring objects blurred the boundary between nature and artifice, provoking interrogation into the nature of "creation" both human and divine.⁹⁶ A new approach to wonder appeared in the mid-seventeenth century with Descartes's *Traité des passions de l'âme* (1649). As opposed to earlier figurations of wonder as a kind of stupefaction in the presence of marvelous creation, Descartes suggested that attention to something extraordinary could participate in intellectual pursuit.⁹⁷ His theory of the passions privileged wonder (*admiration*) as the instigator of all passionate responses. According to Descartes, emotions and affects are a form of "thinking"

⁹⁴ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750* (New York: Zone books, 2001), 14.

⁹⁵ For more on the "age of wonder" and wondrous objects see: *Ibid.*, 215-253.

⁹⁶ The debate over whether nature was the art of God, or the master artisan of God, producing natural marvels and provoking passionate wonder at his whim, took shape in the Middle Ages and became integrated into natural philosophy in the sixteenth century. See: *Ibid.*, 28 and 133.

⁹⁷ On the new Cartesian wonder that broke from earlier "prescientific" notions that blended the categories of the miraculous, preternatural and magical, see Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 47.

in the soul, as are all sensations (both intellectual and sensible) of which humans are conscious as they occur.⁹⁸ When considered as a theatrical affect, a Cartesian type of wonder could be produced more reliably and universally than more complex emotions such as pity and fear, which were colored by subjective, physiological and psychological variations.⁹⁹ Wonder for Descartes is a “primitive” passion, a response to something surprising that leads to fascination with the object and is the necessary precursor to other, more complex responses. This form of wonder, rather than being a desirable affective endpoint to an encounter with an object, is a starting off point for further intellectual and passionate investigation of that object.

The discourse on “regular” drama also offered various ways to think about wonder. Neo-classical theorists, such Hippolyte de la Mesnardière, for example, maintained that a truly verisimilar representation according to neo-Aristotelian principles is in itself wondrous: “un Poëme n’est point raisonnable s’il n’enchante & s’il n’éblouit la Raison de ses Auditeurs.”¹⁰⁰ In effective theater, the representation consumes the spectator in the present moment, so that they are not thinking about the inner workings and artifice of the drama. Wonder was also a key concept for dramatists pushing back against the aforementioned rigid tenets of neo-Classicism. Specifically, Pierre Corneille in his writing on *Nicomède* offers *admiration* as a more effective means of purging the passions than the pity and fear described

⁹⁸ Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 87.

⁹⁹ On the topic of early modern playwrights, such as Corneille, who adopted a wonder-based catharsis according to Cartesian *admiration*, after Descartes’s model of emotion made the universally shared experience of pity and fear impossible, see: R. Darren Gobert, *The Mind-Body Stage: Passion and Interaction in the Cartesian Theater* (California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 50-79.

¹⁰⁰ Jules Hippolyte de la Mesnardière, *La Poétique* (Paris: Sommaville), 72.

by Aristotle.¹⁰¹ In this case, it's the *générosité* of the hero that elicits *admiration* in the theater.¹⁰² Finally, dramatists were steeped in a rhetorical tradition that informed the way they formed their verses to their plays, and, in rhetoric, *enargeiac* descriptions, such as those found in the *desseins*, were thought to reproduce, and even enhance through verbal ingenuity, the wonderment a viewer would experience in beholding the real object.¹⁰³ Rhetorical theory about the power of vivid description provides a framework for understanding the force of the visual in producing *admiration*.¹⁰⁴ All of these facets of the early modern understanding of wonder (rhetorical, poetic, Cartesian, natural philosophical, natural historical, and theological) inflect the presentation of this affective response in *desseins* such as that for *La Naissance d'Hercule*.

Published in the same year as Descartes's text, the *dessein* for *La Naissance d'Hercule* resonates particularly with the Cartesian understanding of *admiration* as a primary emotion. *Admiration* in the Cartesian sense is an affect, a preconscious shock in the mind that grabs the observer's attention and maintains his or her mental focus on the encounter

¹⁰¹ In the examen to *Nicomède* Corneille writes, "Dans l'admiration qu'on a pour sa vertu, je trouve une manière de purger les passions, dont n'a point parlé Aristote, et qui est peut-être plus sûre que celle qu'il prescrit à la tragédie par le moyen de la pitié et de la crainte." Pierre Corneille, *Nicomède*, "Oeuvres complètes," ed. Georges Couton, vol. 2 of 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 643.

¹⁰² On the topic of the admirable Corneillian hero full of emotional generosity, see: Joseph Harris, *Inventing the Spectator: Subjectivity and the Theatrical Experience in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 87, Emma Gilby, *Sublime Worlds: Early Modern French Literature* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2006), 59-60, and Gobert, *The Mind-Body Stage*, 48-83.

¹⁰³ Anne-Élisabeth Spica, *Savoir peindre en littérature: La description dans le roman au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002), 57.

¹⁰⁴ For more on the idea of *enargeiac* description as an enhanced version of *mimesis*, through the effect of *admiration* that it produces, see Spica, *Savoir peindre en littérature*, 27-28, 31 and Florence Dumora-Mabille, "Entre clarté et illusion: l'*enargeia* au XVIIe siècle," *Littératures classiques*, 28 (1996), 75-94.

with something new.¹⁰⁵ For Descartes, any encounter with an unfamiliar object elicits wonder as a first response:

Lorsque la première rencontre de quelque objet nous surprend, et que nous le jugeons être nouveau, ou fort différent de ce que nous connaissions auparavant ou bien de ce que nous supposions qu'il devait être, cela fait que nous l'admirons et en sommes étonnés.¹⁰⁶

Descartes describes wonder as a process. First, the initial surprise of the object registers in the mind. If the object defies the observer's expectations because it is rare and extraordinary, then wonder takes place: "L'admiration est une subite surprise de l'âme qui fait qu'elle se port à considérer avec attention les objets qui lui semblent rares et extraordinaires."¹⁰⁷ The author of the *dessein* for *La Naissance d'Hercule* opens the text with an account of how rarity and extraordinariness produce surprise in the spectator, resulting in a thrilling theatrical experience:

Il est bien difficile [sic] de parler modestement des choses extraordinaires; celles qui composent la merveilleuse représentation de *Naissance d'Hercule*, sont si peu communes que vous n'y seriez pas préparé comme il faut, si nous ne vous avertissions que c'est à ce coup qu'il faut crier miracle, et que de moindres acclamations ne sauraient répondre à la magnificence du plus superbe Spectacle qui ait jamais paru sur la Scene.¹⁰⁸

The author hypes the one-of-a-kind rarity of the production to portray it as showpiece for all spectacles. Like Descartes, the author links the extraordinariness of the object to an experience of admiration and astonishment in the observer. Here, however, the *dessein* offers itself as a necessary supplement to or mediation of an affective process described as

¹⁰⁵ Susan James has shown that *admiration* as a passionate response is a form of thinking for Descartes, as are all affective responses taking place while one remains conscious. *Passion and Action*, 107.

¹⁰⁶ Descartes, *Les Passions de l'âme*, ed. Geneviève Rodis-Lewis and Denis Kambouchner, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2010), 142.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 149.

¹⁰⁸ Gros, "Naissance d'Hercule ou les Sosies de Rotrou transformés en pièce à machines," 8-9.

automatic by Descartes: the spectator must be “prepared” by the text in order to respond to the spectacle.

As a pre-performative text, the *desseins* describe what the reader would see during the actual performance and anticipate how the visual effects would make him or her feel. The *desseins* in this sense respond to the demand of a contemporary educated audience who, as H el ene Merlin has shown, privately read plays at home before the live performance in order to critically prepare themselves to evaluate the piece from a more distanced, less emotional perspective.¹⁰⁹ The *desseins*, in this anticipatory sense, resonate with aesthetic understandings of spectatorial wonder, which, according to Pierre Corneille, takes place only if one’s reason is satisfied; the eye does not have to be tricked or surprised.¹¹⁰ For Corneille, a spectator would believe something on stage that is not perfect, if it is pleasurable; the mind would not be distracted by the false because the eye is so accustomed to a certain type of visual staging. In Corneille’s conception, staging and machine effects do not have to be exactly life-like, they just have to make sense for wonder to take place (for example, the sky and the clouds always appear at the very top or ceiling of the stage, which would seem appropriate and sufficiently verisimilar to the audience). On the one hand, the *dessein* as a text read before the production, with a critical perspective, resonates with aesthetic understandings of wonder as enhancing one’s experience of art through reason. In other words, after reading the *dessein*, the spectator would not be “blown away” sensationally during the actual performance and would have his critical, reasoning faculties intact. On the other hand, the *dessein* as an advertisement, promising a thrilling spectator experience,

¹⁰⁹ H el ene Merlin, *‘Public’ et litt erature en France au XVIIe si ecle* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1994), 175.

¹¹⁰ On Corneille and spectatorship see Joseph Harris, *Inventing the Spectator*, 87 and Emma Gilby, *Sublime Worlds*, 54-55.

resonates with Descartes's understanding of *admiration* as a physiological passionate response based on surprise.

The *Dessein du Poeme de la Grande Piece des Machines de la Naissance d'Hercule* further echoes Descartes in presuming that surprising stimuli are at the root of all affective response. The author punctuates the text with references to surprising effects produced by the quick scenery changes at the beginning of each act. As the first curtain opens, the author writes : "La vitesse d'un éclair est seule comparable à la rapidité du mouvement, qui dérobant à vostre veuë la toille qui l'arrestoit, vous laissera voir la ville de Thebes..."¹¹¹ The scenery changes in the second act with the same suddenness and surprising effect: "La Ville de Thebes dispaissant à vos yeux avec une merveilleuse promptitude, vous serez étonnez de vous voir en un moment dans une belle Campagne."¹¹² These quick set changes at the beginning of each act align with Descartes's instruction that the power of wonder comes from the sensory impact of an object that is both new and immediate: "Et sa force dépend de deux choses, à savoir de la nouveauté, et de ce que le mouvement qu'elle [l'admiration] cause a dès son commencement toute sa force."¹¹³ The sudden opening of each act via the quick curtain is the medium through which the new scene appears to the spectator at full force to excite full movement of the pineal gland (the principal seat of the soul) in the preliminary sense Descartes describes; it provides the unique experience necessary for *admiration* and for other passionate responses.¹¹⁴ The emphasis on immediate speed and

¹¹¹ Gros, "Naissance d'Hercule ou les Sosies de Rotrou transformés en pièce à machines, 9.

¹¹² Ibid, 12-13.

¹¹³ Descartes, *Les Passions de l'âme*, 150.

¹¹⁴ Denis Kambouchner helpfully re-labels *admiration* from being a "primitive" to being a "*préliminaire*" (preliminary) passion; he highlights the uniqueness of *admiration* from Descartes's other five primitive passions (love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness) by emphasizing the power of surprise to provoke and maintain one's

“promptitude” suggests that, like Descartes, the author believes astonishment arises from unexpected, novel stimuli.

Indeed, this *dessein* is replete with descriptions of quick movements in which surprise leads to indelible experiences of *admiration* as described in Descartes’s writing. Characters ascend and descend quickly to and from the heavens: “Jupiter à la fin de l’Acte...s’envolera au Ciel avec une vitesse qui surprendra sans doute toute l’assemblée,”¹¹⁵ and “[Mercure]...fond en terre avec la rapidité d’un Oyseau qui s’abat sur la Perdrix.”¹¹⁶ Multiple characters also move around the stage in a speedy choreography: “Ces trois mouvements [de Mercure, Lucine, et Jupiter] si violents, si contraires, si soudains et si nouveaux, combleront les spectateurs d’une admiration infinie.”¹¹⁷ The characters grandstand with rapid, sudden movements. According to the text, the quickness and suddenness of the character movement and set changes are responsible for the spectator’s marveling and astonishment, resonating with Descartes’s understanding of *admiration* as a physiological passionate response to surprise.

The *dessein* also prepares the readers to experience a new form of surprise when they witness firsthand the artistic excellence of the representation. The accretion of superlative sentence structures makes it seem as though the artistic achievement will shock and surprise the viewer: “le plus excellent Poëme qui ait jamais paru, executé avec toute la justesse imaginable,”¹¹⁸ “les plus reguliers de l’Architecture.”¹¹⁹ The *dessein* resonates with a critical

attention on an object, in the sense of an ouverture. *L’Homme des Passions: Commentaires sur Descartes*, Vol. 1 of 2 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), 237-238.

¹¹⁵ Gros, “Naissance d’Hercule ou les Sosies de Rotrou transformés en pièce à machines,” 12.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

position of regularity and precision, and the language mediates it using the superlative. There is something paradoxical in the way the author points to conforming to neo-Classical critical tastes as something surprising. At the same time the author engages with the “regular” dramatic aesthetic, the juxtaposition between the ordinary and the extraordinary also promises something new.

Much of the ebullient language of extraordinary effects in this genre describes an immediate experience of spectatorship that takes place automatically, much like the affective and cognitive experience of wonder outlined by Descartes in his notion of the soul’s “thinking.”¹²⁰ Yet, paradoxically, the language of the *dessein* itself is mediating that future aesthetic experience by describing it for the prospective spectator. The text offers readers a preview of the amazement they will feel at the spectacle through rhetorical techniques, such as *enargeia*.

The rhetoric of the *dessein* supplements the visual experience it describes through vibrant verbal description.¹²¹ In the *dessein* for *La Naissance d’Hercule*, the narrator recreates an experience of wonder through a didactic tone, exciting the reader’s imagination through *enargeia* and a jovial manner of expression. As the author describes the gods deliberating in the beginning of the fourth act, the author sounds as if he were writing for a child. The author exclaims:

Mais qu’est-ce que nous voyons: ces nuées qui se développent, et qui se poussant les unes les autres vers les cieux, semblent abandonner leur region ordinaire ne vont pas naturellement; Ces clartez qui se font petit à petit plus grandes, semblent-elles pas

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹²⁰ See note 32.

¹²¹ With regards to the qualities of *enargeia* synonymous with hypotyposis, including the substitution of the readable with the visual, see Dumora-Mabille, “Entre clarté et illusion” 79.

s'approcher [sic] de nous, Justes Dieux! C'est le zodiaque qui s'avance: mais qu'est-ce que encore nous voyons? Le Ciel Empirée s'est approché [sic] de la terre.¹²²

The author's enthusiastic and attentive evocation of the clouds and light flickers fizzles with life. The more the author describes the movement of the machinery the clearer the scene comes into focus. Scholars have revealed the paradoxical nature of the linguistic device *enargeia* in the context of the dramatic image in the seventeenth century: At the same time as playwrights used vivid description to make it seem as though dramatic images appeared before the audience, thus making the dramatic images "present" before the spectator's mind's eye, the very vividness of the figures of speech used to enhance the description stood out, making the materiality of the language itself a showcase.¹²³ In other words, *enargeiac* description is doubly spectacular, as an evocation of visual display, but also as a feat of language as artifice. In the above passage, the author's language, particularly the use of rhetorical questions and the first person plural, establishes him as a guide for the scene so that he can bring the image close to the readers. Like a storyteller, the narrator enhances the account of the spectacle with a model emotional response conveyed through exclamations and a breathless tone, such that his enthusiasm transfers to the reader who has not yet experienced the spectacle first-hand. We are given an eyewitness account of a staging that shifts from a grand scene to an intimate one.

With the *enargeiac* descriptions in the *desseins* in mind, a double sense of *vraisemblance* appears. On the one hand, descriptions of theater machines reproduced spectacular effects through *enargeia*. On the other, they (often) made those effects seem as

¹²² Gros, "Naissance d'Hercule ou les Sosies de Rotrou transformés en pièce à machines," 22.

¹²³ Jeffrey N. Peters shows the way in which Corneille, in *L'Illusion comique*, reveals the poetic process of drawing the dramatic image near to the audience through the character Alcandre and the specter images he uses in the cave to bring the image of those who are far away near to those he tries to help. Jeffrey N. Peters, "The Geography of Spectacle in Corneille's *L'Illusion comique*," *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, (2013), 23-37.

real and immediate as possible, by insisting on visual details and their life-like qualities. Considering that vivid descriptions correct or enhance mimetic representations, it is possible to see these texts as providing a wonder-enhancing verbal supplement to the physical representation of stage effects. Indeed, the *desseins* take this power of description to an extreme. Through the use of vivid description, the *desseins* recreate the experience of seeing through a textual substitute.

The *dessein* subtly departs from the Cartesian framework in echoing aesthetic conceptions of wonder and in implying that an experience of wonder can be had vicariously, through the mediation of text, or even that a textual supplement can enhance the viewer's appreciation of an extraordinary object with rhetorical gestures. Another point of distinction pertains to the value ascribed to wonder. For Descartes, the primary experience of wonder has no inherent value but leads to more complex passions. Intensified wonder—astonishment, or “étonnement”—however, is harmful because it arrests rational thought. He writes,

ce qui fait que tout le corps demeure immobile comme une statue, et qu'on ne peut apercevoir de l'objet que la première face qui s'est présentée, ni par conséquent en acquérir une plus particulière connaissance...un excès d'admiration qui ne peut jamais être que mauvais.¹²⁴

In the *dessein*, by contrast, such a strong experience of wonder appears pleasurable and desirable rather than dangerous: “La fin de ce second Acte vous estonnera sans doute... Ces trois mouvements... combleront les Spectateurs d'une admiration infinie.”¹²⁵ Astonishment is a showpiece, not harmful. In the *dessein*, novelty enhanced by wonder is positive.

¹²⁴ Descartes, *Les Passions de l'âme*, 86.

¹²⁵ Gros, “Naissance d'Hercule ou les Sosies de Rotrou transformés en pièce à machines,” 16.

It is in these instances valorizing astonishment that the *dessein* for Rotrou's play engages with early modern cultural, natural historical and natural philosophical discourses on wonder and objects of wonderment, as appearing in the context of early modern "cabinets of curiosity," or *Wunderkammern*. The most spectacular objects appearing in these collections were those that blurred the opposition between art and nature, provoking debate upon whether nature was the divine artisan of God or instead the art of God. It has been shown that the wonders of the *Wunderkammern* provoked a form of stultifying astonishment ultimately denigrated by Descartes, but that the mixture of both man-made and natural artistry appreciated culturally in these collections ultimately inspired the anti-Aristotelian metaphysics of Descartes, Francis Bacon, and their followers that separated art and nature all together.¹²⁶ The *desseins*, in their reverence for the artisan of machine effects and especially for his ability to represent divine authority with special effects, display the philosophical tension between nature's agency and divine sovereignty in their discourse on wonder. Like the wondrous objects of the *Wunderkammern*, the *desseins* also showcase the pleasurable forms of astonishment produced from the blurring of the artificial and the natural, pitting human ingenuity against divine authority. In fact, in this *dessein* (as in others), the narrator repeatedly encourages the reader/spectator to transform a primary experience of wonder into a sophisticated appreciation for the technical wizardry required to accomplish the spectacular effects described. Pointing out the limits to Descartes's distinction between "good" and "bad" *admiration*, pleasurable wonder in the *dessein* reveres the innovation of the engineer, as opposed to just dazzling the viewer uselessly. The reader is engaged with thought about the technology expressed in the art of the machinist.

¹²⁶ With respect to the blurring of natural and artificial wonders in the *Wunderkammern* and the influence of these objects on seventeenth-century natural philosophy, see Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 255-301.

In fact, much of the language in the *dessein* points specifically to the machinist's creative authority over the production—an artistic freedom playwright's often fought for, as shown in the period's critical dramatic discourse. For example, in his *Discours* of 1660, Pierre Corneille defended his right to stage unpredictable occurrences in drama—acts on stage that appear sudden, unpredictable, and thus, non-verisimilar, in his articulation of “vraisemblance extraordinaire.”¹²⁷ The *dessein* also evokes unpredictable experiences of wonder, but of those created at the hand of the engineer, not the playwright:

Admirez l'excellence de l'Ingenieur qui les [la Lune, l'Aurore et le Soleil] a si bien representez sur ce Theatre, et dont l'esprit fertile en inventions a trouvé le moyen de donner à trois differents Astres, la Lune, L'Aurore et le Soleil trois differentes sortes de lumieres, qui toutes chacune à son tour ont eu le mesme effet d'esclairer ses belles Decorations, et confessez qu'il n'y a point d'honeste homme en France dont ces merveilles ne doivent attirer la curiosité.¹²⁸

The engineer's ability to add nuance to his creations provokes universal admiration for his work. The author does not disclose how the light effects differ from each other, nor the degree to which the visual suffusion of light appears admirable both on its own and as a spotlight. Instead, he leaves the experience as a complete surprise for future spectators. Similarly, in the case of the quick curtain, spectators cannot predict the precise time it will open, even though they know that it will. Just as the playwright's poetry can inspire awe through surprising evocations of a universal, shared experience, so too can the machinist invoke a unified experience of surprise and wonder with his machine effects. In the *desseins*, the machinist stands in for the playwright as the producer of surprise and awe.

With bright imagery, the *dessein* author also enshrines the virtuosity of the machinist, subtly comparing his skill to the divine hand of God. For example, the author of the *dessein*

¹²⁷ For more on the way in which Corneille staged unpredictable occurrences for ineffable effects with his notion of “vraisemblance extraordinaire,” see Emma Gilby, *Sublime Moments*, 54-55.

¹²⁸ Gros, “Naissance d'Hercule ou les Sosies de Rotrou transformés en pièce à machines,” 15-16.

calls attention to the superb machine used to represent the moon in the early scenes of the play. He writes:

Jamais la lune en son plain n'a paru si lumineuse que vous la verrez dans cette machine, Il est à croire que devant (pour obeyr au commandement du Maistre de la Nature) éclairer la terre l'espace de trois nuits continuës, elle a dérobbé forte la lumiere au Soleil, pour consoler en quelque façon les humains de l'absence de cét Astre, ou que l'exemple de Jupiter reveillant sa passion amoureuse, elle brille de cét éclat extraordinaire pour paroistre avec tous ses avantages aux yeux de son cher Endimion.¹²⁹

The prodigious moon appears larger and brighter than any other moon on stage ever before due to the machine's ingenuity. The opening superlative structure highlights the rarity of the spectacle in this scene and trumpets the success of the machine effect. In the context of the plot, Jupiter needs the moon to extend the night so that he can spend as much time as possible with the current object of his affections, Amphitryon's wife Alcmène. In this way, the machine is not only responsible for the spectator's visual pleasure, but it also enables the play's mythological characters to fulfill their plan. The author links the moon's might—and the prowess of the machinist who created it—to divine power.

Later in this same scene, the author highlights evocations of a different spectator response of astonishment in his description of the mechanical sun that blinds the audience. Unlike the mechanical moon above that amazed the audience with its grandeur, here, the artificial sun inspires awe by blinding the audience with its brightness. The author writes:

L'Astre qui donne la vie à toutes choses, fasché qu'un commandement tirannique interrompant sa course naturelle, l'ait empesché de rendre ce qu'il doit à l'Univers, d'un pas plus pressé qu'à l'ordinaire, monte sur nostre horizon revestu d'une lumière insupportable à la foiblesse de nos yeux, desireux, de reparer les forces de la Nature qui languissoit après luy depuis trois nuicts...¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Ibid.,” 10-11.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 15.

The juxtaposition of the sun's strength with human weakness reveals that the aesthetic response to theater machines used to portray divine tensions can be one of paralyzing astonishment. In the context of the plot, the sun is angry because he was cast aside for several days so that the moon could lengthen the night to help Jupiter carry out his plan, and the machine expresses the sun's divine indignation through the diffraction of bright lights. While Descartes warns of these paralyzing effects because they impede the pursuit of knowledge, here, the author champions them as signs of the rarity of the performance and of divine power at the hand of the machinist. The author of the *dessein* expresses the sun's divine power using descriptions of machine effects that strongly impact the senses, further marrying divine will to the machinist's hand.

The likening of machinery to divine power is especially striking in the context of this mythological play whose story revolves around divine will (Jupiter) trumping human authority (Amphitryon). Special effects stand in for divine will. For example, theological references describe spectator responses to machine effects like a leitmotiv throughout the *dessein*: "il faut crier miracle," "voici le prodige," "cet Enfant miraculeux," and "cette prodigieuse Machine."¹³¹ The machinist's work is also subtly compared to divine creation. For example, the opening scene's description declares: "La veritable Ville de Thebes bastie de la main des Dieux, ne sçauroit estre plus dignement representée."¹³² The stage-set version of the town (made by human hands) rivals the real city (crafted by the deities). In these kinds of passages, the machinist's authority comes close to the gods', as it is implied that the wonder produced by the spectacle approaches admiration for nature itself.

¹³¹ Ibid., 3, 6, 9, 10.

¹³² Ibid., 9.

Spectacle, Technology, and Authority

The *dessein* for Chapoton's *La Grande Journée des machines ou Mariage d'Orphée et d'Eurydice* (1647) is particularly illustrative of the genre's promotion of the machinist's authority. Like Rotrou's play, Chapoton's *Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers* was first produced at the Hôtel de Bourgogne (in 1639) and later revived at the Théâtre du Marais with more machine effects.¹³³ The play is a tragedy based on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice from the tenth book of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Its *dessein* reveres the machinist for his ability to trick the eye of the audience and to create naturalistic illusions through superior artifice. In this text, the machinist occupies the highest rung in the hierarchy of creative authority, surpassing the dramatist and even the divine figures depicted in the play, all of whom depend upon his technical genius.

This valorization of the machinist goes against the grain of the most well-known dramatic theory of the period. Seventeenth-century French theater valued the verisimilar imitation of nature on stage. For example, in his *Pratique du théâtre*, d'Aubignac wrote: "En un mot la Vraisemblance est, s'il le faut ainsi dire, l'essence du Poème Dramatique, et sans laquelle il ne se peut rien dire de raisonnable sur la Scène" (In short, Verisimilitude is, so to speak, the essence of Dramatic Poetry, and without which nothing reasonable can be said to be on stage).¹³⁴ D'Aubignac represents an elite, critical viewpoint and his prescriptions describe an ideal play according to neo-Aristotelian precepts that undervalue the pleasurable

¹³³ François de Chapoton, *Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers*, ed. Hélène Visentin (Paris : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004), 162.

¹³⁴ D'Aubignac, *La Pratique du théâtre*, 123.

effects of “unreasonable” representations, such as supernatural phenomena or sudden twists of fate—precisely those events that theater machines were used to depict.¹³⁵

Desseins, not surprisingly, are much less concerned with matters of verisimilitude in the aforementioned critical sense. Instead, the *dessein* highlights alternative forms of verisimilitude that theater and spectacle could produce. In addition to valorizing the wonder and astonishment produced by sudden (unmotivated, therefore non-verisimilar) changes in plot and setting, *dessein* authors tend to value the extraordinary over the ordinary, the artificial over the natural, in their descriptions. At the same time, however, they praise these extraordinary, artificial visual effects for how natural they appear on stage. In other words, it is considered positive that the machinist’s art “tricks” the eye to make the artificial appear natural. The author refers to the manipulation of the spectator’s eye in a way that makes it consider an object both as it appears in nature (ordinarily) and how it appears on stage (extraordinarily), and he favors the artificial version. The author opens the text writing, “La Terre s’ouvrir. L’enfer parroistre. Et l’agreable diversité des Forests. Des plaines, des Deserts, des Rochers, des Montagnes et des Fleuves disputer avec la Nature pour tromper agreablement la veue des Spectateurs, et les ravir par les charmes d’un artifice inimitable.”¹³⁶ In this sparse description of the set design (evoked in fragments rather than fully formed sentences), the *dessein* emphasizes the use of art to recreate a natural landscape. The spectator’s pleasure, charm, and delight derive not only from the visual pleasure of the scene but also from an appreciation of the artifice used to “trick” the eye into seeing forests,

¹³⁵ John D. Lyons shows how the lightning bolt which strikes the Prince’s horse in the dénouement of Corneille’s *Clitandre* exemplifies a spectacular end disfavored by Aristotle’s tragic theory. John D. Lyons, *The Phantom of Chance: From Fortune to Randomness in Seventeenth-Century French Literature* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 41. For more on d’Aubignac’s theory of dramatic affect see Joseph Harris’s book *Inventing the Spectator*, 50-75.

¹³⁶ Chapoton, *Descente d’Orphée aux Enfers*, 135.

mountains, and rivers on the stage—the machinist’s blurring of the natural and the artificial, as if by magic.

As has been shown, the *desseins* resonate with multiple early modern conceptions of wonder, and in the *dessein* for Chapoton’s play, this author, too, engages with the discourse of wonder in the pre-Cartesian tradition of the *Wunderkammern*, in his appreciation for man-made and natural oddities revering the engineer and his ability to reveal the collapse of the art-nature opposition with his work. The discourse on artifice continues in the recounting of the final acts, as the author details the ways the machinist plays with the audience’s impressions of what they see:

Aussi n’en peut-on rien dire, si ce n’est que les esprits de tous les plus habilles Machinistes ensemble, ne sçauroient produire une feinte si pleine de choses extraordinaires et surprenantes que sera cette Decoration de l’Enfer, où l’on verra tout d’un coup le Theatre couvert de flammes depuis un bout jusques à l’autre, qui ne disparaissant pas comme un éclair, dureront autant que la Scene durera. Et feront admirer le genie et l’adresse du Machiniste, soit en l’invention de cette flamme artificielle, soit dans la Perspective, les esloignemens et les diversitez, qui rendront mesme ce lieu d’horreur agreeable à la veue.¹³⁷

The repetition of “Machiniste” highlights the authority attributed to the machinist in the creation of this scene. Vocabularies of artifice and inventiveness dominate the passage, foregrounding human innovation depicted through the use of stage technology. By the end of the passage, the object of the spectator’s admiration is displaced from the spectacle itself onto the “genius and skill” of the machinist off-stage.

It is no surprise then that the *dessein* for Chapoton’s play concludes with an explicit reverence to the engineer Buffequin: “afin de louer dignement le Sr Buffequin, qui seul estant l’auteur de ce grand travail.”¹³⁸ Calling Buffequin the “sole” author of the “work,” the

¹³⁷ Ibid., 138-139.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 140.

dessein occludes the poet entirely, attributing all the play's success to the talent of the machinist and the power of his spectacle.

This *dessein* therefore serves as a striking counter-example to Corneille's "Argument" for *Andromède*. Although Corneille uses several theater machines in *Andromède*, he does not recount their pleasurable effects like the *desseins* authors before him. Instead, in his own approach to a *dessein*, he declares that he wrote *Andromède's dessein* as an aid for spectators sitting too far from the stage to hear the poetry and sung verses. In concluding his *dessein* for *Andromède* Corneille writes:

J'ai dressé ce discours seulement en attendant l'impression de la pièce entière, pour servir à soulager la plupart de mes spectateurs, qui pour mieux satisfaire la vue par les grâces de la perspective, se placent dans les loges les plus éloignées, où beaucoup de vers échappent à leur Oreille ne leur laissent pas bien comprendre la suite de mon dessein.¹³⁹

Corneille posits a conflict between two modes of spectatorship: one privileging visual spectacle, the other foregrounding appreciation of the verbal content. The structure of the theater, he suggests, makes it impossible to enjoy both visual and verbal aspects at the same time. Corneille therefore offers his *dessein* for *Andromède* as a (passive aggressive) guide to facilitate spectatorship for those who have chosen the pleasures of spectacle over those of poetry. Corneille reasserts his authority as playwright, subsuming the machinist's work with the repetition of the first person singular possessive adjective. Although his insistence on the primacy of the poet conforms to scholarly expectations for neo-Classical theatrical values, in fact Corneille had to mount such a defense of his authority because the period's discourse on machine plays tended to adopt the opposite perspective, lauding the genius of the machinist over that of the dramatist.

¹³⁹ Corneille, 'Andromède' *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II., 545.

One vivid example of how seventeenth-century critics appreciated visual spectacle as a means of producing wonder can be found in a different text about *Andromède*, this one published in the court news circular, the *Gazette*.¹⁴⁰ The author of the text in the *Gazette* on *Andromède* approaches artifice differently from Corneille in his *dessein*. As opposed to Corneille’s “simple and bare” (“simple et nue”) description of the performance in his *dessein*,¹⁴¹ the article in the *Gazette* offers a vivid account of the spectacle, full of appreciation for the ingenious artifice of the production. At the beginning of the text the author explains the play’s opening scene: “Estant haussé [le rideau], il se présente un bocage que la perspective par une agréable tromperie, fait paroistre de deux ou trois lieues.”¹⁴² Here we are reminded that these texts are more than descriptions of what takes place on stage, but also descriptions of the “agreeable” spectator experience. This particular description emphasizes the agreeableness of the artificial creation of depth perception through the use of perspective. Indeed, throughout the article, this author links the audience’s pleasure to their appreciation for illusionistic effects. He writes, for example : “Et les spectateurs, quoi qu’ils sçachent bien que ce ne sont que des terreurs feints par l’invention du Machiniste, ne sçauroyent néanmoins s’epescher d’en avoir autant d’épouvant que d’admiration.”¹⁴³ *Vraisemblance* aside, the audience knows the effects are artificial and finds them effective (scary) and wonderful, anyway. The article in the *Gazette*, therefore, stresses a visually pleasurable theatrical experience that excites the passions based solely on the machinist’s

¹⁴⁰Renaudot, ed., “L’Andromede Representee par la Troupe Royale au petit Bourbon: avec l’explication de ses Machines,” 156-169.

¹⁴¹ Corneille, ‘Andromède’ *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II., 544.

¹⁴² Renaudot, “L’Andromede Representee par la Troupe Royale au petit Bourbon: avec l’explication de ses Machines,” 159.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 162-163.

ability to create illusionistic effects. At the same time, this text also calls into question the claims of contemporary theater critics who trumpet dramatic decorum and play up the value of verisimilar illusions, in the traditional sense, in their work. On the one hand, the effects produce a powerful illusion and so add to verisimilitude in that sense. Yet, their status as extravagant artifice opposes them to the dogmatic neo-Classical understanding of *vraisemblance* as that which does not shock or surprise.

In this same light, the author from the *Gazette* echoes the authors of the earliest *desseins* in his praise for how natural the machines appear on stage. Ironically, the machinist's genius is showcased by the invisibility of his efforts because the machines do not seem to be there. The author writes:

C'est bien une chose admirable que ce Planette suive le mouvement régulier des Cieux, mais qu'il se détache, comme il fait, du corps de son Ciel pour venir jusques aupres du bord du Theatre par un mouvement du tout singulier, sans que l'oeil puisse discerner son attache avec sa Machine, de laquelle neantmoins il fait partie, c'est ce qui ne peut trouver assez d'admirateurs, bien que toute l'assistance en soit ravie.¹⁴⁴

The machine is deliberately hidden so that the planet seems to be moving by itself, yet the author of this text makes the machine "visible" again by explaining its workings to the reader. From this description, we can infer that if the machine depicts something in nature in a way that hides the machine's property or quality that makes it distinct from the original, the success of this impression elevates the artificial to the extraordinary. The machine inspires awe in the spectators because even though the machine operates just above their heads, in their plain view, downstage, they remain unable to discern with their sight and evaluate with their reason how it works. Like in the earlier *desseins*, here in the *Gazette* appears the cultural taste for art imitating nature. Depicting again this aesthetic taste, the author describes "l'intelligence motrice de cette Machine, imitant si exactement dans ce Ciel

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 161.

artificiel celle qui guide les Spheres celestes...”¹⁴⁵ Although this text points out that the effects are not real, it also mentions the way the spectacular nature arises from the machine so perfectly imitating actual movement from nature. Personifying the artificial sky, this text implies that the machinist’s ability to blur the lines between the natural and the artificial parallels and perhaps surpasses the functioning of nature itself.

The examination of the *Extraordinaire* on *Andromède* in the Gazette demonstrates the existence of a continued valorization of theater machine effects, consistent with the earliest *desseins*, that has been missing from previous study of machine plays based largely on Corneille’s writing.¹⁴⁶ The various forms of wonder described in these texts elevate the work of the machinist to interest the reader in innovation, and as a result playwrights, most importantly Corneille, respond to reclaim their authority over the productions. Because much of the scholarship covering the value of plays with theater machines at this time centers around Corneille’s *Andromède* and because Corneille sought to diminish the importance of the machinist’s work, thereby elevating his own genius, as this section has shown, the multiple spectatorial benefits of machine effects have continued to be misunderstood. According to the *desseins*, in the context of spectacle, the machinist stands in for divine authority, and his pleasurable special effects and perfectly imitated natural settings provoke audiences to reflect on the power of human innovation, overriding traditional, contemporary notions of how effective theater should be. Although Corneille authored successful machine

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 160.

¹⁴⁶ The following scholarship on machine plays refers to Pierre Corneille’s writing to valorize the machine play genre and considers *Andromède* to be the supreme example of the genre: Jan Clarke, *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris (1673-1680) Volume Three*, 66; Damien Charron’s edition of Jean Rotrou’s *Les Sosies*, 14; Visentin, “Le théâtre à machines: succès majeur pour un genre mineur,” 206 footnote 4. Here, Visentin lists the six aesthetic principles for “the machine play genre” that Corneille inaugurated with *Andromède*. Also by Visentin, see: “La tragédie à machine ou l’art d’un théâtre bien ajusté,” *Mythe et histoire dans le théâtre classique*, 42-44(2002), 417-429, (418), “Le Dessein de la Pièce à machines,”¹⁴⁵, and her doctoral dissertation, “Le Théâtre à machines en France à l’âge classique.”

plays, it is understandable that as a playwright, he would value *admiration* as a “reasonable” aesthetic that trumpeted his art as a poet versus the visual razzle-dazzle of machine plays that relied on the machinist’s ability to evoke a visual wonder that tarried at the aesthetic boundary between human and divine creation. The multiple forms of wonder that the *dessein* depict, specifically those that spark curiosity about how the machines work, both complement and compete with Corneille’s aesthetic form of *admiration*.

In an era of serious drama, when other critical texts read as dry prescriptions, the *desseins* stand out for their vivid descriptions, as well as for their positive perspective of the genre of spectacle maligned by “regular” critics. For example, in his *Art poétique* (1674), Boileau reiterates the superiority of tragedy and maintains that it is the poet’s job to provoke surprise and wonder with his verses: “Que de traits surprenans sans cesse il [l’auteur] nous reveille:/ Qu’il coure dans ses vers de merveille en merveille... Ainsi la Tragedie agit, marche, et s’explique.”¹⁴⁷ Here, Boileau’s prescriptions privilege wonder and surprise at the hand of the poet as fundamental to effective tragedy, the highest form of poetry. Conversely in the *desseins*, it is the machinist, not the playwright, who excavates fresh levels of wit and skill with each new creation. Even as the genre makes a strong and compelling case for the power and fun of visual spectacle, the spangled aesthetic it describes is also, at times, more subtle. One of the most effective features is the contrast the genre makes between the machinist’s work and the playwright’s. For example, in the *dessein* from 1670 for Jean Donneau de Visé’s machine play, *Les Amours de Vénus et Adonis*, the author suggests that the producers tell the story on stage through the movement of the characters in the air and the stage decorations, not through the poetry: “Venus veut aller remercier Jupiter jusques dans la moyenne region de l’air, où Mars paroist d’un autre costé. Elle s’emporte contre luy, &

¹⁴⁷ Nicolas Boileau, “L’Art poétique,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Françoise Escal (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 173.

quand ils se trouvent vis à vis l'un de l'autre, ils font un vol, l'un croisé, et l'autre en tiers point, et se perdent ainsi dans les airs."¹⁴⁸ Here, the vivid description of fanciful flight—the meeting, reconciliation, and departure in the air—brings the scene into focus for the reader in his or her mind's eye, allowing the *dessein* to act as a textual substitute for the production itself. A self-reflexive genre, the *desseins* market machine theater through the use of *enargeia*. With the valorization of the machinist in mind, this genre offers a different critical perspective on the source of wonder in theater—the machinist's work and the visual mutability of the aesthetic he offers become the source of investigation and bewilderment.

Indeed, in their praise of the machinist's work, the *desseins* offer a new dramatic theory of verisimilitude. Just as an effective poet's verses blend in seamlessly with the audience members experience of representation as reality, so too, does an effective machinist showcase his best work when the artificiality of his art does not appear to be there. At the same time the *desseins* reveal that the machines are invisible, they also show that the machinist's ability to mask artifice is noteworthy enough to call out, erasing the very anonymity the machinist skillfully cultivated. In other words, the *desseins*' authors articulate the power of the machinist to hide the artificiality of the stage technology he displays, making his art effective as both visible and invisible creation. The engineer's successful manipulation of visual appearances, in a way that hides the effort behind his work, parallels the invisible, automatic functioning of nature itself, hence the *desseins* authors' comparison of machine effects to divine creation. In the *desseins*, the comparison of machinery to God's work in nature echoes Descartes's work in the period. In his work on the passions, Descartes uses the theater as a metaphor to describe the mind's relationship to the body and emotions, and this detached perspective of spectatorship he depicts contradicts his mechanical theory

¹⁴⁸ Jean Donneau de Visé, *Sujet des amours de Vénus et d'Adonis* (Paris: Chez Pierre Prome, 1670), 14.

appearing in the same texts that says that the passions, as ignited by our sensorial impressions, move automatically in the body-machine.¹⁴⁹ The implicit valorization of machinery (all matter functions automatically, like an automaton) and the machinist behind it (God, according to Descartes) appear in Descartes's work on the passions, and it conflicts with the notion of representation itself, in the sense that the machine threatens to overshadow the spectacle it is supposed to be behind. What the *desseins* show in their reverence to the machinist's work, particularly at a time when Descartes's mechanical philosophy claimed all nature to be an artifact—a self-regulating automaton—as initiated by God, is that mechanisms *as* spectacle displace mechanisms *of* spectacle as sources of wonder. It is no wonder that playwrights, such as Corneille, would downplay the artistic value of a variety of dramatic efficacy that competed with his own work. Just as anyone can step outside and marvel at nature's beauty, one can also easily enter the theater to appreciate the human ingenuity behind the recreation of nature, and its automatic functioning, for the stage. The *desseins*' sharpest arc and the machine aesthetic that they mobilize align with the thought of the culture regarding the power of the machine to equal and perhaps surpass divine creation.

The Trope of the Jaded Spectator

As my first two sections demonstrate, surprise foregrounds the many forms of wonder that are explored in the *dessein* genre. Like Descartes, the *dessein* authors believe that surprise has to happen first for wonder to take place. Because plays with theater machines revolved around well-known mythological tales, spectators had no incentive to see the

¹⁴⁹ Both Emma Gilby and Victoria Kahn explain how Descartes uses the theater as a metaphor in his writing on the passions to talk about the mind. Both scholars show that the spectatorial distance the philosopher articulates with this metaphor, as being necessary to control the passions and to reconcile unexpected/unfortunate life events, contradicts the automatic, mechanical movement of the passions he also articulates. Victoria Kahn, "Happy Tears: Baroque Politics in Descartes's *Passions de l'âme*, in *Politics & the Passions 1500-1850*, ed. by Victoria Kahn, Neil Saccamano, and Daniela Coli, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 93-108. Emma Gilby, "The Language of Fortune in Descartes," in *Chance, Literature, and Culture in Early Modern France*, ed. by John Lyons and Katherine Wine, (Ashgate: Burlington, VT), 2009. 155-167.

production if the theater machines did not depict a surprising, never-before-seen effect. In the *desseins* after 1660, playwrights constantly justify the originality of their production implying that they considered their readers to be experienced theatergoers who had already “seen it all” and revealing their anxiety to put something new on stage. As theater machines increased in number and popularity in the later half of the seventeenth-century, more spectators entered the theater to see them than ever before, further adding to this pressure. A public taste for “the new” developed in the second half of the seventeenth-century and the discourse of judgment and discernment in the later *desseins* suggests that playwrights catered to the public’s penchant for novelty. This section focuses on late-century *dessein* authors’ emphasis on novelty as a precondition for the spectators’ sense of wonder. It examines whether or not the *desseins* avoid creating a memory of stage effects in order to preserve the spectator’s future experience of wonder. I will also investigate how a *dessein* convinces a reader he or she is seeing something new, in a sense staging novelty in the context of expertise.

Epitomizing the obsession with “the new” in the 1660’s, author and editor Jean Donneau de Visé favored novelty more than anyone else of his time. His first publication was aptly titled, *Nouvelle, nouvelle*.¹⁵⁰ Highlighting the obsession for novelty in Parisian culture in the 1660’s, this work amplifies the interplay of spectacle and news as an aesthetic cultural taste. Depicting the public’s appetite for novelty, *Nouvelles, nouvelles* also foreshadows Donneau de Visé’s contribution to the development of the media in Paris in 1672 with the *Mercurie Galant*. Sara Harvey’s interpretation of *Nouvelle, nouvelle* stresses the spectacular nature of the “nouvellistes”’ delivery of the news. The *nouvellistes* were a fictional type of

¹⁵⁰ Jean Donneau de Visé, *Nouvelle, Nouvelle, divisées en trois parties* (Paris: J. Ribou, 1663).

journalist or newsmen who often made private news public.¹⁵¹ The similarities between the effect of the *desseins*, in general, and that of the work of the *nouvelliste* are striking. The pageantry associated with the *nouvelliste's* delivery parallels the vivid descriptions of the *desseins* and both served to dazzle their audiences. Harvey writes: “L’urgence et la fugacité, la parole qui rapporte l’événement doit produire un effet rapide, spectaculaire et mémorable.”¹⁵² The same effect of speed used in productions with theater machines to invoke surprise exists here through a quick delivery of the news. Harvey further details the significance of the reader’s appetite for this spectacular newsflash, highlighting the discourse on curiosity in Donneau de Visé’s text. In the context of the *desseins*, it is implied that the authors’ hyperbolic description will incite curiosity in the future spectator. Similarly, the *nouvellistes* delivers the news in an exaggerated way to make the reader more curious about what they are reading. Harvey writes:

À travers les descriptions et commentaires critiques sur la curiosité, les *Nouvelle, nouvelle* montrent que la voix du nouvelliste doit s’adapter à l’acte de communication qu’il produit. De même qu’il est attentive aux moindres événements d’actualité, le nouvelliste sait le préalable indispensable à un acte d’adhésion immédiate est la curiosité. Cette passion est le gage de l’échange communicative avec le lecteur des *Nouvelle, nouvelle*.¹⁵³

Like the authors of the *desseins*, the *nouvelliste's* work depends on the reader’s curiosity and revolves around perpetuating it. According to Daston and Park, “in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, wonder and curiosity interlocked.”¹⁵⁴ In much of his literary output

¹⁵¹ Joan DeJean, *The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies, and Tabloids in Early Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 99. On the definition of a “nouvelliste” DeJean writes, “He defines the *nouvellistes* of his title as ‘men whose profession it is to know everything that’s going on in the world. who make all sorts of news public.’”

¹⁵² Sara Harvey, “‘Qu’y a-t-il de nouveau aujourd’hui?’: la présence des nouvellistes dans la première oeuvre de Donneau de Visé,” *Littérature classiques* 78 (2012): 10.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵⁴ Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 15.

leading up to his founding of the news gazette the *Mercure Galant* (1672), Donneau de Visé dramatizes reality to arouse and satisfy the reader's curiosity.¹⁵⁵ Treating curiosity as a powerful literary affect, the media developed by Donneau de Visé and others through sensationalized reality created a "theater" for news that nurtured an insatiable public appetite for novelty.

Although the new and the novel became an obsession in Parisian culture in the 1660s, novelty had been understood to play an essential role in producing the sensation of wonder that the previous generation of playwrights and producers sought to elicit in their audience. Paraphrasing the Cartesian theory of wonder that influenced those dramatists, Fisher clarifies that in order for wonder to take place in general there must be no sensory memory of the object on the part of the spectator. Detailing the importance of an absence of memory he writes: "For wonder there must be no element of memory in the experience. That is part of the purity of this involuntary and, at least at first, purely aesthetic experience, an experience of the senses."¹⁵⁶

The absence of memory necessary for the experience of wonder underlines the paradoxical nature of the *dessein* genre, one that simultaneously entertains the reader in the present moment with *enargeia* and also alludes to a future main event of never-before-seen effects. *Desseins* of the 1660s resolve this paradox by treating the reader as a sophisticated spectator who will appreciate rather than be blown away by innovative special effects. Donneau de Visé's *sujets* and the *desseins* by the machinist Buffequin (of the Marais theatre)

¹⁵⁵ Monique Vincent. "L'Amour échappé, 'une revue de la société observée par Donneau de Visé.'" *Travaux de littérature*. 9 (1996): 87-103. On Donneau de Visé's text she writes, "Donneau de Visé a fait une oeuvre originale tout d'abord en recourant à une fiction mythologique adaptée au sujet par le moyen de quelques allusions adroitement insérées, puis en concentrant dans un espace réduit un nombre considerable de portraits" (103).

¹⁵⁶ Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*, 18

for the productions of seventeenth-century dramatist Claude Boyer, refer to traditional Classical theatrical theory, such as the unities, suggesting that they were intended for a reader who evaluated performances based on reasoned aesthetic judgment, rather than sensory impressions. The cultural emphasis on novelty in the second half of the century presumes that the spectator was an experienced and knowledgeable connoisseur who required continual innovations to maintain interest. Appealing to an audience who had already “seen it all” led authors to address and perhaps cultivate a more refined spectator exposed to theatrical theory and machine techniques.

The *dessein* for Claude Boyer’s *Les Amours de Jupiter et de Sémélé* (1666), written by the play’s machinist Denis Buffequin, son of the machinist Georges Buffequin, employs both vivid description of machine effects and a reasoned analysis of the play with reference to the precepts of Classical dramaturgy. This play appeared for the first time at the Marais Theater in 1666, and it is based on the story *Juno and Sémélé* in book three of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*. In this tale, Juno avenges herself against Jupiter’s infidelity with the mortal Sémélé. In Boyer’s version specifically, Juno’s wrath culminates in the fifth act when the character Jealousy opens the scene to avenge Juno and harm Sémélé. This scene allows Jupiter to save the day and transform Sémélé into an immortal being. Buffequin begins the *dessein* letting the reader know that despite the popularity of spectacular productions of the time, *Les Amours de Jupiter et de Sémélé* will be new and different from all the others. Picquing interest in the production, Buffequin declares: “Le theatre François a fait voir des Spectacles si Magnifiques; qu’on avoit sujet de croire que toute l’invention des Poetes et des Machinistes estoit épuisée; cependant on pretend faire connaitre dans la Representation des *Amours de Jupiter et de Semelé* qu’on a découvert de nouvelles sources du Beau et du

Merveilleux.”¹⁵⁷ The repetition of the causative construction *faire* plus infinitive emphasizes the passive role of the spectator and the active role of the producers. Moreover, a vocabulary of effort dominates the opening sentence, depicting the playwright and machinist’s work behind the creation of the new effects. From the depictions of the inactive spectator and active producers, we can infer that Buffequin emphasizes his authority over the spectator due to his superior engagement with the piece. However, Buffequin’s use of the adjective “toute” depicts the popularity of this genre and the spectator’s experience with it. For this reason, Buffequin’s opening line suggests a tension between the spectator’s authority and his own. In response to this tension, Buffequin establishes his authority by coupling his work with the authority of the king. He writes, “sous un Regne miraculeux, tous les Arts peuvent faire des Miracles.”¹⁵⁸ The repetition of the root “*mira*” ties the king’s might with the machinist’s art. The adjective “tous” serves to conflate all art together, including traditional Classical authority with the spectacular, implying the king receives the best that all theatrical aesthetics have to offer. Based on this description, Buffequin’s representation of the yoking together of all types of art will be the newness he offers in this production. Buffequin’s opening lines serve to divorce the spectator’s experience from his own and to couple his work with the glory of the king. Furthermore, from the opening passage we see that to depict what will be new to the spectator in this production, he has to first display his authority over the spectator.

Consistent with his introduction, Buffequin stages newness in the first act through emphasizing the “regular” decorations mixed in with the spectacular ones. In his description of the scenery in act one Buffequin writes:

¹⁵⁷ Denis Buffequin, *Dessein de la Tragedie des Amours de Jupiter et de Semele. Représentée sur le Theatre Royal du Marais. Inventé par le sieur Buffequin, Machiniste* (Paris : Chez Pierre Promé, 1666.), 3.

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

Quoy que toutes les Decorations de nostre Piece soient riches et pompeuses, ce n'est pas par là qu'on les doit estimer d'avantage, on a veu peut-estre sur d'autres Theatres plus d'or et de magnificence, mais on n'en vit jamais où il y eut tant de regularité pour l'Architecture, et tant de justesse par la perspective, si l'ordre et la proportion font la premiere beauté des Spectacles, et font le charme des yeux sçavans et délicats, nous sommes asseurez du succez de nos Machines, tout y plaist, et rien n'y blesse la veue, parce que rien n'y blesse les regles de l'Art.¹⁵⁹

Buffequin characterizes the aesthetic of order as novel and innovative. He alludes to the fact that perfect, Classical architecture and machines share roots in engineering and technology. Juxtaposing rules and the sensitivity of the experienced eye with spectacular set designs, Buffequin's description marries a spectacular aesthetic with a more traditionally Classical one. The "regularity" of his play's design will please a superior taste, according to Buffequin. The fact that this claim assimilates theater machines to a Classical aesthetic, moreover, belies the scholarly assumption that a machine aesthetic is contrary to Classical aesthetics. Buffequin completely conflates the two, establishing an aesthetic of order in the first act, as a foil for juxtaposing it with an aesthetic having fewer boundaries later on in the play.

In addition to presenting exacting degrees of order as a source of novelty, Buffequin also convinces the reader they are seeing something new in his depiction of infiniteness. This is significant because it shows that Buffequin is not completely leaving the spectacular aesthetic behind in the production and that he employs *enargeia* to elevate it. Even though Buffequin admits in his description of the first act that other plays may be more "pompeuses and riches" in decoration than his, he still plays with a spectacular aesthetic to depict novelty. Buffequin depicts an aesthetic of infiniteness in the garden scene in the third act. He writes, "Ce lieu que Jupiter fait expres pour estre l'azile de Semele contre la jalousie de Junon, est un amas irregulier, et une agreeable confusion de tout ce que la plus vaste imagination peut

¹⁵⁹Ibid .,7

inventer pour l'embellissement d'un Jardin."¹⁶⁰ The rhyming of "imagination" and "confusion" couples two formless concepts, existing only as mental images that have unlimited possibilities and variations. Buffequin employs the superlative to emphasize the infiniteness of the space, depicting novelty through evoking a sense of the limitlessness of invention. Unlike in the first scene where order stands in for novelty, Buffequin convinces the reader here that they are seeing something new through his depiction of a garden with no visual limits.

Buffequin also stages novelty in the conclusion of his *dessein* by juxtaposing the garden's baroque chaos with the opposite aesthetic. Identifying a "regular" aesthetic with royal and divine taste, Buffequin discounts the surprising aesthetic of infiniteness he just used to depict novelty. He writes:

C'est dans ce Palais que l'on voit éclater tous les traits les plus hardis et les plus reguliers de l'Architecture. Le Peintre ayant voulu judicieusement que la Politesse y surmontat la Magnificence, parce qu'on n'en sçauroit trouver sur la Terre, qui puisse réjoindre dignement à la Majesté d'un Un Dieu amoureux et galant, trouve plus de beauté dans les agrémens de l'Art, et de l'Ordre, et de la Propreté, que dans une Pompe qui seroit toujours beaucoup au dessous de celle qu'on doit à sa prudence.¹⁶¹

Buffequin references the arts of architecture and painting to connect this scene with them and distance this production from traditionally pompous expressions. The repetition of the superlative punctuates the regularity of this scene and suggests that the Classically perfect palace is still quite magnificent. Moreover, the author uses the comparative to marry the orderly aesthetic of the scene with divine glory. Buffequin here demonstrates his authority over experienced theatergoers, not only through surpassing their expectation for novelty, but also because his references to Classical authority depicts Buffequin as in tune with traditionally elitist notions of the way theater should be.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 11

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 15

While Buffequin expressed novelty by assimilating theater machines to a traditionally Classical aesthetic, Donneau de Visé expresses it with never-before-seen quantities of theater machines. The depiction of novelty through excess is similar to the way the author of the *Extraordinaire* on *Andromède* depicted novelty through describing a diversity of view on stage. The dramatic effect in both instances arises from multiple machines being on stage all at once. *Les Amours du Soleil* in 1671 by Donneau de Visé was performed for the first time at the Marais theatre in February 1671, also with the work of the machinist Denis Buffequin. Based on the tale beginning with *The daughters of Minyas* in book IV of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Donneau de Visé's representation picks up when the second daughter recounts the tale of the love between the sun god, Phoebus and Leucothoe. Phoebus saw Mars and Venus having an affair and Phoebus informed Venus' husband Apollo of the infidelity. Venus plotted her revenge against Phoebus by making him fall hopelessly in love with Leucothoe. To persuade her of his affections, Phoebus disguised himself as her mother and went into her room. After he sent all the servants away, he revealed himself to her. At first she was frightened, but then she was flattered that the god was in love with her, and so she did not fight off his advances. In Donneau de Visé's version, a prince promised to Leucothoe was jealous, and so he spread the word of the sun god's affair with Leucothoe. The girl's father, a Persian king, was so ashamed that he buried his daughter alive for her unchaste behavior, and Phoebus could not save her from the burial or revive her lifeless body. Donneau de Visé's production had more gods included in the tale than in Ovid's version because he included Juno, Mercury and Jupiter. The multiple gods on stage permitted the use of more clouds on stage than ever before.

Similar to Buffequin, Donneau de Visé mentions previous productions with theater machines to put his play into dialogue with them and ultimately depict the superiority of his productions. Donneau de Visé writes,

Ce n'est pas que depuis quelques années, on n'en ait veu beaucoup dans le mesme lieu, auxquelles on a donné le nom de Piece de Machines, bien qu'elles ne le meritassent pas tout à fait. Celle des Amours du Soleil ne doit pas estre mise au nombre de ces dernieres, puisque aucune Troupe du Marais n'a fait voir un si grand Spectacle.¹⁶²

Donneau de Visé's reference to the Marais troupe's judgment is significant because the Marais theatre was known for housing productions with theater machines. Instead of referring to traditional Classical authority like Buffequin, in this example, Donneau de Visé refers to the authority of the actors in this genre. Donneau de Visé convinces the reader they are seeing something new by mentioning that this experienced troupe found his work to be one-of-a-kind. Again like Buffequin, Donneau de Visé highlights what will be innovative about his production this time around. On this subject Donneau de Visé writes:

il y a huit changemens magnifiques sur le Theatre d'enbas, & cinq sur celuy d'enhaut, & que toutes ces superbes decorations seront accompagnées de vingt-quatre tant vois que Machines volantes; ce qui ne s'est jamais veu, en si grand nombre dans aucune piece. Les Machines seront considerables par trois choses, par leur grandeur, par la surprise des Spectacles qu'elles produiront, & par l'invention, estant certain qu'on n'en a jamais fait qui ayent produit de pareils effets.¹⁶³

Donneau de Visé's lists replicate a sense of excess for the reader. He does not recreate the visual experience of the future performance through vivid description, but instead presents a catalog of novelty. With the repetition of numbers, he offers a tally of what is new that serves to convince the reader of his expertise. The repetition of negative constructions highlights the never-before-seen quality of the effects and legitimizes the theater-going experience of the

¹⁶² Ibid., 1.

¹⁶³ Donneau de Visé. *Sujet des Amour du Soleil*. Ed. Christian Delmas. (Toulouse: Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1985.), 1-2.

reader. Employing more machines than ever before, Donneau de Visé trumpets quantity. In this way, quantity and excess stand in for novelty.

Throughout the *dessein*, Donneau de Visé also uses the weather to depict novelty through excess. In the first act, Donneau de Visé brings never-before-seen amounts of clouds and fog to the stage and describes the scene vividly. The author writes:

On en voit peu à peu les nuages se dissiper, en se detachant tantost par morceaux & tantost par bandes, qui font de longues traînées de nuages, entre lesquels de petits Jours laissent voir la claret du Soleil. Ce gros nuage descend toujours à mesure que le Soleil avance, & quand il est à terre il ne reste plus de nuages; & Venus qui estoit envelopé dans celuy que le Soleil a dissipé, reste à decouvert. Ce dieu descend de son Char, les nuages qui l'environnoient se perdent, & le char s'en retourne.¹⁶⁴

The *dessein* verbally reproduces the aesthetic of “more-ness” by repeating the word “nuage” to excess. Four different verbs and three different adverbs nuance the movement of the clouds, highlighting their extravagance. The repetitive description of the clouds coupled with the image of Venus appearing on stage through a cloud, accentuates that Donneau de Visé is trying to depict a future experience of novelty in a typical scene of this genre (the gods in the heavens), with an excess of clouds. Through repetition of excess, Donneau de Visé attempts to convince the reader he will see something new. However, when reading this passage we experience the opposite of novelty on account of the repetitiveness. Donneau de Visé’s insistence on novelty through excess was a way to stage novelty for an apathetic spectator who had “seen it all.”

Although depictions of novelty were used to evoke wonder in all remaining *desseins*, the emphasis on “the new” in plays with theater machines became more important than ever before in the 1660’s because of the public’s growing taste for the media. The newness of the advertised spectacles implies that the authors envisioned their readers as experienced

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 7.

theatergoers who had already witnessed a variety of plays with theater machines. Their insistence on novelty was a way to appeal to a cynical crowd. Donneau de Visé takes recourse to a discourse of hype or publicity to convince spectators that this spectacle offers an interesting variation on what they have seen before (more clouds than ever before). Furthermore, in Boyer's play, Buffequin's characterization of the aesthetic of order as a novelty symbolizes the producers' effort to appeal to a spectator familiar with the Classical aesthetic pervasive at the time. At the same time as Buffequin defends his expertise, he clearly caters to the experience and taste of the spectator. Although Donneau de Visé and Buffequin include instances of *enargeaic* language in the tradition of the earlier *desseins*, here it serves a different purpose, aiming not to replicate or anticipate an experience of wonder, but facilitate the future spectators appreciation for a well accomplished production.

Conclusion

Through an examination of the *dessein* genre, this chapter demonstrates that machinists and playwrights evoked different forms of wonder in their descriptions of the effects of theater machines used to portray various cultural tensions, such as between the artificial and the natural, or man's pursuit of progress over nature. In addition, producers of plays with theater machines used them to negotiate different levels of authority, for example between divine power and human authority, the playwright and the machinist or the playwright/machinist and the spectator. Because multiple tensions and levels of authority exist and are ever changing, the possible varieties of wonder evoked through the use of theater machines to represent them also seem limitless, and the public's appetite for the spectacular aesthetic increased accordingly.

Indeed, as plays with theater machines grew in popularity and as the public developed an appetite for novelty due to the development of the media in the second half of the

seventeenth-century, playwrights felt pressure to use novelty to produce wonder, more than ever before. Theatrical technologies improved at a slower pace than the public's growing appetite for novelty, adding to the stress of the producers of plays with theater machines. Because spectators became more experienced with these types of productions, a discourse of judgment and discernment in the later *desseins* indicate that they become harder to impress.

The genre of *desseins* inscribes a theoretical spectator experience provoked by machine effects. The next chapter will show how plays represented spectator responses to similar effects by examining examples of meta-theater, or plays-within-plays, where machines are used to dupe or dazzle other characters.

CHAPTER 3: UNVEILING THE MACHINE IN META-THEATRICAL PLAYS

“Rien n’est plus surnaturel que d’avoir découvert la tromperie.”
-*La Giraudiere* in *La Dévineresse*, Thomas Corneille and Jean Donneau de Vizé, 1679.

The *desseins* valorized the awe produced by spectacular, theatrical elements such as theater machines, and they implied that visual pleasures could produce audience responses as powerful as the horror, terror and awe associated with tragic catharsis. The *desseins*’ explicit descriptions of spectator reactions to machine effects give us an important source of insight into seventeenth-century theories of theatrical affect. An alternative way to understand the period’s ideas about spectatorial responses to visual effects is through an examination of the ways in which playwrights re-create spectator reactions to them in meta-theatrical plays. Meta-theater stages character reactions to theater, thus offering implicit theories of spectator response.¹ In addition to the explicit spectator responses expressed in the *desseins*, the staged reactions of characters to machine effects in meta-theater offer further insight into the ways in which theater was considered to be dramatically effective (or not) in the seventeenth century.

Through staging spectators’ responses to drama and special effects, seventeenth-century examples of meta-theater prompt the audience’s reflection upon theater’s ability to create an alternative reality through verisimilar imitation. The seventeenth-century French theatrical critic Jean Chapelain explains the importance of verisimilitude: “l’imitation en tous

¹ Georges Forestier explains the way in which a play-within-a-play stages spectatorship: “Le théâtre dans le théâtre, c’est, d’une certaine manière, présenter à des spectateurs une pièce dans laquelle des spectateurs regardent une pièce; c’est une sorte de profondeur de champ abstraite.” *Le Théâtre dans le théâtre sur la scène française*, (Genève: Droz, 1996), 21.

poèmes doit être si parfaite qu'il ne paraisse aucune différence entre la chose imitée et celle qui imite."² As a practical matter, the kind of perfect imitation Chapelain describes is unachievable in reality. Joseph Harris shows that Pierre Corneille was realistic about this divide between theory and practice in his approach to spectatorship. Corneille believed that spectators were always aware of theater's limitations when sitting down for a performance and were not thoroughly "tricked" in any way: "Corneille...establishes a tacit contract between audience and dramatist; the latter has the right to seek indulgence from his audience, while he in turn is under the obligation to distract his spectators...from potentially troubling flaws."³ In Corneille's *Examen to Andromède*, he explains that spectators overlooked the inconsistency of place when Junon descends from the clouds in the fourth act because they are accustomed to the staging of clouds at the ceiling:

Bien qu'ils [nos théâtres] représentent en effet des lieux fermés, comme une chambre ou une salle, ils ne sont fermés par haut que de nuages; et quand on voit descendre le char de Junon du milieu de ces nuages, qui ont été continuellement en vue, on ne fait pas une réflexion assez prompte ni assez sévère sur le lieu, qui devrait être fermé d'un lambris, pour y trouver quelque manque de justesse.⁴

Spectators accept the cloud as a cloud even though the setting also represents an enclosed space. Because these spectators are accustomed to a certain type of visual staging, in which the clouds are always at the ceiling, Junon's dissent would not stand out as unrealistic.

Corneille's theory of spectatorship accounts for the artifice inherent in all theater and perhaps challenges d'Aubignac's construction of a naïve spectator who is so absorbed in the drama that he forgets he is actually sitting in a playhouse.⁵ For Corneille, a spectator could be both

² Jean Chapelain, "Lettre sur la règle des vingt-quatre heures," in *Opuscles critiques*, ed. by Anne Duprat, (Genève: Droz, 2007), 223.

³ Joseph Harris, *Inventing the Spectator*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 85.

⁴ Pierre Corneille, *Writings on the Theatre*, e.d. H.T. Barnwell, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 145.

⁵ Harris, *Inventing the Spectator*, 55-56.

absorbed in the illusion on stage and maintain a critical distance at the same time. Early modern examples of meta-theater show that playwrights other than Corneille were also grappling with the question of how to create effective dramatic illusions without “perfect” imitation.

Meta-theatrical machine plays, in particular, tend to expose the inner workings of theatrical effects in a way that removes any pretense of a perfect verisimilitude. Yet the playwrights discussed in this chapter present those theatrical effects as dramatically effective or entertaining in and of themselves. Unlike Corneille, most authors of machine plays did not develop an explicit dramatic theory in the form of a discourse or *examen*. However, their meta-theatrical pieces offer implicit theories of spectator response to machine effects. This becomes evident because meta-theater has a self-theorizing function. It puts the inherent artificiality of dramatic illusion on display, allowing spectators to confront the falsity of theater. Breaking the absorbing, perfect theatrical illusion Chapelain describes, the poetics of the playwright in meta-theater lead to a reflexive moment for spectators; the staging of spectatorship prompts reflection on their own positions in the theater.⁶ Spectators become especially self-conscious about their status as viewers of illusion and their response to the performance.

Meta-theatrical plays incorporating machine effects bring self-reflexivity to bear specifically on the power of spectacle, as characters witness and react to special effects. Audience members also view the special effects, but their experience is complicated both by the intermediation of the on-stage spectator and, in some cases, by the unveiling of the

⁶ Classic theory on meta-theater by Lionel Abel suggests that meta-theater serves as a reminder of the inherent performativity of our daily life. Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 59-60. Critics such as Rousset suggest that meta-theater entails self-reflexivity: “Le théâtre y joue à se réfléchir dans son propre miroir par le moyen de la pièce intérieure.” Jean Rousset, *L’Intérieur et l’extérieur: Essais sur la poésie et sur le théâtre au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1968), 55.

production of the effect. This “behind the scenes” view gives the audience insight and heightened awareness, leading viewers to think about their own ability to be emotionally provoked by spectacular illusion.

This chapter examines how three plays in particular stage theater machines meta-theatrically in order to analyze how these techniques are used to dupe or dazzle other characters. Rotrou’s *Le Véritable Saint Genest*, Brosse’s *Les Songes des hommes esveillés* and Thomas Corneille and Jean Donneau de Visé’s *La Devineresse* represent varied spectator responses to machine effects, including confusion, fear, religious experiences, and belief. These plays, through their meta-theatrical staging of spectator characters, offer another source for analyzing seventeenth-century assumptions about the effects of machine-enhanced spectacle on viewers. I consider how these playwrights staged theater machines in meta-theater to play with and at times challenge the contemporary critical assumptions towards the effects of theater machines. At times, playwrights seem to align with critical views on machine effects in their staging of overt machine effects whose obvious artificiality borders on the absurd. Conversely, at other moments in these same meta-theatrical productions, playwrights also demonstrate that the emotions provoked by machine effects, however artificial their causes may be, are indeed real and powerful.

This chapter aims to determine these plays’ critical position about spectator responses to machines, based on the way playwrights display characters responding to machines. To that end, it speculates about to what extent the staged response of the fictional spectators might have conformed to the extradiegetic spectator’s experience. Considering how the real audience might have reacted to special effects in light of their exposure to the various technological capabilities available at the different Parisian venues is an alternative way to

gauge the value of the performance. Susan Bennett argues in favor of speculating on audience response in this investigative fashion and through the study of lesser-studied artifacts (such as the *desseins*). According to Bennett, traditional scholarship speculating on how audiences reacted to early modern spectacle is misleading because it focuses predominately on the scripts of canonical plays and on theater reviews of those plays as evidence; therefore, it does not reflect the taste of the entire theater going public, but instead that of an educated (and usually male) elite.⁷ Bennett's call to imagine historical spectatorship from a de-centered perspective allows us to consider lesser-studied plays and paratexts as cultural evidence.

The chapter's first section examines the staged reactions to machine effects in *Le Véritable Saint Genest* (1647) and *Les Songes des hommes esveillez* (1645-1646), in light of the mechanical capabilities at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. I consider the ways in which the meta-theatrical staging would have provoked the extradiegetic audience to reflect on technology's role in matters of faith (in *Saint Genest*) and more pedestrian forms of belief in what one sees (*Les Songes des hommes esveillez*). The second section considers the machine effects in *La Devineresse*, a meta-theatrical play based on current events in the late seventeenth century and staged at the Guénégaud theatre, which housed several recycled machines from the former Marais theatre and the Palais Royal. In *La Devineresse*, machine effects staged the dupery and trickery that took place in the "Affair of the Poisons" in Paris between 1679 and 1680. My analysis considers how the fortune-teller Mme Jobin's ability to deceive relies on the assumptions of her clients who arrive as either true believers or skeptics of her powers. Yet, even the most dubious characters respond to Mme Jobin's artful tricks,

⁷ Susan Bennett, "Making Up the Audience: Spectatorship in Historical Context," *Theatre Symposium* 20 (2012), 16-20.

suggesting how the power of spectacular effects might exceed their ability to trick the eye or produce illusion. From the on-stage spectators in these three meta-theatrical plays using machine effects, we see that playwrights used theater machines to make the extra-diegetic audience complicit in the creation of illusion. This privileged perspective on the inner-workings of theatricality also satisfies spectators' curiosity and cultivates a connoisseurship of stage machinery and trickery.

Staging Spectator Response in Meta-theater at the Hôtel de Bourgogne

Theatrical machinery became increasingly sophisticated throughout the seventeenth century in both public and court theaters, and different venues acquired different devices for creating special effects at different points in time. The gradual transfer of tools and technologies from the court to the public theaters in the seventeenth century and the lack of systematicity in the sharing of machine effects between venues make it difficult to track the various capabilities of each theater throughout the period. When technology changes or when techniques varied between theaters, the normalization of special effects was less reliable. While we cannot be certain of the various spectator responses to machine effects at the various theatrical venues at different points in time throughout the century, the relative novelty or familiarity of a particular effect has to be considered as one element influencing reception. "Never-before-seen" effects stood out and dazzled the audience, and repeatedly used stage technology became "invisible," blending in seamlessly with the illusion on stage.

In her work on the adoption of stage machinery in France, H el ene Visentin remarks that the earliest machine effects—such as Italian machinist Giacomo Torelli's sliding frames and levers and counterweights allowing for the rapid execution of scenic changes—inspired

admiration in audiences because they were so new and innovative.⁸ These new technologies soon dazzled the public (as opposed to members of the court) when they were included in the new Marais theater rebuilt after a fire in 1644.⁹ While the Hôtel de Marais and the venues of court performances, such as the Petit Bourbon, offered special effects to diverse audiences, the Hôtel de Bourgogne lagged behind with inferior theatrical technology. The primary set-design technology available at the Bourgogne was the “théâtre supérieur,” (also known as a “petit théâtre,” or a “théâtre de Jupiter”), “whose exact nature and function are not well understood.”¹⁰ In *Le Véritable Saint Genest*, for example, a “petit théâtre” was used in two instances: first, during the Roman actor Genest’s rehearsal of the play, and second, when the performance of that play-within-the-play begins. In the first instance at the beginning of the second act, the stage direction reads, “*Le théâtre s’ouvre,*” and in the second instance, in the seventh scene of the same act, the stage direction reads, “Genest, *sur le Théâtre élevé.*” From these descriptions we can infer that Genest was on a raised platform, possibly delineated from the main stage by a curtain. Deriving from the medieval *mystère* tradition via the street theater, this compartmentalized, dramatic space was perhaps elevated above the main stage floor. The “petit théâtre” was clearly a useful feature of stage design for meta-theatrical plays in particular. Yet, as Georges Forestier notes, it was increasingly viewed as “dépassée” in the 1640s, as newer, more complex technologies were adopted.¹¹

⁸ Hélène Visentin, “Au coeur d’une mutation socio-politique et esthétique de l’art dramatique en France: le théâtre à machines à la cour et à la ville,” *Rome-Paris 1640: transferts culturels et renaissance d’un centre artistique*, (2010), 509-510.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 515-517

¹⁰ T.E. Lawrenson, *The French Stage and Playhouse in the XVIIth Century: A Study in the Advent of the Italian Order*, (New York: AMS Press, 1986), 143, 144-145.

¹¹ Georges Forestier ed., *Les Songes des hommes esveillez by N. Brosse* (Paris: Libraire Nizet, 1984), 17. Forestier writes, “la suite du texte complique notre compréhension de la mise en scène, puisque l’action passé

The Hôtel de Bourgogne was less machine-centric than other venues. Yet this theater did boast the work of the eldest of the Buffequin family of theater engineers, indicating that some court technology appeared at the venue.¹² Visentin explains: “Georges Buffequin, à la fois ‘peintre et artificier du Roy’ et feinteur des comédiens de l’Hôtel de Bourgogne, rendit possible ce transfert des connaissances techniques de la cour à la ville dans les premières décennies du XVIIe siècle.”¹³ Indeed, Lawrenson suggests that the stage of the Hôtel de Bourgogne was impressive: “the simplicity of these [the Hôtel de Bourgogne’s] décors has been exaggerated.”¹⁴ Although the stage effects were not the most advanced of the time, they appear to have been thoughtfully constructed, suggesting that they were not entirely underwhelming for audiences. Previous scholarship on the material archive of early modern French theater history has shown that certain public venues housed more theatrical machinery than others. Yet, the plays examined in this chapter at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, a venue that mostly relied on less-sophisticated painted tapestries for scenery, still found creative ways to produce plays with special visual effects, sometimes in a way that questioned the value of those effects.

In fact, one might hypothesize that meta-theatrical plays reflecting on the effectiveness of theater machines and overt theatricality appeared at the Bourgogne specifically because the mechanical capabilities of the venue teased the border between the outdated (the théâtre de Jupiter) and the innovative (Georges Buffequin’s work). In other

sans cesse de la chambre de Lucidan à celle de Clorise. R. Horville suggère judicieusement qu’ils pourraient se trouver dans un étroit compartiment situé entre les deux chambres.” 17.

¹² Hélène Visentin, “Décorateur à la cour et à la ville: un artisan de la scène nommé Georges Buffequin,” *XVIIe* 195 (1997), 335.

¹³ Visentin, “Au coeur d’une mutation socio-politique et esthétique de l’art dramatique en France, 509-510

¹⁴ Lawrenson, *The French Stage and Playhouse in the XVIIth Century*, 108.

words, as theater machines became more common, playwrights writing for a venue housing less awe-inspiring, but still aesthetically functional technology might be led to question the value of visual pleasure and the dramatic effectiveness of overt artifice.

Les Songes des hommes esveillés by Brosse is one such play that interrogates the aesthetics of stage technology as it became more readily available to both the court and the paying public. The play is characterized by Georges Forestier as a “château comedy,” a style of meta-theater in which the characters are non-professional actors who put on performances in a noble residence.¹⁵ At the outset, the plot appears to revolve around the château’s host Clarimond and his promise to alleviate his friend Lisidor’s heartache through the effects of entertainment. Clarimond states: “Tandis, nous essayerons par de nouveaux moyens/ A faire que vos maux transforment en biens: / Nous vous divertirons” (2.3.199-201).¹⁶ The first person plural in Clarimond’s speech includes his fellow château guests, such as Lucidan and Cleonte, and his sister Clorise. At times, these guests help Clarimond carry out his illusions—not plays so much as ruses or tricks on unwitting spectators—and at other times, they are on the receiving end of the trickery. Through the manipulation of stage décor, including trap doors, back cloths, and hanging ropes, duped guests are made to believe that what appears impossible (i.e. floating beds) is actually possible, specifically in instances where they are near sleep or intoxicated, in other words, not at their daily cognitive peak. Each of the first four acts contains a meta-theatrical scene in which one of the guests, such as Cleonte or Lucidan, is tricked by special effects, orchestrated by Clarimond and enacted by the other guests, such as his sister Clorise. Clarimond also uses illusion to confuse characters

¹⁵ Georges Forestier, *Le Théâtre dans le théâtre sur la scène française du XVIIe siècle*, (Genève: Droz, 1981), 80.

¹⁶ All references from will be from the following edition: N. Brosse, *Les Songes des hommes esveillés*, ed. Georges Forestier, (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1984).

who are not his guests. For example, he arranges stage props so that the drunken peasant Du Pont believes that he has died and come face to face with the devil. In fact, as the play unfolds, we see that Brosse has created a Schadenfreudian fantasia: Clarimond gets his guests to torture one another with deception so that he and Lisidor can watch, mostly for entertainment. The plot of the play points towards a sadism inherent in the desire to see others tricked by illusion. Joseph Harris elucidates the inherent sadism in “some accounts of tragic pleasure”; he explains that “an element of sadistic complicity in other’s suffering” exists for spectators of tragedy.¹⁷ Here, in the context of comedy, Brosse uses meta-theater as a device to put the inherent sadism of the dramatic experience on display, and he reveals the inner-workings of machine effects used for the trickery to make spectators complicit on the ruse.

Indeed, because an important part of the play’s meta-theatricality entails displaying to the audience the mechanics behind Clarimond’s “special effects,” the extra-diegetic audience is also made complicit in the character’s trickery. Martin Meisel explains that this type of dramatic structure, particularly in the early modern context, “flatters the real audience by assuming its superiority, and by letting it in on the joke.”¹⁸ Through dramatic irony, the audience acts in collusion with the mastermind of the illusion. In this play, the spectator’s sense of knowing superiority is also bound up with a kind of sadism, as the duped characters suffer fear, confusion, and even pain as a result of Clarimond’s deception. The stakes of each trick become greater, with increasingly more complicated stage effects, until finally in the last act the ruse is an actual play itself, in which the other guests serve as willing actors. Throughout the play, the position of the spectator becomes more uncomfortable through

¹⁷ Harris, *Inventing the Spectator*, 131.

¹⁸ Martin Meisel, *How Plays Work: Reading and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 100.

repetition as well as through the intensification of tricked characters' suffering, and this uneasiness peaks in the final act, when the interior play disappears into the main play. Throughout the comedy, special effects take place in the context of rather sadistic acts of trickery, raising questions about the ethics of both staging such ruses and witnessing them.

The way in which Clarimond uses illusion to successfully entertain Lisidor undermines the critical notion of theater as a serious discipline based on the importance of verisimilitude. Brosse illustrates Clarimond's inspiration as he considers the dramatic utility of tricking a drunken peasant named Du Pont in the first act. Watching Du Pont, Clarimond states: "Il est yvre" (1.4.272), "Cét yvringne est plaisante" (1.4.281), "Toutefois, son sommeil & son yvrongerie/ Me font imaginer une galanterie" (1.4.349-350). Through repetition, the playwright suggests that Clarimond's inspiration comes from Du Pont's drunken state and the possible ways he could be tricked for comic effect. We can infer that the focus on Clarimond's cleverness would appear sharper next to the visual stage elements, given that the machine effects and props in this play are simple in comparison to those of the court and of the Marais theatre.¹⁹ In other words, this scene's emphasis is not on the set designs and effects, but rather on Brosse's portrayal of Clarimond as a skilled manipulator of relatively simple technologies and, more importantly, of his spectators' state of mind.

The most significant onstage spectator in *Les Songes* is Lisidor who, until the final scenes of the play, is a knowing witness to Clarimond's tricks rather than their dupe. As a spectator, Lisidor's status is closest to that of the external audience. Yet Brosse also portrays Lisidor as unintelligent. In part, Lisidor's dimwittedness further highlights Clarimond's cleverness through juxtaposition. In the first scene, Lisidor is confused by Cleonte's use of

¹⁹ For more on the restrained infiltration of stage technology at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, see: Lawrenson, *The French Stage and Playhouse in the Seventeenth Century*, 108.

metaphor to describe his love for Clorise: “Quoy! Clorise est pour vous & de glace et de roche?” (1.1.68). Cleonte’s figurative language confuses Lisidor even though he experiences similar anguish over his long-lost love Isabelle. Depicting Lisidor as a ridiculous character, Brosse sets up his critique of the type of spectator who enjoys the variety of trickery-based entertainment Clarimond offers. Indeed, throughout the play Lisidor ebulliently praises Clarimond’s dramaturgy: “Le succes est meilleur que je ne l’eusse dit” (2.4.523). Lisidor’s fawning admiration and lack of perspicacity provokes the audience to reflect on the superior position they share with Clarimond and to create a critical distance from Lisidor. Spectators cannot enjoy the spectacles Clarimond mounts without aligning themselves with this naïve character.

Multiple forms of spectatorship are therefore represented onstage by the time Clarimond’s tricks begin, allowing several different kinds of spectator reactions to the special effects to be represented. For example, in act II, Clarimond confuses his guest Cleonte with a “floating bed” illusion. As the stage direction indicates, Clarimond attaches cords to the bed, and the bed is then raised and lowered via a winch (a cylinder rotated on an axis with handles that wind and unwind the cord attached to the bed).²⁰ Before employing the special effect, Clarimond first discombobulates a sleepy Cleonte by making him believe that there is a fire outside of his door in the hallway. Hiding in his room in fear, Cleonte is further destabilized as the bed is then raised and lowered (“*On leve le lict sur lequel Cleonte s’estoit couché*”). While Cleonte is the primary “audience” for the floating bed illusion, and its only victim, other onstage spectators enjoy the trick from a behind-the-scenes perspective. Two other

²⁰ Jan Clarke describes this same “floating bed” effect set up in this way in 1678 for the performance of *La Magie naturelle* by the Italian company sharing the stage of the Guénégaud theatre. Although we do not know if an actual *treuil* was used in Brosse’s play, we can imagine a similar winding motion being used to lever the bed up and down at the hands of the machinist (or stage hand) back stage. Jan Clarke, *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris (1673-1680) Volume Three*, 195.

guests, Lucidan and Clorise, are also in on the ruse. Clarimond attaches the cords in front of these spectators. Clorise participates by adding sound effects, alternating between screaming as if she were on fire, and making it sound like she is playing cards with Lucidan (they were all playing cards in the previous scene), making Cleonte question whether he is asleep or awake. For Clorise and Lucidan, the visual pleasure of seeing the effect is somehow displaced by the visual pleasure of seeing how the effect is produced. In this meta-theatrical scene, their curious view of the bedroom replicates the experience of the real audience who also get to see how the floating bed effect works.

The on-stage characters enjoy using theater technology to trick and torture a heart-sick Cleonte right before his slumber. Cleonte's suffering includes bewilderment and self-doubt. He also suffers from heartache and frustration, for he considers the illusion to be a physiological manifestation of his love for Clorise: "L'excez de la tristesse où l'ingrante Clorise/ Laisse flotter mon ame après l'avoir surprise,/ M'a cause ces erreurs, & son aversion/ M'a sans doute troublé l'imagination" (2.5.605-608). With their acting, Clorise and Lucidan further tease Cleonte, amplifying his discomfort and the guest's and public's viewing pleasure. Perplexed, Cleonte exclaims: "Est-ce que je n'ay pas le jugement bien sain?/ Ou que je suis atteint de quelque maladie," (2.5.572-573), and "O Ciel! Est-il croyable? Mon idée & mes yeux ne se trompent-ils point? (2.5.634-635). Watching Cleonte's torment delights Lisidor: "J'ay pris un grand plaisir à cette comedie; Je n'en ay ry de bon coeur!" (2.5.675). This scene uses meta-theater to show that watching someone being duped, confused, and humiliated is dramatically effective.

What is Brosse saying about spectatorship by staging these rather sadistic onstage spectator responses? In one sense, the play uses theater machines as a way to implicate the

audience in the sadistic trickery. Extra-diegetic spectators may indeed share some of Lisidor's enjoyment in watching Cleonte suffer in his private space. At the same time, however, the play has already distanced the audience from Lisidor by characterizing him as less intelligent. As Meisel observes, moreover, the audience occupies a position of superiority vis-a-vis the characters whose responses they may find ridiculous.²¹ Finally, the audience may have a critical attitude toward Clarimond who violates Cleonte's privacy. From the different perspectives onstage, Cleonte's room either is a private space or a public space, and the scene is one either of pain or of laughter. Whichever angle the spectator adopts, he or she is aware of his or her own presence and participation in the ruse, and the pleasure he or she experiences at the expense of these characters may be denigrated by a realization of the sadism it entails.

Brosse depicts his onstage "director" Clarimond as a sadistic, curious-minded trickster and Lisidor as an unintelligent observer. These characterizations intensify in subsequent ruses. In act III, Clarimond uses stage props to trick the drunken peasant Du Pont. In fact, Clarimond, in a controlling, borderline maniacal fashion, repeatedly signposts the hilarity of Du Pont's confusion: "Mesnageons le plaisir que nous allons voir" (3.1.704), "Il commence fort bien" (3.1.715), "Preparez-vous à rire" (3.1.727), and "Il en dira tantost de meilleures encores" (3.1.754), and "Le plaisir est entier!" (3.4.867). Clarimond's repeated interruption of his ruse with specific descriptions of the pleasure to come reveals his intense craving for it, equating it with the state of inebriating that DuPont exhibits. At the same time, Clarimond also mediates Lisidor's response to the scene with his repeated signposting, as if Lisidor needs to be coached on how to react. Indeed, Lisidor gives Clarimond the spectatorial response he is after: "Je n'ay jamais rien veu de plus divertissant" (3.4.844). The superlative

²¹ Meisel, *How Plays Work*, 18.

expresses to the extra-diegetic audience that Clarimond and Lisidor enjoy Du Pont's confusion more intensely than they enjoyed watching Cleonte's reactions earlier. Clarimond's pleasure increases with his cruelty: Although the stage tools are less sophisticated than the rising bed in Cleonte's scene, Du Pont is in a more vulnerable state, given that he was both sleepy *and* intoxicated, whereas Cleonte was just sleepy. Moreover, Du Pont is not one of Clarimond's guests and he is of a lower social class, highlighting Du Pont's exclusion from the group and the "unfriendliness" of Clarimond's deed. Clarimond's clear fetish for watching others suffer, his influence over Lisidor's reaction to Du Pont and his ability to pick on an outsider less fortunate than himself, amp up the sensation of sadism in the play for the spectators. In fact, as Clarimond's power increases with his unkindness, it becomes possible that Lisidor delivered his own reaction out of his fear of Clarimond, thus perhaps provoking the real audience to feel sympathy for him. From Clarimond's expressed enthusiasm for Du Pont's suffering, and from the sense that Lisidor and the other "guests," such as Cleonte, may be dragooned members of Clarimond's clique rather than willing participants, the extra-diegetic spectators' privileged perspective becomes an increasingly uncomfortable one.

The stage equipment used to deceive Du Pont makes its meta-theatricality and the implication of the offstage audience especially clear. The architecture of the Bourgogne stage is central to the ruse. On stage at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, different tapestries were used as backdrops for different compartments or rooms those often moved to mark the exits of actors

from a scene.²² In his work on *Le Mémoire de Mahelot*, Pierre Pasquier concludes that this technique would have been used in Brosse's play:

Il est fort probable que l'on utilisait également de telles toiles pour ménager une issue entre deux chambres quand l'action de la pièce représentée exigeait des passages répétées and rapides de l'une à l'autre, comme dans...*Les Songes des hommes éveillés* de Brosse.²³

The stage direction for Cleonte's floating bed scene indicates that such a separate room was used: "*Lucidan & Clorise entrent dans la chambre où est Cleonte.*" (2.5). Du Pont's scene also involves a bed, but in his scene it is the backdrop, not the bed, central to his confusion. Clarimond and his helpers place the drunken, sleeping Du Pont in a bedroom and change his peasant clothes for those of a rich man. Based on Pasquier's context and given Clarimond's description of his plan for this scene ("Mes gens l'ont [l'=Du Pont] apporté dans cet appartement," 2I.1.688) we can infer that Du Pont's scene also occurs in a separate room space with a "toile," or canvas backdrop. Georges Forestier labels this same compartmentalized staging effect as "tapisserie" using *guillemets* to convey doubt or uncertainty over using the term.²⁴ T.E. Lawrenson's work on the French stage in the seventeenth century indicates that painted "toiles" were most often used as backdrops at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.²⁵ Furetière's dictionary makes a clear distinction between "toiles" (painted canvas backdrops used in theater) and "tapisseries" (woven wall-hangings used in

²²Pierre Pasquier explains that tapestry was used for back drops of inner rooms visible to the audience and that when an actor exited a room the back drop changed to mark the end of the change: Laurent et Michel Mahelot, *Le Mémoire de Mahelot*, ed. Pierre Pasquier (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), 75.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ N. Brosse, *Les Songes des Hommes éveillez*, ed. Georges Forestier (Paris: Société des textes modernes), "la "tapisserie" est tirée de côté faisant apparaître le décor du lieu en question, dans lequel se trouvent les personnages." 39

²⁵Lawrenson, *The French Stage and Playhouse in the Seventeenth Century*, 116.

homes).²⁶ Although theatrical producers used the painted “toile” for backdrops, Du Pont’s confusion stems from a possible woven “tapisserie” in his room. Upon waking, Du Pont begins to survey his surroundings, and at first he thinks he sees the sunrise from outside of the room’s window: “je voy par la fenestre/La belle Aube du jour qui commence à paraistre” (3.2.709-710). However, as Du Pont notices the fine clothing in which he is clothed, as opposed to his usual rags he questions whether what he sees exists in reality, outside of his window—a view presumably represented by means of a painted backdrop, or whether it is instead representation of a view on a decorative tapestry: “Qu’est-ce que j’apperçoy? cette tapisserie/ Est-elle encore l’effet de mon yvrongerie?/ Ou si c’est que mes yeux louches & mal ouverts/ Pensent voir des tapis en voyant les champs verts?” (3.2.729-732). Although Du Pont initially ponders whether the “tapisserie” is reality or art, towards the end of the scene Du Pont decides that it a tapestry, not the outside after all: “Ce superbe attirail, cette tapisserie/ Ce plancher peinturé n’est rien qu’enchanterie; Et je doy recevoir de cette illusion/ Beaucoup moins de plaisir que de confusion.” (3.2I.757-760) Du Pont is having an experience of ambiguity that he is narrating out loud, and his use of technical stage terms, “plancher,” and “attirail,” accentuate the uncertainty. By mistaking one type of representation for reality, Du Pont’s meta-theatrically highlights the stage technologies that spectators are meant to accept as part of the theatrical illusion.

Du Pont’s confusion on the use of the canvas as a theatrical backcloth underlines how outdated it was as a theatrical tool for creating illusionistic effects. Indeed, in his work on

²⁶ Furetière defines toile: “tissu fait de fils entrelacés, dont les uns appellés fils de chaîne s’étendent en longueur, & les autres nommés fils de trême traversent les fils de la chaîne...Il y a des toiles de toute sorte de largeur & d’un nombre presqu’infini d’especes différentes.” He elaborates on the various ways paint is made to adhere to these canvases, and, based on the brush strokes on drawings in the *Mémoire de Mahelot*, it further appears that painted canvases of this variety served as backdrops at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. The painted “toile” differs from a woven “tapisserie” that Furetière defines: “piece d’étoffe ou d’ouvrage dont on se sert pour parer une chambre, ou tel autre appartement d’une maison.” These tapestries are embroidered (not painted), in the tradition of the Greeks and Romans who used gold thread as an accent.

these backdrops in *Le Mémoire de Mahelot*, Pasquier points out that their use to denote entrances and exits was inconvenient for actors: “ ‘Ces entrées et ces sorties étaient fort incommodes, et mettaient souvent en désordre les coiffures des Comédiens, parce que ne s’ouvrant que fort peu par en haut, elles retombaient rudiment sur eux quand ils entraient ou quand ils sortaient.’ ”²⁷ We can imagine that upon awakening, Du Pont (dressed in a costume, like an actor) appeared disordered in the way that Pasquier describes. However, these painted canvases were made with great care. In his 1638 manual for constructing scenes and machines in theater, Sabbattini details the delicacy of these painted canvases and the care with which they must be treated:

bien souvent, devant que tombe le rideau les décors s’en trouvent si malement lacés et gâtés que, lorsqu’ils se découvrent, non seulement ceux qui en ont le soin mais les spectateurs mêmes demeurent ébahis et scandalisés devant telle profanation.²⁸

Brosse’s treatment of the character Du Pont mocks the delicate, professional treatment of theatrical canvases. The self-awareness Du Pont’s confusion provokes in the extra-diegetic spectators forces them to question their own ability to fall for such illusionistic effects, even those that are artfully constructed and protected. It compels them to keep the dramatic illusion at a critical distance, for if they mistake the artificial for the natural like Du Pont, or enjoy stock trickery as art like Lisidor, perhaps they are no smarter than the two of them.

While spectators may share a superior position with Clarimond, the master of illusions, they begin to distance themselves from his sadistic perspective in the scene in which Clorise tricks Lucidan (another one of her admirers) using a “secret” door that makes it seem like she is invisible. Unlike in the earlier scene, here, Lucidan becomes so upset with

²⁷ Ibid., 74.

²⁸ Nicola Sabbattini, *Pratique pour Fabriquer les Scènes*, ed. Louis Jouvet, (France: Bibliothèque des arts, 1977), 16.

confusion and fear that Clarimond finds him at the scene's conclusion to relieve him: "Je m'en le vay trouver dans un moment d'icy./ Vous, ma soeur, retirez Lucidan de soucy" (4.7.1461-1462). Clarimond's gesture to break the successful illusion highlights just how troubled Lucidan had become. Lucidan declares, "Mais quelle fausse image à mes yeux est offerte? Que voy-je? Juste Ciel!" (4.4.1164-1165), and "Clorise, estes vous donc devenuë invisible?" (1.1.72). Cleonte's questions and exclamations highlight his painful confusion, and once again, Brosse uses stage technology to make the extra-diegetic audience complicit in the ruse because spectators can see the inner workings of the special effect. Georges Forestier indicates that we do not know the exact staging use for the secret door connected to Clorise's room, but that it was most likely a visible compartment in between the two rooms (Clorise's room and Lucidan's room).²⁹ This means that Lisidor and the audience can see Clorise inside the compartment while Lucidan cannot. This practice differs from the way trap doors were typically constructed in the period, where the secret compartment existed below the stage and out of the audience's view. Sabbattini describes how the trap door effect inspired awe in the audience: "cette action a coutume de plaire et d'émerveiller fort, singulièrement lorsque les spectateurs ne s'aperçoivent ni quand, ni comment ces hommes sont sortis."³⁰ However, in this instance, Brosse reveals the inner workings of this special effect to the extra-diegetic audience to, paradoxically, overshadow the technology behind it and instead highlight Lucidan's destabilized reaction to it. As Clarimond terrorizes Lucidan, the château becomes a dystopia, where guests lead dehumanized and often fearful lives while Clarimond abuses his power.

²⁹ Georges Forestier ed., *Les Songes des hommes esveillez by N. Brosse* (Paris: Libraire Nizet, 1984), 17.

³⁰ Nicola Sabbattini, *Pratique pour Fabriquer les Scènes*, 100.

Indeed, Clarimond increasingly appears as a host gone rogue. His final prank targets Lisidor, who has been a privileged spectator to the earlier ruses. Lisidor knows that Clarimond has arranged to put on a play and that the other guests are the willing actors and actresses. What Lisidor does not know (but what everyone else involved does), is that his estranged love Isabelle will also participate in the play and that the plot mirrors Lisidor's real life struggle, anticipating the dynamic between Alcandre and Pridamant in Corneille's *L'Illusion comique*. Like Clarimond, the actors are in on the joke and will watch Lisidor's reaction, as he watches them perform. Clarimond's sister Clorise states: "Precipitons nos pas: S'il vous [Isabelle] voit, nostre jeu ne reüssira pas" (5.2.1482-1483). Although everything is set right when the illusion is broken—Lisidor reunites with Isabelle, and his world is as he wishes it to be—he nevertheless suffers severely during the scene due to his identification with the character he inspired: "C'est mon malheur!" (5.3.1637), and "Mais c'est plutost du mien le recit lamentable!" (5.3.1660). With Lisidor's exclamations, Brosse shows the callousness of Clarimond's final ruse. Although in the end Lisidor thanks Clarimond for his "amitié constante autant qu'ingénieuse" (5.5.1830), it is also possible that Clarimond's delaying the reunion of Lisidor with Isabelle is a form of cruelty, leaving us to decide whether Clarimond's series of spectacles was an act motivated by kindness, or by his own desire for sadistic enjoyment.

Brosse's play agitates audiences through the staging of stock trickery that doubles as torture of unsuspecting characters, and yet, it remains dramatically effective at creating suspense, as audience members anticipate how the special effects will play out. Dramatic critics including d'Aubignac, Chapelain and La Mesnardière commented on the

“uncomfortable” pleasure of the “impatient desire” of suspense.³¹ Although in the context of comedy, not tragedy, *Songes des hommes esveillez* points to a similar audience response based on an anticipatory, engrossing discomfort. Sullied by lurking senses of sadism, mania, and curiosity, spectators of Brosse’s comedy may have squirmed in their seats, not just sat on the edges of them. Moreover, through the character Lisidor, spectators were able to maintain enough of a critical distance so as to still laugh at the pranks while maintaining their sense of superiority. Furthermore, although they were made complicit in the sadistic trickery, it is possible that Clarimond prompted spectators to reflect on the power of illusion and on the ways they had been tricked themselves. Through the staged revelation of how stage technology works, we see an additional dramatic value for machine effects—machinery and set décor are the tools for this type of speculative comedy of cruelty.

Appearing one year after Brosse’s play, also at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, *Le Véritable Saint Genest* (1647), like the *Songes des hommes esveillez*, showcases the behind-the-scenes efforts required to put on a play. It stages the story of the Roman actor Genest who suddenly converts to Christianity during his performance in the role of a Christian martyr on stage, and then becomes a martyr himself when sentenced to death by Roman authorities for blaspheming against the pagan gods. The play’s comparison of belief in God and the belief in theatrical illusion has led many critics to place it at the center of their studies of Baroque dramatic theory.³² From the spectator’s point of view, either Genest had a true religious

³¹ Harris, *Inventing the Spectator*, 111-12.

³² William Egginton’s analysis of Rotrou’s *Le Véritable Saint Genest* is central to his argument for a change in the vocabulary of modernity from one of subjectivity to one of theatricality in *How the World Became a Stage*. In his subsequent work, *The Theater of Truth: The Ideology of (Neo)Baroque Aesthetics*, Egginton explains how we (like Genest) are all performing on a stage that is “reality” because truth as we experience it can never be set free from the deceiving appearances of such truth. William Egginton, *The Theater of Truth: The Ideology of (Neo)Baroque Aesthetics*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2.

experience, or he is such a good actor that, through inhabiting the role of a convert and martyr, he became one himself. As John Lyons explains, the play does not provide definitive “proof” to support one interpretation or the other.³³ My analysis here aims to contribute to this critical discussion by focusing on the play’s scenic and machine effects—specifically the thunder and flame effects that accompany the crucial conversion scene—and speculating about how their realization might influence the audience’s interpretation.

From the beginning of the play, Rotrou focuses attention on the importance of set design and other theatrical technology to the success of a performance. The actor Genest and his troupe’s decorator work on the backcloth for the play they will perform for the emperor. They focus on making the backcloth appear as verisimilar as possible, and this depiction of special attention elevates set design to the art of painting. Genest states: “Faire un jour naturel, au jugement des yeux; Au lieu que la couleur m’en semble un peu meurtrie” (2.1.325). Before their play begins, both the emperor Maximin and the prefect Plancien praise contemporary theater in general for its high artistic quality. Plancien states: “Le Théâtre aujourd’hui, superbe en sa structure,/ Admirable en son Art, et riche en sa peinture,” (2.6.461-462). Maximin also remarks: “Les effets en sont beaux, s’ils sont bien imités” (2.5.464). As in the case of Genest’s play, artificial scenery is considered beautiful when it perfectly imitates the natural versions of what it represents. These moments of dialogue foreground the importance of set design technology for the success of theatrical representations, perhaps inviting the audience to reflect on the artificiality of the theatrical elements, such as the backdrops, for the play they are witnessing.

The reflexivity of these moments is enhanced, moreover, by the fact that the type of set technology under discussion is anachronistic to the Roman context of the play and instead

³³John Lyons, “*Saint Genest* and the Uncertainty of Baroque Theatrical Experience,” *MLN*, 109 (1994): 602.

reflects what was currently in use at the Bourgogne. T. E. Lawrenson explains that the Hôtel de Bourgogne used a perspective backcloth that was similar to the one described by Rotrou's characters.³⁴ The care with which Genest and the decorator handle their painted canvases demonstrates the caution Sabbatini describes in Chapter 30 of his 1638 manual for constructing scenes and machines in theater: "Une fois dessinée une scène en toutes ses parties, il faudra ordonner que le peintre, ayant passé une première couche d'impression... la commence à peindre, apportant tous les soins possibles à coloriser tant les maisons et leurs ornements que la perspective médiane selon la règle."³⁵ In this context, Genest's comments on the backdrops for the show he and his fellow actors produce call spectators' attention to the quality of the set design of the play they are witnessing, and ask them to consider its importance for the success of the illusion.

In Rotrou's play, set technology plays a most critical role in the scenes depicting Genest's conversion. At the beginning of his transformation, Genest is rehearsing the play to be performed for the emperor when he sees a light and hears a voice. The stage direction reads: "*Le Ciel s'ouvre, avec des flammes, et une voix s'entend qui dit.*"³⁶ After Genest sees and hears these effects, he begins to doubt his faith in the pagan gods and to consider the power of the Christian one. This flame reappears later during the public performance of the Roman actors' play. Genest interrupts the performance to admit to the Romans that he has, in

³⁴ In the case of Rotrou's play Lawrenson writes, "To instance the well-known passage from Rotrou's *Saint Genest*, as does Despois, who believes that 'il ne s'agissait que de barbouiller à la hâte quelques aunes de toile' is neither here nor there since in this scene the painter is not confessing to slapdash methods, but putting Genest right as to the manner in which to paint theater sets so they look well from a distance; broad, generous lines are necessary." T.E. Lawrenson, *The French Stage and Playhouse in the Seventeenth Century*, (New York: AMS Press, 1986), 116.

³⁵ Nicola Sabbatini, *Pratique pour Fabriquer les Scènes*, ed. Louis Jouvet, (France: Bibliothèque des arts, 1977), 50.

³⁶ Jean de Rotrou, "Le Vêritable Saint Genest," annotated by Pierre Pasquier in *Oeuvres complètes* dir. by Georges Forestier, vol. 4 of 6, (Paris: Sociétés des textes français modernes, 2001), 277.

reality, converted: “Il faut lever le masque, et t’ouvrir ma pensée;/ Le Dieu que j’ai haï, m’inspire son amour;/ Adrian a parlé, Genest parle à son tour!” (4.5.1244-1246). At this point, the stage direction reads, *Regardant au Ciel, dont l’on jette quelques flammes* (4.5). Although multiple instances of special effects exist in the stage direction during the conversion moments, Pierre Pasquier states that this play was strikingly un-spectacular: “Dans *Le Véritable Saint Genest*, on pressent une certaine réticence à représenter le surnatural autrement qu’à l’aide du discours.”³⁷ He even refers to it as “la moins spectaculaire de toute la production des années 1640.” Yet, the entire play turns on these moments when Genest thinks God has spoken to him and the voice, flame, and thunder appear.

Indeed, Genest’s conversion scenes, accompanied with special effects, become a meditation on the nature of faith. William Egginton’s analysis of baroque aesthetics remains useful for examining the functioning of illusion in representations of divine and royal power. Egginton depicts the Baroque as “an enormous apparatus of propaganda,” one that uses illusion to compel people to justify their existence under a system that suppresses them in the name of a spiritual promise of fulfillment in the afterlife.³⁸ On his theory of the baroque Egginton writes, “the Baroque becomes pertinent when, in the very midst of the performance, and in full knowledge of its artifice, the viewer becomes convinced that the artifice in fact refers to some truth,” beyond the realm of the representation.”³⁹ This perspective on illusion, what Egginton terms the “major strategy” of the Baroque, is particularly helpful in dealing with the theme of deceiving appearances and the promise of an essence (the divine, God,

³⁷ Ibid., 234.

³⁸ William Egginton, *The Theater of Truth: The Ideology of (Neo) Baroque Aesthetics*, (California, Stanford University Press, 2010), 3.

³⁹ Ibid., 4.

etc.) that exists outside the realm of those illusions, or behind the curtain of representation. Genest's conversion, marked by special effects, represents this attitude. From Genest's point of view, there is a spiritual truth behind the flames, the opening of the heavens, and the omnipresent voice he hears during rehearsal, which states: "Poursuis Genest ton personnage,/ Tu n'imiteras point en vain;/ Ton salut ne depend, que d'un peu de courage,/ Et Dieu t'y prêtera la main. (2.4.421-424). Genest's devotion to this effect *as truth* is what inspires him to break the fourth wall and convert in reality. Conversely, what Egginton terms the "minor strategy" of the Baroque rejects the idea that a transcendental truth underlies representation or performance, claiming that reality itself is constructed through a play of appearances. Read according to this strategy, the flame effect in the aforementioned scene represents the inherent theatricality of all demonstrations of faith. In his work on this play, Christopher Semk considers Genest's conversion as an example of an actor getting lost in his role, and of theatricality's transgression of the bounds of the stage. Semk explains that Genest's failure to remain in control of his performance—in that he goes off script—is responsible for his martyrdom: "But if Genest's acting is freed from the limitations imposed by the text, at the same time it highlights the spectacular, rather than the discursive, nature of theater at a time when theorists such as d'Aubignac and La Mesnardière insisted upon the textuality of the 'dramatic poem.'" ⁴⁰ What role do machine effects and the machinist play in the work's exploration of the spectacular nature of both theater and faith in relation to divine authority?

If special effects can provoke sincere belief, as in the case of Genest, or, conversely, call out the artificiality of faith, wouldn't the machinist in some sense, be a purveyor of truth, causing us to reflect on the mediation between how things appear and how they actually are?

⁴⁰ Christopher Semk, *Playing the Martyr: Theater and Theology in Early Modern France*, (Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2017), 75-76.

This play, as we reflect on the engineer's role as a mediator of divine authority and human experience, offers us a new discourse on the power of special effects.

If the power of theatricality aligns with the power of faith, then the execution of the special effects may influence how and to what extent audiences may accept them as “true” manifestations of divine intervention or, conversely, as hallucinations or even as accidental mis-firings of the Roman players' own stage technology. In other words, the material quality of the machine effects could authenticate or undermine Genest's sensation of faith from the audience's perspective. How might these effects have been realized in the original production? One possibility is that actual fire appeared through a hole in the ceiling of the main stage where Genest was rehearsing his role.⁴¹ In this case, a real flame would have appeared from up above, most likely provided by an oil lamp. Nicola Sabbatini details the production of flame effects on stage using either oil lamps or white wax in chapter 38 of his manual for constructing theatrical scenes and machines, entitled “Comment placer les lumières sur la scène.” Although this chapter mostly provides instructions for using candles and oil lamps to facilitate spectatorship, Sabbatini indeed details that oil lamps were used to light the sky “et fassent très bel effet.”⁴² It is also possible a torch or firework was used to produce the flame through an opening in the ceiling. Jan Clarke writes that “lightning flashes were probably created by means of fireworks or other small explosive devices” in *La Dévineresse*.⁴³ Although this play took place decades after Rotrou's play, the use of

⁴¹ In the critical edition of Rotrou's play Pierre Pasquier suggests that the flame appeared through the ceiling: “Grâce à la brèche ouverte dans le ciel de la scène, le microcosme dramatique s'ouvre à un autre espace.” Jean de Rotrou, “Le Vritable Saint Genest,” annotated by Pierre Pasquier in *Oeuvres complètes* dir. by Georges Forestier, 6 vols. (Paris: Sociétés des textes français modernes, 2001), vol. 4: 226.

⁴² Sabbatini, *Pratique pour Fabriquer les Scènes*, 66.

⁴³ Jan Clarke, “Illuminating the Guénégaud Stage: Some Seventeenth-Century Lighting Effects,” *French Studies*, Vol. LIII. No. 1 (1999), 10.

fireworks on the French stage appeared for the first time in 1619 in *Ballet de Tancredè*,⁴⁴ It is possible, therefore, that the machinist threw a firework from a hidden (or not so hidden) place above the main stage to create the flame effect. One could imagine that a firework would have a more startling effect and could more easily convey a “misfire,” due to the sudden noise they could produce. Conversely, given the risk of possible dripping, the oil lamps and white wax would most likely have been more carefully presented, thus suggesting a more deliberate light effect. As these hypotheses suggest, the technology used to create the machinist’s flame in this rehearsal scene could have influenced the reception of the flame effect, as either truly divine, a misfire or even a deliberate practical joke.

These various possible interpretations of the first flame effect take on new significance in the subsequent scene of the Roman actors’ performance for their imperial host. The first flame effect designates what the extra-diegetic audience knows about Genest that the inter-diegetic audience does not. This dramatic irony is heightened when the inter-diegetic spectators rave about Genest’s “performance” and the quality of the stage effects. After the opening scene of the inner play, the emperor Diocletian declares: “En cet Acte, Genest, à mon gré se surpasse” (2.8.667), and the emperor Maximin states: “Il ne se peut rien feindre avecque plus de grâce” (2.8.668). Famed for his theatrical skill, Genest *should* deliver a performance that is perfect, in the way the Romans anticipate. And yet, his performance convinces because he no longer recognizes the boundary between person and personae. Christopher Semk conflates Genest’s “bad acting” with his conversion: “Genest’s crime, then, was not necessarily a veritable conversion but rather a derogation of the tacit understanding of the relationship between spectators and actors.”⁴⁵ Similar to Brosse’s play,

⁴⁴ McGowan, *L’Art du ballet de cour en France: 1581- 1643*, 129.

⁴⁵ Christopher Semk, *Playing the Martyr*, 83.

then, machine effects in *Genest* are a vehicle for a perversion of the actor/spectator relationship. In *Les Songes des hommes*, Clarimond's victims become unwitting actors in spectacles staged to entertain spectators whose motives are unveiled as increasingly sadistic. In Rotrou's play, the onstage audience witnesses a performance that, in the eyes of its actor, is not one. In both plays, machine effects designate the dramatic moments in which the theatrical intrudes into the "real," or vice versa.

An additional factor in the reception of this scene's theatricality is the architecture of its stage design. Specifically, the Roman actors' play takes place on a "petit théâtre" structure, whose use in other types of performances of the period may inform how audiences interpret what occurs there. Indeed, theater audiences of the 1640s were accustomed to seeing divinity represented through spectacular machine effects and elaborate set designs, including the "petit théâtre." The "petit théâtre" was traditionally used to represent divine authority. Hélène Visentin convincingly describes the success of this staging:

On a tout lieu de croire que cette apparition divine fut réalisée sur un espace praticable surélevé, au-dessus de la scène principale, que l'on appelle communément le « petit théâtre » ou le « théâtre de Jupiter », réminiscence du *theologeion* du théâtre des Anciens ; quant à l'ouverture du ciel, il suffisait de tirer un rideau ou une tapisserie afin de faire apparaître la nuée d'Hercule posée sur la scène supérieure avant que la divinité n'effectue une descente sur la scène principale, à l'aide probablement d'une glissière.⁴⁶

A *deus ex machina* in a literal sense, Visentin suggests that divine authority, symbolizing royal order, was often depicted through this special effect in the earlier theater history.

Moreover, her work on *Mirame* (1641) suggests that the machine effects were not ridiculous or comical as suggested by contemporary academic critics, but instead genuinely

⁴⁶ Hélène Visentin, "Au coeur d'une mutation socio-politique et esthétique de l'art dramatique en France: le théâtre à machines à la cour et à la ville," *Rome-Paris 1640: transferts culturels et renaissance d'un centre artistique*, 513.

admirable.⁴⁷ Audiences, perhaps, were conditioned to interpret what they saw on the “petit théâtre” as genuine representations of divine might.

Of course, in Rotrou’s play, similar effects appear in the context of a meta-theatrical work, provoking spectator reflection on theater’s ability to enchant through representation. The stage direction suggests that Genest ascends to the “petit théâtre” before the rehearsal, “*Le théâtre s’ouvre*” (2.1) and then again when the inner play begins, “*Genest seul sur le Théâtre élevé*” (2.7), thereby making his “conversion” in both performances taking place inside the “petit théâtre.” Since spectators were accustomed to seeing divine authority theatricalized via a “petit théâtre,” and since Genest’s “conversion” took place inside of one, it is possible that his religious transformation seemed sincere, conforming to audience expectations for supernatural representations in this scenic context. In this scenario, given the effectiveness Visentin attributes to this structure, the flame effect during Genest’s rehearsal would have resonated with the traditional use of the “petit théâtre,” to appear to audiences as a representation of an authentic spark of faith, in line with Egginton’s “major strategy,” in which the promise of spiritual fulfillment remains intact in the representation of divine authority. Indeed, shortly after the special effects in rehearsal, Genest has spiritual doubts that seem real: “Prenez, Dieux, contre Christ, prenez votre parti,/ Dont ce rebelle coeur s’est Presque départi;/ Et toi, contre les dieux, ô Christ, prends ta defense,/ Puisqu’à tes lois, ce coeur fait encor résistance” (2.4.435-442). If the “petit théâtre” was the focus of the scene, it is possible that it symbolically aligned with divine authority central to Genest’s confusion. It remains possible the flame effect expresses the same divine authority that the “théâtre de Jupiter” was meant to showcase.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 511-512.

The role of audience expectations is also illustrated by a final possible technology that may have been used at the Bourgogne to stage the conversion scenes. Earlier, I discussed the traditional and relatively “low-tech” lighting effects that may have materialized the flash of light indicated in Rotrou’s stage directions. A newer means of producing such an effect was that of an “éclair.” The Italian machinist Sabbatini detailed how this light effect works in his treatise on mechanics that circulated in France from the time it was published in 1638.⁴⁸ The younger Buffequin at the Hôtel de Bourgogne would have had access to this manual. Sabbatini describes that a flash, such as that produced by lightning, could be created from two hanging planks: the lower one covered in gold in the shape of a lightning bolt and the higher one with candles attached to create the visual effect of flashing light. In *Chapitre 52: Comment stimuler des éclairs* Sabbatini writes:

on mettra une autre planche, longue d’un pied et demi, laquelle devra être recouverte de clinquants d’or et devra être un peu plus longue que la fissure que l’on fit pour l’éclair...Au moment d’opérer, on prendra dix ou douze chandelles et on les posera sur le morceau immobile de la planche, distantes les unes des autres de trois ou quatre doigts et à un demi-pied de la fissure; on les allumera et on postera ensuite un homme par éclair, si on en fait plusieurs, lequel devra tenir en main le morceau mobile de la planche, laquelle s’ira rejoindre au morceau immobile et l’éclair aura disparu. Et procédant ainsi, on en pourra faire d’autres, des grands, des petits, selon la volonté de l’ordonnateur.⁴⁹

This lightning flash effect involves more than one artisan holding various planks of wood (one plank had gold pieces on it and the other a reflective device) at various distances, and when the planks come together the appearance of a flash disappears. Sabbatini’s description suggests that the machinist (“l’ordonnateur”) chooses the length of the flash to suit his needs, and it is telling that Sabbatini fails to mention that the playwright would be consulted in any way. Sabbatini focuses on the functionality of the effect, at the hands of the operators, not on

⁴⁸ Visentin, *Rome-Paris 1640: transferts culturels et renaissance d’un centre artistique*, 513.

⁴⁹ Nicola Sabbatini, *Pratique pour Fabriquer les Scènes*, chapitre 52, p. 162.

the possible aesthetic relation of the effect to the play itself. The novelty of the effect surely had an effect on the aesthetic reception of plays, though. Lawrenson explains that Sabbatini's engineering was innovative for his time: "the merest listing of some of the chapter headings of his second book forms a vertiginous repertory of possibilities at a time when the baroque was not completely developed... These machines have broken free of reference to the past."⁵⁰ If this was the technique used for Rotrou's play, we can infer that this "éclair" lighting effect would have appeared innovative to the spectator, standing out from the more old-fashioned aspects of the dramatic production. It would have especially stood out at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where less innovative machine effects were typically used. With the sophisticated "éclair" effect, divine power is more stylized, more broadly awe-inspiring. The object of awe, however, could either be the subject of representation (the divine light suggested by Genest's response) or the genius of the play's machinist. In either case, the engineer stands in for divine authority.

Although the Bourgogne was not known for its machinery, in the case of both *Les Songes des hommes* and *Le Véritable Saint-Genest*, it served as a productive backdrop for meta-theatrical reflections on the role of special effects in the creation of theatrical illusion and spectator engagement. In Brosse's play, the meta-theatrical structure arouses and satiates the curiosity of the spectator by providing a behind-the-scenes view of how the scenery and special effects work. The visual delight of seeing the effect is somehow supplemented by the pleasure of seeing how the effect is constructed. In Rotrou's play, the special effect instigates a larger reflection on the relationship between spectacle and belief, such that the quality of the effect—its spectacularity, verisimilitude, and novelty—has the power to influence how audiences interpret the nature of this relationship. As many scholars have discussed, both of

⁵⁰ Lawrenson, *The French Stage and Playhouse in the Seventeenth Century*, 45.

these plays reflect on the nature of illusion and belief through their meta-theatrical structure. A focus on the role of machine effects within this construction revisits that problematic from the perspective of theater's materiality, showing that the plays acknowledge that illusion is fabricated not only through words and actions, but by nuts and bolts, pulleys, elevated platforms, trap doors, and lighting effects, which play an ambivalent role in maintaining and resisting verisimilitude.

Machine Effects in Meta-Theater at the Guénégaud

In contrast to the Hôtel de Bourgogne, beginning in the mid 1640's, the Marais theater began to include more spectacular productions in their repertoire. This is in large part due to the technical improvements made to the venue during a rebuilding, after a fire, in 1644. The Marais staged five "machine plays" between 1647 and 1649,⁵¹ before the well-studied 1655 revival of Corneille's *Andromède*. Equally impressive, the Marais theater also made the spectacular aesthetic available to a larger public: As S. Wilma Deierkauf-Holsboer observes, "cela [les pièces à grand spectacle au répertoire] permettra donc aux spectateurs ordinaires, à tous les Parisiens sans exception, de voir les nouvelles merveilles de la mise en scène."⁵² Plays with special effects continued to dominate at the Marais until its closure in 1673. Indeed, 1673 remains a significant year in French theater history, marking Molière's death, the Marais Theater's closure, and the Guénégaud Theater's creation through the merger of the displaced Molière and Marais troupes.

After 1673, spectacular productions also appeared at the Guénégaud theater, revealing the public's appetite for new special effects. The journalist and dramatist Jean Donneau de

⁵¹ Ibid., 21.

⁵² S. Wilma Deierkauf-Holsboer, *Le Théâtre du Marais: Le berceau de l'opéra et de la comédie française 1648-1675*, vol. 2 of 2, (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1958), 18.

Visé played an important role in satiating the public's appetite for this aesthetic. Jan Clarke elucidates his early role in negotiating on behalf of the Guénégaud with certain members of the Marais troupe before its eventual closure.⁵³ These negotiations resulted in the transfer of actors, costumes and theater machines from the Marais to the Guénégaud.⁵⁴ Thus, in addition to staging Molière's works, the Guénégaud also continued the machine-centric dramatic tradition of the Marais theatre, with the construction and representation of plays making heavy use of stage machinery.

However, many of the machine plays of the Guénégaud were unlike the mythology-centered machine plays the public had come to know at the Marais (*Andromède*, *La Toison d'Or*, *Les Amours de Jupiter et de Sémélé*, etc.). In 1675, the French royal composer Jean-Baptiste Lully secured a monopoly over the use of music on stage.⁵⁵ Therefore the use of singing and instruments was no longer available to the producers of the Guénégaud, neither to entertain, nor to drown out the sounds of the machines during the performance.⁵⁶ As a result, members of the Guénégaud, and its two chief playwrights, Jean Donneau de Visé and Thomas Corneille, had to come up with new ways to incorporate theatrical machinery on stage. Their play *La Devineresse* is one result of their efforts. At base, *La Devineresse* represents Donneau de Visé and Corneille's effort to dazzle the public with machines despite bureaucratic restrictions on the Guénégaud's productions. In the play, machine effects do not

⁵³ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 54.

⁵⁵ Jan Clarke, *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris (1673-1680) Volume Three: The Demise of the Machine Play*, (New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2007), 277.

⁵⁶ Visentin explains the use of music in the machine play, *Andromède* covered the noise of the machines: "la présence isolée de paroles chantées et un recours limité à la musique (généralement à l'apparition des machines pour en couvrir le bruit)." Hélène Visentin, "Au coeur d'une mutation socio-politique et esthétique de l'art dramatique en France: le théâtre à machines à la cour et à la ville," *Rome-Paris 1640: transferts culturels et renaissance d'un centre artistique*, 516.

represent “real” events in the fictional world represented onstage. Rather, much like in *Les Songes des hommes*, they reproduce effects created by the characters. Written in response to the Affair of the Poisons, it also displays the public’s obsession with phantasmagoria. As Martial Poirson and others observe, *La Devineresse* uses meta-theater to debunk illusion, not to represent the divine.⁵⁷ Yet, as I will show, while the play unveils the creation of illusions of the supernatural, it also demonstrates that even disillusioned viewers remain in thrall to the spectacular. *La Devineresse* reveals the aesthetic power of special effects beyond their role as representations of the divine.

La Devineresse alluded to many Parisians’ fascination for fortune-tellers and “black magic,” in one form or another, and the address to the readers of *La Devineresse* acknowledges this reality: “on est fort persuadé que mille & mille Gens se sont trouvez dans les divers caracteres dont la Comédie de la Devineresse est composée, & c’est parce qu’ils s’y sont trouvez, qu’elle a pû leur estre utile.”⁵⁸ According to its authors, this play aimed to provoke audience members to think of their own relationship to occult beliefs. Purportedly, it staged the same special effects used by fortunetellers implicated in the Affair of the Poisons, and served as a warning to spectators who might otherwise be duped by their tricks.

In the play, Madame Jobin is one such practitioner of black magic. She is a sort of anti-hero because her horrible behavior in tricking her clients is paired with an intriguing competence that makes the audience invested in her. The authors’ aim is not to point out what an injustice Mme. Jobin’s work is, but instead to point out how ordinary it would be for one to try and profit from the business of giving the public what they want, whether that is

⁵⁷Martial Poirson, “Les Classiques ont-ils cru à leurs machines? La force du surnaturel dans *La Devineresse* ou *les Faux enchantements* (1679), *Revue d’histoire du théâtre*, 56 (2004), 192.

⁵⁸ Corneille and Donneau de Visé, *La Devineresse ou Les Faux enchantements*, ed. P.J. Yarrow, (England: University of Exeter, 1971), 6.

flattery, reassurance, or predictions about the future. In fact, in the preface, the authors even declare that it was as if the trusting public was *asking* to be tricked: “elles [les personnes] sont timides & naturellement poussées à tout croire...qu’elles se laissent tromper d’autant facilement qu’elles cherchent en quelque façon à estre trompées.”⁵⁹ The preface suggests that the goal of the play is to encourage spectators to reflect on moments when they sought the assurance of trickery themselves.

The plot and different types of characters in the play serve to represent the various members of the Parisian public who were duped by or complicit with actual Parisian fortunetellers such as La Voisin and her helper Lesage.⁶⁰ Among the credulous clients in the play, some, such as Mme des Roches, visit Mme Jobin to become more beautiful, or to receive the fortuneteller’s flattery. Others seek self-improvement, such as La Paysanne who asks for “une pommade” to make her breasts larger or Mr Gilet who seeks courage and purchases a magic sword for battle. The character Mme de Troufignac asks Mme Jobin to change her into a man, and Mme de la Jubliniere and Mme Noblet, unhappy in their marriages, seek to learn when their husbands will die. Conversely, le Chevalier, la Marquise and Mme de Clarimont fear that their love is unrequited and seek reassurance from Mme Jobin. The aforementioned credulous characters often react to Mme Jobin’s magic with gratitude and enthusiasm, most likely provoking laughter in the extra-diegetic spectators who are privy to the inner workings of her “magic” with their privileged perspective. Indeed, helper characters, such as Maturine and Mademoiselle du Verdier, show that Mme Jobin’s clairvoyance often relies on spies. Vanity or personal insecurities blinker these trusting characters, and Mme Jobin caters to them accordingly for monetary profit.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁰ Clarke, *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris (1673-1680) Volume Three*, 346.

The juxtaposition of credulous and incredulous characters serves to highlight Mme Jobin's variety of magical skill and her success as a master manipulator of both appearances and her clients' emotions. Mme Jobin pits her credulous clients against each other, and another dramatic arc serializes a love triangle between two trusting clients (Madame Noblet and her rival, the ingénue, Comtesse d'Astragon) and the incredulous Marquis, who turns out to be a thorn in Mme Jobin's side. Mme Jobin's client Madame Noblet loves the Marquis who loves the Comtesse d'Astragon, also a client. Because the Countess believes in Mme Jobin's magic and because Mme Jobin has told her that the Marquis would make a jealous husband, the Marquis sets out to show the Countess that Mme Jobin is a fraud. Mme Jobin's brother, Monsieur Gosselin, echoes the skepticism of the Marquis, and Monsieur Gosselin eventually becomes interested in learning how to trick others for his own monetary profit. The engagement of the Marquis and Monsieur Gosselin in Mme Jobin's ruses, in spite of their persistence to discredit and discourage her, shows that even the most skeptical spectators found her craft to be intriguing. There is an entrepreneurial spirit behind her alchemy that these two characters respect; they presume to equal her in guile and shrewd qualities, which, in the case of the Marquis, ends up inciting her wrath. Credulous and incredulous characters appear together to highlight Mme Jobin's many dimensions—entrepreneur, sycophant, magician, avenger, and conjuror of zombies—as well as to model various modes of spectatorship for the external viewer's consideration.

The play creates an obvious hierarchy among these various modes of spectatorship. The credulous characters are depicted as frightened or insecure, and often seem ridiculous. For example, La Giraudiere asks for a spell to make all the women he fancies fall in love with him: "Mais dans six mois m'assurez-vous que je me feray aimer de toutes les Femmes

qui me Plairont?”⁶¹ The play also seems to mock members of the Parisian public who frequented fortunetellers in secret. The play’s address to the reader suggests that people enjoyed learning about the different types of customers who frequented fortune-tellers: “la plûpart de ceux qui vont consulter ces sortes de Gens, ou ne se connoissent point les uns les autres, ou cherchent toûjours à se cacher” (5). The play depicts the prurient delight of characters who uncover that their acquaintances frequent Mme Jobin. For example, the Financier reacts with surprise when he catches the Marquis leaving Mme Jobin’s business: “Quoy, Monsieur le Marquis, on vous trouve icy?”(98). In a later scene, the Marquis confronts the Chevalier on the street about a rumor he had heard about his experience at Mme Jobin’s the previous day. The confirmation the Marquis seeks from the Chevalier suggests that he is surprised to learn that someone of his social status would believe in her magic. The Chevalier even admits, “Je ne suis pas moins surprise que vous” (103). The revelation that unsuspecting characters, such as the Chevalier, frequented Mme Jobin relates back to the authors’ preface, most specifically, their implication that this play remains useful because a large variety of Parisian viewers could identify with it. Vanity and credulity extend to all levels of society.

La Devineresse demonstrates that all ranks are subject to the power of theatricality. It also shows that even spectators with a skeptical, enlightened mindset are not immune to it. Although the Marquis represents the ideal form of spectatorship in the play, for his refusal to buy into the “magic” behind special effects, the play reveals that he can still be moved by them. This idea is most evident in the scene in which the Marquis and Mme Jobin get into an argument because he tries to force her to admit to her deception. His demands are

⁶¹ Corneille and Donneau de Visé, *La Devineresse ou Les Faux enchantements*, ed. P.J. Yarrow, (England: University of Exceter, 1971), 116.

undermined by one of Mme Jobin's illusions which makes body parts appear to move down the chimney on stage via a "zigzag" machine. Furetière defines the zigzag machine:

Petite machine composée de plusieurs rangs de triangles plates disposés en sautoir ou losange et clouées, mobile tant dans le centre que par les extrémités, de telle sorte qu'elle s'allonge par un des bouts ou se retire, selon qu'on manie les deux branches par où on la tient.⁶²

Body parts move down the chimney and then separate from each other on stage, as if magically. Even though the Marquis puts on a brave front: "Je le verray sans trembler" (95), he remains horrified after witnessing the magic: "Je ne m'estois pas attendu à cette horreur. Un corps par morceaux! Assassine-t-on icy les Gens?" (95). The scene shows the power of machine effects to emotionally move even those who doubt their validity. Later the Marquis denies having felt spooked by the trick at all: "Je fis semblant d'avoir peur" (112). And yet, the audience sees that his fear is indeed sincere (Mme. Jobin trumpets: "La voix vous tremble!"(96)) If we juxtapose the Marquis's frightened reaction with the reactions of more credulous characters, for example, Mr. Gilet's delight upon receiving his magical sword: "Que je suis heureux! Mon Epée, ma chère Epée, faut que je te baise et rebaise" (32) and La Giraudière's gratitude when he is shown who stole his money, "Vous ne perdrez rien à ce que vous aurez fait pour moy. J'ay du credit" (37), we see that Mme Jobin evokes fear, using machine effects, even in those who doubt her, as if in a power play.

In these scenes, the play explores how special effects and trickery can provoke affective responses even in spectators who are not under the spell of illusion. The Financier's reaction to the same zigzag machine effect indicates that the Marquis's skeptical perspective cannot fully be trusted. Unlike the Marquis, later on in the play the Financier confesses to being afraid of that same trick, in spite of his rational mind telling him that it is fake: "Je croy

⁶²Michel Laurent Mahelot, *Mémoire de Mahelot: Mémoire pour la decoration des pièces qui se représentent par les Comédiens du Roi*, ed. Pierre Pasquier (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), 338 footnote 313.

que tout ce qu'elle fait voir de surnaturel n'est qu'artifice. Mais je vous l'avoue, j'ay veu des choses qui m'ont fait peur, & je ne sçay si...”, and the Financier also praises the trick: “Le divertissement est beau” (102). The Financier’s confessional tone (“je vous l’avoue”) suggests that he was afraid even though he knew that the effects were artificial. The authors juxtapose the Financier’s embarrassment against the Marquis’ brave front (“Je feindray encore de trembler, afin qu’il avance”) to highlight the sincerity of the Financier’s emotions. Indeed, the Marquis’s peacocking serves as a foil, contrasting with the variety of impressions the Financier describes: “le divertissement est beau” and “j’ay veu des chose qui m’ont fait peur.” We see that Mme Jobin’s magic produces fear and fascination in spectators like the Financier, who are not taken into the illusion. Her magic also disturbs the Marquis in spite of his sound reason—the fact that the Marquis returns the next day to see the devil trick also points to her success. The kind of dramatic effectiveness that bypasses illusionism, therefore, is an undeniably visceral, affective response that disrupts observers, as if automatically.⁶³

Curious-minded followers of Mme Jobin’s work, like the Marquis, point to a spectacular aesthetic that moves even those spectators who are pre-occupied with its contrivance. Seemingly rooted in intellectual curiosity, those who doubt the validity of Mme Jobin’s magic become fascinated by her power to viscerally move them, in spite of their resistance to and denial of such experiences. Mme Jobin snidely remarks: “je vois tous les jours de ces Braves-là. Ils parlent bien haut quand il ne faut que parler, mais la moindre

⁶³A. Bailey and M. DiGangi explain that “Unlike emotions, affects are generally understood as ‘pre-individual bodily forces’ or ‘impersonal intensities that do not belong to a subject or object’ but that inform the ‘co-motion of relational encounter.” Amanda Bailey and Mario Digangi, “Introduction,” in *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts: Politics, Ecologies, and Form* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2017), 4. Eugenie Brinkema also explains that “‘affect,’ as turned to, is said to: disrupt, interrupt, reinsert, demand, provoke, insist on, remind of, agitate for.” *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), xii-xiii.

vision les épouvante” (112). In this moment, the apparently exemplary Marquis becomes the object of Mme Jobin’s ridicule (because he does not recognize his emotional responses to her work), and the authors show that the most enlightened character is not the petulant hero, the Marquis, but the plucky fortuneteller who masters others’ emotions through technology.

Indeed, the authors imply that credulous clients would become complicit in any illusion that flatters them. In other words Mme Jobin also controls her clients through flattery, not just by scaring them into submission. Not only does the fortuneteller recognize her clients’ complicity, she manipulates their desire to be flattered. We see that there is a narcissistic element to this type of commodified illusion. Although Mme Jobin is a fortuneteller who cannot always be trusted (she risks ruining the Marquis’s and the Comtesse’s relationship to keep both the Comtesse and her rival as clients), she is not entirely nefarious—her work effectively satisfies a narcissistic public: “je fais du plaisir à tout le monde, & comme chacun veut estre flaté, je ne jamais que ce qui doit plaire” (42). Mme Jobin treats flattery as a default setting for her work, because she understands its hidden dramatic efficacy. Spectators will become consumed in an illusion that serves their self-interest.

Towards those customers who seek flattery and who already believe in her magic, Mme Jobin provides a source of pleasure. And yet, among those who pretend to doubt her, she is an innovative magician and machinist, one whose work inspires fright, delight, and curiosity. Not a one-note character, Mme Jobin stands for profit and ingenuity. We see her magisterial side when she shares her secrets with her brother, Mr. Gosselin. Like the Financier who admits to both enjoying and being afraid of what he saw, Mr Gosselin also finds value in Mme Jobin’s work after expressing his initial distaste. He is so disgusted, in

fact, when he first appears on the scene that he refuses to hug his sister because he is afraid one of the evil spirits will infect him, and he also remains bitter because her work is sullyng the family name (42-43). But, Mme Jobin reassures him it's not a question of evil, it's one of resourcefulness: "Voyez, mon frère, si c'est estre Sorciere qu'avoir de l'esprit, & si vous me conseillerez de renounce à une fortune qui me met en pouvoir de vous estre utile" (42), and she succeeds in proving herself to him. Indeed, he becomes interested in the financial benefits of her work, and to further entice her brother to join her, Mme Jobin heralds the machines she uses to trick her clients: "Vous n'avez encore rien vû. Venez avec moy, & quand je vous auray montré certaines Machines que je fais agir dans l'occasion, vous me direz si dans la suite de vostre Procé vous ne voudrez vous servir, ny de mon argent, ny de mes Amis" (70). The causative construction of this declaration reinforces that Mme Jobin alone makes the machinery work, and the superlative trumpets the machines as being incredible and powerful. After secretly witnessing the Marquis tremble during the detached body parts scene, Mr Gosselin offers to play the part of the Devil in a new ruse upon the Marquis' return the next day. Her brother's willingness to participate in her craft (which he denigrated to "les dupes") in the second act shows his interest in the technology, or inner workings, behind her special effects. As her brother has figured out, Mme Jobin's power lies in her ability to use machinery to create illusions that trick even those who doubt her. Jobin's apparent omnipotence reaffirms the power of special effects even when their force would seem to be undermined by the jadedness of the spectator.

Indeed, spectators at the Guénégaud in the 1670s were connoisseurs of machine effects, having seen countless plays with impressive stage technology that was part of the repertoire here and at its predecessor the Marais Theater for decades. How did stage

machinery continue to impress such knowledgeable spectators? Although the authors of *La Devineresse* announce their intentions in writing the play as wanting to disillusion gullible Parisians who fell victim to the domestic spectacles of fortunetellers, in fact their comedy highlights the persistent force of spectacular effects even upon the most jaded viewers.

Onstage spectators to Mme Jobin's illusions model both the visceral, affective responses that visual effects provoke (in spite of knowledgeable spectators' protestations) and the rational pleasure of peeking behind the scenes and unveiling the secrets of stage technology. At a time when the Guénégaud lost some of its ability to disguise the workings of its machines (e.g., music to mask their noise), *La Devineresse* pointed toward ways of understanding the pleasures of spectacle that did not entail maintaining theatrical illusion. The play takes a form typically associated with the representation of mythological divinity and reimagines it as a celebration of human ingenuity.

All three of the plays in this chapter explore how much the spectator indulges the playwright in rendering representations effective. Meta-theatricality highlights the stage technologies that spectators are meant to accept as part of the theatrical illusion. Machines accentuate moments in meta-theater in which the spectator's complicity with the playwright is exposed. In this way, the playwrights illustrate Corneille's critical point about the flexibility of verisimilitude. In his *Trois discours*, moments after denouncing the inherently subversive *deus ex machina*, Corneille defends his decision to use a flying chariot in *Médée's* dénouement based on his measure of the spectators' willingness to buy into the special effect:

Je trouve un peu de rigueur au sentiment d'Aristote, qui met en même rang [de *deux ex machina*] le char dont Médée se sert, pour s'enfuir de Corinth, après la vengeance qu'elle a prise de Créon. Il me semble que c'en est un assez grand fondement, que de l'avoir faite magicienne, et d'en avoir rapporté dans le poème des actions autant au-

dessus des forces de la nature, que celle-là. Après ce qu'elle a fait pour Jason à Colchos, après qu'elle a rajeuni son père Éson depuis son retour, après qu'elle a attaché des feux invisibles au présent qu'elle a fait à Créuse, ce char volant n'est point hors de la vraisemblance, et ce poème n'a point besoin d'autre préparation, pour cet effet extraordinaire.⁶⁴

Although not a meta-theatrical play, Corneille's *Médée* involves a form of dramatic irony because spectators know Médée's backstory as a magician and source of power, qualities the on-stage characters underestimate or fail to recognize. Disagreeing with Aristotle's renunciation of Euripides' use of a chariot in his version of *Médée*, Corneille suggests that spectators participate in the legitimization of the machine effect through their understanding of the character Médée and her history. The three plays analyzed in this chapter similarly reflect on the role of audience expectations and desires in rendering special effects effective. Spectatorial complicity is necessary to make the illusions in Brosse's play. Genest's Roman audience exhibits a willingness to believe in the perfect illusion. Finally Mme Jobin's clients are shown to believe in unlikely visions because they are flattering to themselves. Through the reflexivity of meta-theater and the unveiling of the production of special effects, these plays show that effective theatrical illusion depends in part on spectators' emotional states, desires, sympathies, and viewing habits.

In sum, this chapter has shown that spectators are not naïve viewers who must be completely convinced of the representation as reality, as critics suggest. Instead, the public is eager to view overt theatricality and extreme artifice, which produce laughter or terror or pleasure. Indeed, machine effects in meta-theatrical plays recreate moments in which man-made illusions impact reality in multiple ways and among various types of people.

Playwrights used machines in meta-theater to reveal the inner workings of illusion, causing

⁶⁴ Pierre Corneille, "Les Trois discours sur le poème dramatique", in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol 3. Of 3, ed. Georges Couton, (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 180.

audience members to interrogate the relationship between truth and spectacle in theater and beyond.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has aimed to explore what machine plays contribute to seventeenth-century dramatic theory. Looking beyond the brief and often dismissive remarks on machine effects in the era's academic dramaturgical writing, I have sought traces of alternative theories in various sources. I have examined how staging practices tend to associate machine effects with magic and the grotesque. I have analyzed how playwrights and set designers imagined spectator responses to machine effects in descriptive *desseins*. I have investigated how authors provoke audiences to reflect on their own reaction to special effects by displaying examples of spectatorship in meta-theatrical plays. In my discussion of all of these kinds of sources, several key themes recur which I will review here by way of conclusion: the reconsideration of *vraisemblance* and thresholds of spectator belief, the comparison between human ingenuity and divinity, and the importance of material technology to theories of reception. Finally, by challenging some of the critical orthodoxies of their own era, machine effects have the potential to revise the way modern scholarship approaches early modern spectacle.

First, machine theater, as the most theatrical and spectacular kind of theater, questions seventeenth-century critical discourse about dramatic illusion by valorizing multiple possible emotional responses to dramatic art and by exploring spectators' thresholds of belief. One of the most common charges leveled against machine effects by academicians is that they break dramatic illusion. Machine plays and writing about them often challenge the idea that verisimilitude is a necessary precondition for a successful work. For example, *desseins*

valorize the pleasure that spectators take from attending plays that may not be verisimilar but that are wondrous or awe-inspiring. Meanwhile, meta-theatrical works such as *Les Songes des hommes* or *La Devineresse* consider the spectators' own role in producing verisimilitude through the expectations, and desires they bring to a work.

Second, machine theater inspires discourse about human ingenuity and the power of artifice, often implicitly or explicitly placing the artist or machinist in the role of divinity. We have seen how the tension between the natural and the artificial as expressed in machine plays such as *La Naissance d'Hercule* uncovers cultural insecurities and excitement about the power of human innovation as compared to divine power. Spectators marvel at the engineer's ability to replicate the automatic functioning of nature; for example, in the *Extraordinaire* for *Andromède*, the author highlights the way in which the planets in the sky imitate the movement of actual planets so perfectly. It is no surprise, then, that while some playwrights use theater machines because they are effective at provoking marvel and excitement from the audience, others—namely Corneille, in his preface to *Andromède*—also delegitimize that type of enjoyment in their critical writing about such spectacular pieces—because the engineer rivals the poet.

Third, the primacy of technological artifice in machine plays encourages scholars of these works to pay more attention to the material and economic conditions of performance, including the different capabilities of rival theaters. The popularity of machine plays explains why the Marais theater chose to rebuild their theater with costly machines after the fire in 1644, why the Hôtel de Bourgogne used the little stage technology they did have, and why productions at the *Guénégaud* innovated the genre in the face of restrictions mandated by Lully. *Desseins* from late in the seventeenth century and the staging of meta-theatrical plays

with machine effects reveal the public's growing appetite for new special effects and overt theatricality, even as strict neo-classical poetic ideals prevailed in other kinds of dramatic production.

Finally, machine theater questions categories of study- diversifying our image of classical theater by asking us to think about theater technology in conjunction with dramatic poetics. Considering “machine plays” or the “machine aesthetic” as a category of study allows us to bring plays into dialogue with ballets and operas. The persistence of machine plays throughout the seventeenth century belies literary historical narratives that claim to trace the triumph of Classical over Baroque styles or simplicity over spectacularity. The machine aesthetic that celebrated spectacle lived on after 1680, even with the closing of the *Guénégaud* theater and the birth of the Comédie Française because similar machines and spectacular elements were used in opera.¹ Another aspect of the new form of *vraisemblance* from the *desseins* that remains to be examined is how this “machine aesthetic” expanded into opera in the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century. As such, I would like to do more research on paratexts on operas and other hybrid dramatic genres with machine effects, such as “comédie-ballets,” to better understand the evolution of the machine aesthetic.

¹ Jan Clarke, “Machine Plays at the Guenegaud: The Twilight of the Gods,” *The Seventeenth Century*. 12, (1997), 87.

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