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AESTHETICS OF OPERA IN THE ANCIEN RÉGIME, 1647–1785

This is the first study to recognize the broad impact of opera in early-modern French culture. Downing A. Thomas considers the use of operatic spectacle and music by Louis XIV as a vehicle for absolutism, the resistance of music to the aesthetic and political agendas of the time, and the long-term development of opera in eighteenth-century humanist culture. He argues that French opera moved away from the politics of the absolute monarchy in which it originated to address Enlightenment concerns with sensibility and feeling. The book combines close readings of significant seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century operatic works, and circumstantial writings and theoretical works on theater and opera, together with a measure of reception history. Thomas examines key works by Lully, Rameau, and Charpentier, among others, and extends his reach from the late seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth.

Downing A. Thomas is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of French and Italian at the University of Iowa. He is the author of *Music and the Origins of Language: Theories from the French Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1995), and co-editor of *Empire and Occupation in France and the Francophone Worlds*, a special issue of *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature* (1999). He has also published numerous articles.

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Frontmatter
More information

CONTENTS

List of illustrations | viii

Introduction | 1

Part I French opera in the shadow of tragedy

1 Song as performance and the emergence of French opera | 17
2 The Opera King | 53
3 The ascendance of music and the disintegration of the hero in *Armide* | 100
4 The disruption of poetics I: *Médée*'s excessive voice | 129
5 The disruption of poetics II: *Hippolyte et Aricie* and the reinvention of tragedy | 154

Part II Opera and Enlightenment: from private sensation to public feeling

6 Heart strings | 179
7 Music, sympathy, and identification at the Opéra-Comique | 201
8 Architectural visions of lyric theater and spectatorship | 265
9 Opera and common sense: Lacépède's *Poétique de la musique* | 293

Conclusions | 321

Notes | 325
Works cited | 383
Index | 405

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1 *Siege of Douai* (1667) by Charles Le Brun and François-Adam Van der Meulen, after cartoon by Baudoin Yvart. Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, N.Y. | 57

Fig. 2 *The Franche-Comté Conquered a Second Time in 1674*, drawing by Jean-Baptiste Massé after Charles Le Brun. Louvre, Paris. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, N.Y. | 64

Fig. 3 Illustration of the prologue of *Cadmus et Hermione* (1673), engraving after Jean Berain. Photo courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, Paris. | 78

Fig. 4 Destruction of Armide's palace, engraving by Jean Dolivan after Jean Berain. Photo courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, Paris. | 105

Fig. 5 Médée hovering over Jason on a dragon, from *Recueil général des opera représentez par l'Académie royale de musique*, 16 vols. (Paris: Ballard, 1703–45), vol. IV [1703], n.p. Photo courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. | 150

Fig. 6 From Pierre Patte, *Essai sur l'architecture théâtrale* (Paris: chez Moutard, 1782), 210. Photo courtesy of Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa. | 268

Fig. 7 From Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Projet d'une salle de spectacle pour un théâtre de comédie* (London and Paris: C.-A. Jombert, 1765), 44. Photo courtesy of Special Collections Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. | 270

Fig. 8 From Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des moeurs et de la législation*, 2 vols. (Paris: chez l'auteur, 1804), 1:224. Photo courtesy of the Environmental Design Library, University of California, Berkeley. | 276

Fig. 9 From Charles de Wailly, "Plan d'aménagement de la place du théâtre français, transformée en aire de rassemblement public, avec gradins et tribune d'orateur" (1794). Photo courtesy of the Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie-Française, Paris. | 288

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