

**THE KING'S MEN:  
MOLIÈRE AND LULLY'S *COMÉDIES-BALLETS* AND THE POLITICS OF  
PATRONAGE DURING THE REIGN OF LOUIS XIV, 1661-1673**

by  
Serena Frechter

A thesis submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts.

Baltimore, Maryland  
April, 2018

### *Abstract*

This paper examines Louis XIV's patronage of the arts as a tool to consolidate his absolutist rule through a close study of his patron-client relationship with Jean-Baptiste Pouquelin, more commonly known as Molière, and Jean-Baptiste Lully, and the *comédies-ballets* the pair produced during the first decade of Louis' personal rule. By first establishing Louis' development of an absolutist order through relation-based systems, such as venal offices and the intendant system, I show how Louis created and expanded parallel systems of control in the arts, through *Académies*, patronage, and privileges. I then consider how Louis further used performative rituals and physical representations of his power to reinforce this absolutist agenda. It was in this environment in which the arts were integrated as a critical aspect of Louis' quest for political control that the *comédie-ballet* developed. Focusing specifically on two of Molière and Lully's *comedies-ballets*, *Les Fâcheux* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, this paper proceeds to demonstrate how both the production and the performance of the *comédies-ballets* served the Sun King's wider political goals. The artists benefitted from their relationship with the King through patronage and privileges; in return they created these *comédies-ballets*. By examining the evolution of Louis' patronage of Molière and Lully beyond the initial *comédies-ballets*, I demonstrate how Lully adapted to Louis' shifting political visions and gained enormous power as a result, while Molière deviated from the changing absolutist agenda and thus remained only modestly powerful. Success came from each artist's ability to frame their works to suit the king's interests. This paper seeks to show just how the patronage impacted the artists and their artistic output and how nuances in the evolution of these relationships impacted the artists' power and success, financially and artistically, in a way that ultimately reinforced the king's own power.

Primary Reader: Michael Kwass

Secondary Reader: Laura Mason

### *Acknowledgements*

I am incredibly grateful to my thesis advisor, Professor Michael Kwass, for his guidance during the research and writing process. His knowledge of early modern French history and valuable feedback helped me during each stage of this project. I would also like to acknowledge Professor Laura Mason, for serving as second reader of this thesis, and for providing extremely helpful comments on my drafts; I am especially grateful for her suggestion to consider adding Lully to my research.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my major advisor Professor Gabriel Paquette for his continuous support and guidance throughout my time at Johns Hopkins. I greatly appreciate his advice and encouragement. I would also like to thank Professor François Furstenberg, who was an incredibly helpful mentor as I wrote my undergraduate research paper, from which this paper developed.

Finally, I am tremendously thankful to Stephanie Manzella and Tonhu Hoang, my teachers at Concord Academy, whose courses in French history and language greatly influenced my academic interests and intellectual development. I am very grateful to them both for their teaching, inspiration and encouragement, and especially to Tonhu for introducing me to Molière when she assigned *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* to my eleventh grade French class.

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## I. Introduction

On August 17, 1661, Molière's theater troupe premiered his *comédie-ballet*, *Les Fâcheux*, in honor of Louis XIV at the residence of his Superintendent of Finances, Nicolas Fouquet. The *comédie-ballet* was, as described by Molière in his published remarks, “un mélange qui est nouveau pour nos théâtres.”<sup>1</sup> A combination of traditional court ballets and professional theater performances, the *comédie-ballet* was invented by Molière when—responsible for presenting both a ballet and a play for Fouquet's *fête*—he found himself short of a cast large enough to present both a ballet and a theatrical number, and chose to meld the two performance types.

The year 1661 is of note, not because it was the first performance of a *comédie-ballet*, but rather because it marked the year Louis XIV began his personal rule of France. The performance of *Les Fâcheux* itself was perhaps not even the most notable part of the day; the extravagance of the party at which it was performed contributed to Fouquet's subsequent arrest and imprisonment. Fouquet had expected to take over Cardinal Mazarin's position as chief minister; his arrest reinforced Louis' choice to rule personally, without a chief minister. The introduction of the *comédie-ballet* was thus uniquely associated with Louis XIV's direct rule, as it was first performed at an event in his honor. The popularity of this art form played a particularly special role in the beginning of Louis' personal reign, and in fact waned after a decade.

While the inaugural performance of a *comédie-ballet* did not seem remarkable amongst the political rumblings of the day, it was in fact representative of broader political trends of the first decade of Louis' personal reign. When Louis XIV took personal rule of France, it was the

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<sup>1</sup> A mixing that is new for our theaters (Translation is mine). Molière, *Les Fâcheux*, quoted in Gretchen Smith, “Molière's Comédies-Ballets: Political Theatre for the Court of Louis XIV” (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1995), vi.

first time in half a century that a king both reigned and ruled in France.<sup>2</sup> With Mazarin's death, Louis had the opportunity to develop his own network of supporters not loyal to Mazarin and to the ideology of ruling through ministers. He faced the challenge of needing to expand his network of support while holding all the power himself, rather than exercising it through ministers. During his reign from 1661-1715, Louis XIV undertook a number of ideological, administrative, and institutional changes to solidify his role as absolute monarch. The flowering of performing arts, such as *comédies-ballets*, opera, and music played an important role in this political consolidation.

To add to the significance of the year 1661, Louis named composer Jean-Baptiste Lully, who later contributed additional music to *Les Fâcheux*, Master of the King's Music, further indicating a strong tie between art and Louis' personal rule

To facilitate the proliferation of art, including these *comédies-ballets*, as a tool for his absolutist rule, Louis developed a system of royal patronage, in which he built relationships with artists to commission works that reinforced his royal image. Key to the development and production of these *comédies-ballets* were musicians and playwrights who produced them. The most well known works were created through a partnership between Molière and Lully; the pair produced twelve *comédies-ballets* together in the decade following the beginning of Louis' personal reign.

This paper examines the symbiotic nature of the patronage system during Louis XIV's first decade of personal rule and illustrates how the degree to which clients supported Louis' evolving agenda impacted the success of both the monarch and the artist. I focus on Molière and Lully as examples, to show how their *comédies-ballets* supported Louis' initial agenda of

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<sup>2</sup> William Doyle, "Politics: Louis XIV," in *Old Regime France, 1648-1788*, ed. William Doyle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 169. EBSCOhost.

consolidating his power. After Louis' first decade of personal rule, as his agenda shifted away from domestic concerns and more broadly towards recognition by Europe, the art form lost some of its utility to Louis. Lully responded by creating a new art form, the French opera, to support Louis' changing agenda, and was amply rewarded with power and career success. Molière did not recognize the waning utility of the art form, chose to continue producing *comédies-ballets* and did not experience the same level of unfettered power granted to Lully.

### Existing Scholarship

In this paper, I consider three major bodies of scholarship: Louis XIV's use of the arts to reinforce his absolutism; Molière and his theater; and Lully and his music. My goal is to bridge the gap between these three literatures, in order to explore how the *comédies-ballets* as a body of work advanced Louis' political project, and how Molière and Lully in particular helped to shape that project. Louis did not order and orchestrate the development of the genre, rather, he negotiated with the artists to produce a genre that supported his image.

Louis XIV is the most written about French King; the biographical literature is enormous. Much scholarship on Louis XIV emphasizes his role as a modern state-builder, with a commitment to tightening control of France by creating a new administrative structure, imposing an absolutist ideology, and facilitating the flowering of the royal court. The subset of scholarship on Louis XIV considered in this paper focuses on his use of art and culture to consolidate his rule. Key scholarship on theater, performance, and artistic presentation of his kingship during Louis' rule includes work by Jean-Marie Apostolides and Peter Burke, who consider Louis XIV and his ministers' use of paintings, sculptures, literature, theatre, music, dance, and galas to fabricate an impressive royal image as a symbol of Louis' omnipotence in all areas of French

society.<sup>3</sup> John Powell explores the development of music and dance, from comedy to tragedy over the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and identifies the major contributions made to the development of French opera by Louis XIV as well as highlighting the interactions because music and theater.<sup>4</sup> Robert Isherwood examines the production of music under Louis XIV to explain how performance and spectacles served as an important tool for controlling society.<sup>5</sup> Isherwood places a special emphasis on Lully, looking at the fame and prestige he gained in exchange for serving the king. These texts focus on Louis' governing apparatus and consider broadly how he used different types of art as tools to consolidate his power. However, with the exception of Isherwood, most dedicate no more than a few pages to Molière and Lully. Rather, authors typically use them as brief examples to support claims about Louis XIV's passion for developing the arts.

Within the scholarship on Louis' use of the arts arises a debate over the nature of Molière's and Lully's performances. Were they creative satires or benign pieces created to praise the king? Looking closely at Louis' relationships with the artists he patronized reveals a complicated relationship that renders artists neither fully independent nor fully domesticated. This paper will build upon this body of scholarship by focusing more narrowly on Louis' relationship with the two artists to understand how trends discussed in the aforementioned scholarship played out in the patronage and production of *comédies-ballets*, and then in the fall of the art form a decade later. William Beik identifies provincial intendants as a critical way Louis XIV asserted his royal rule over France. These intendants interacted with provincial nobles

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le Roi-Machine: Spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1981) and Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> John Powell, *Music and Theatre in France 1600-1680* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Isherwood, *Music in Service of the King* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1973).

to bolster the king's influence.<sup>6</sup> Louis' relationship with Molière and Lully can be seen in a similar vein; just as the king's agents, the intendants, negotiated with nobles, so the king himself negotiated and collaborated with the artists constructing his image.

The second set of scholarship focuses on Molière and primarily analyzes his plays and their theatricality from a literary perspective. Very few works connect Molière's work to contemporaneous political trends. Dissertations form a key subset of scholarship on Molière and the political. In his doctoral dissertation, Zachary Polsky, a scholar of French Literature, considers how Molière used comic machinery such as setting, staging, and props to reinforce the themes of the plot.<sup>7</sup> Gretchen Smith's dissertation suggests that Molière's productions should be considered as political weapons for Louis XIV; though her dissertation focuses on situating Molière's plays in the contemporaneous political context, she rarely mentions Lully or analyzes his contributions to the productions.<sup>8</sup> Michael Call explores Molière's authorial strategies and interactions with the French publishing industry.<sup>9</sup> James Gaines seeks to connect the literary forms of Molière's plays with the social structures of the era, noting specifically the visible social indicators, such as clothing and offices that determined status.<sup>10</sup> These works, as well as the larger set of scholarship, often focus on the plays themselves rather than the playwright, but they still prove useful to this paper as they demonstrate how Molière deviated from traditional structures and expectations of the time. Molière's plays were central entertainment to the royal court; they helped Louis distract the nobles whose attempts to gain autonomy threatened Louis'

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<sup>6</sup> William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Zachary Polsky, "Molière's Machines: Comedy, Narrative, and Politics" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Smith, "Molière's Comédies-Ballets: Political Theatre for the Court of Louis XIV."

<sup>9</sup> Michael Call, *The Would-be Author: Molière and the Comedy of Print* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2015)

<sup>10</sup> James Gaines, *Social Structures in Molière's Theater* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984)

stability. Molière and Louis' symbiotic relationship allowed Molière more artistic flexibility as long as his plays promoted Louis' ideology. On the surface, Molière's work appeared to be full of criticisms of contemporary social standards; however, underneath, the plays promoted Louis' absolutist agenda.

The final body of scholarship focuses on Lully and his innovation in the musical field. Most works on Lully focus on his contribution to the development of a uniquely French opera style, the *tragédie-lyrique*, which gained popularity in the 1670s. Scholarship on Lully tends to center on the later part of Louis XIV's rule, while the beginning of Lully's career and his work with Molière on the *comédies-ballets* remains relatively unexplored. Robert Isherwood identifies Lully as an important figure in his aforementioned work.<sup>11</sup> James Johnson provides an overview of opera over the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, identifying Lully as a key contributor to its prominence.<sup>12</sup> In John Hajdu Heyer's collection of essays on Lully, the collected scholars discuss Lully's music itself as well as his musical legacy. Louis XIV is rarely mentioned in these essays.<sup>13</sup> Lully's first works, which were commissioned in partnership with the king, allowed him to achieve extraordinary fame for his tragic operas. This set of scholarship proves useful in its discussion of Lully and his *privilège* for opera, which was granted him control over the production of opera in France because of his close relationship with the king.

This paper builds on the aforementioned secondary scholarship to analyze primary sources: the *comédies-ballets* on which Lully and Molière collaborated. Analyzing a variety of the *comédies-ballets* from different periods enables an understanding of the evolution of the trilateral relationship between Molière, Lully, and Louis XIV.

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<sup>11</sup> Isherwood, *Music in the Service of the King: France in the Seventeenth Century*.

<sup>12</sup> James Johnson, *Listening in Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> John Hajdu Heyer, ed, *Jean-Baptiste Lully and the Music of the French Baroque* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

This paper intervenes by considering Lully and Molière together, through their collaboration on understudied genre of the *comédies-ballets*, and by examining their relationships with the king. Louis XIV's development of patron-client relationships with Molière and Lully allowed him to use art, specifically performance arts, as a tool to further project his power. These artists created art forms that Louis appropriated and redeployed to support his project. These relationships were mutually beneficial, and Louis' political structure allowed for Molière and Lully to maintain fame and notoriety contingent on the king's patronage. The plays and works these men produced emphasized Louis XIV as the sole source of power, a notion that was reinforced by both men gaining their own fame from the king. Louis' use of royal patronage as a way to support the artists, through moments of both collaboration and feud, ultimately reinforced, rather than tarnished, his image as absolute monarch. Considering these two individuals during the twelve-year period in which Molière and Lully's work with the king overlapped, from their collaboration to their feud, how broader trends of Louis' absolutist project manifested on an individual level.

This paper proceeds by first briefly examining the structures Louis XIV developed in order to support his absolutist agenda, namely the expansion of venal offices and the intendant system. I then narrow in on Louis' XIV's use of art, exploring the parallel systems of control he created in artistic disciplines and his use of performance rituals to reinforce his absolutism. After establishing the political and artistic environment, I then turn to Molière and Lully to analyze how the king used these systems of control, such as patronage and privileges, to create the performative ritual of the *comédie-ballet*, before concluding with a consideration of the evolution of Louis' patronage of Molière and Lully beyond the initial *comédies-ballets*. Lully remained strictly focused on serving the King through his works and gained enormous power; Molière did

not do so and remained modestly powerful. This paper shows just how the patronage impacted the artists and their artistic output and how nuances in the evolution of these relationships impacted the artists' power and success, financially and artistically, in a way that ultimately reinforced the absolutist power of the king.

## **II. Louis XIV's Development of Absolutism: The Backdrop for the Creation of the Patronage System**

Louis' quest for absolutism stemmed from the instability of his youth. France of the early modern period was simultaneously opulent and oppressive. A tripartite hierarchy bound the social orders in a strict and highly unequal order divided into three estates. The First Estate comprised the clergy and the Second Estate the nobility; the crown granted these elite classes legal and economic privileges that reinforced their elevated status. The Third Estate consisted of a diverse range of people, including rural farmers, skilled and unskilled craftsmen, as well as wealthier landowners, merchants, and magistrates. While some peasants owned property, the rigid hierarchy rendered them largely politically and legally powerless. The tension that stemmed from this power imbalance among the three Estates remained relatively quiescent until the early seventeenth century. During the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), France levied higher taxes on the Third Estate, which precipitated widespread discontent. These frustrations manifested themselves in 1648, when the nobles and the *Parlement* led segments of the population in an uprising known as the *Fronde*. Louis XIV was ten years old at the time of the uprising.

Struck by the instability and unrest of his youth, Louis XIV committed himself to preventing further uprisings. Though Louis became king after the death of his father in 1643, his mother Queen Anne and chief minister Cardinal Mazarin ruled France until the young king came of age

in 1661. Louis claimed that when he became king, “disorder reigned everywhere.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, when Louis began his personal rule in 1661, he oversaw a number of administrative changes that further organized the social order through the introduction of a system of absolute rule according to which all power derived from and centered on the monarch. Because many of the inciters of the *Fronde* were wealthy nobles and political notables, called *grandeess*, Louis XIV worked to reduce their influence and instead, promote his own sovereign power. The *grandeess*, also known as nobles of the sword, were landed nobility who derived their status from the large quantities of land passed down from previous generations. Ownership of this land provided *grandeess* with special privileges, such as seigniorial status over peasants in their towns and exemption from taxes. These nobles threatened Louis’ power as they received their privileges and influence from means beyond the king’s control.

During his reign, Louis XIV sought to redirect the power of these potentially rebellious, individually-minded nobles, in order to prevent future challenge to monarchical authority. He introduced venal offices, which allowed the wealthy elite to buy their way into the ministerial court. Those who purchased these posts became known as the nobility of the robe; they received power and opportunities as these offices provided access to the king. By attracting the wealthiest families across France into royal service, the crown created a network of support of families who derived their power from the king. The opportunity to purchase an office from the king also created a new standard in which those not born into the second estate could enter it.

Louis further expanded his centralized rule across the provinces by introducing the intendant system. Acting as agents of the king, intendants were used from the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century until 1789 to bring about administrative unification and centralization under the French monarchy. The

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<sup>14</sup> William Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism: A Brief Study with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 207.

intendant system allowed Louis' monarchical presence to permeate beyond the royal court at Versailles; nobles and subjects all around France could have interaction, albeit indirectly, with the king. Describing the intendant system, William Beik explains that it was one of the many institutional channels introduced at the beginning of Louis' personal rule that enforced "that the king expected his demands to be met promptly, but that a proper attitude of submission was even more important to him than the content of the demands. Those who pleased the king would benefit from his benevolence. Those who did not would immediately feel the effects of his disfavor."<sup>15</sup> The intendant system set a precedent for a relationship with the king that seemed submissive in nature, but benefitted both the king and the intendant. The king gained dominance and the intendant gained his favor.

Louis' quest for stability and the promotion of his absolutist image undergirded his subsequent projects. He created positions that derived power from the crown, thus countering the influence of the landed nobility. Louis' development of venal offices and the intendant system were key structures to this quest, which were paralleled in other fields, such as the arts.

### **III. Louis XIV's Development of Parallel Systems of Control in the Arts**

Louis sought to impose a more rigid order in areas beyond the political realm as well. He used the arts as a means to exert further control by expanding and developing the *Académies*, the patronage system, and by bestowing royal offices on certain artists.

The Sun King expanded and imposed strict literary standards as part of his absolutist campaign to bring stability to all areas of French life. The *Académie Française*, established by Cardinal Richelieu in 1634, had already created a set of norms for the literary world that rid the French language of impurities and generated an elite cast of writers. The *Académie* expected

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<sup>15</sup> William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France*, 304.

plays to follow the neoclassical aesthetic of structure, language, length, morals, setting, and plot; regulations required *comédies* to end happily and forbade the mixing of *tragédies* and *comédies*.<sup>16</sup> During his reign, Louis expanded the *Académie* by instituting a standard for a reciprocal patron-client relationship where writers derived their reputation and identity from their patron. French literary scholar George Brown writes, “Such relationships often involved a transaction—the writer’s dedication exchanged for the protector’s financial and social sponsorship—literary patron-client encounters represented and performed through exchanges of reciprocal courtesy.”<sup>17</sup> Brown’s description of this “exchange” is crucial to understanding the reciprocal nature of the patronage dynamic between Louis and Molière and Lully. Molière and Lully provided Louis resources for productions and fame just as Louis provided them with prominence and artistic freedom. “Patronage of the arts was one of many ways—including military conquest and expansion of the empire, giving and withholding favor among those in government, and making himself the physical center of Parisian life—that the king consolidated his power.”<sup>18</sup> Similar to the robe nobles’ derivation of power from the crown, authors too gained prominence from royal patronage, implying that playwrights would inherently serve a specific political function, attached to the king.

In 1669, Louis XIV established the *Académie Royale de Musique*, which brought similar control over additional artistic disciplines, as the production of music now centered around Louis. Music historian James Johnson explains this was part of

the academy-building drive that effectively turned the arts and sciences into so many planets orbiting the sun and [Louis] took a personal hand in music-making, confirming personnel, selecting libretti, and occasionally sitting in on rehearsals:

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<sup>16</sup> George Brown, *A Field of Honor: Writers, Court Culture and Public Theater in French Literary Life from Racine to the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 36.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, *A Field of Honor*, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, “Molière’s Comédies-Ballets,” 25.

the works that appeared during Louis XIV's lifetime were permeated with his presence.<sup>19</sup>

That Louis chose both to develop an academy for music and to play a significant role in the direction of musical composition and performance, demonstrates that he saw music as a key tool for consolidating and promoting his power. No great musical performance could be produced without Louis' involvement. The state-run *Académies* thus served as an important tool in Louis' quest to impose order and stability in France and allowed Louis to achieve his goal of maintaining a "permeat[ing] presence." Laurence Packard writes, "Through membership in the *Académies*, created and sanctioned by royal authority, and through the patronage of pensions, he accomplished much toward producing uniformity and compliance with the royal ideas of excellence in art and letters."<sup>20</sup>

Louis also used the bestowing of royal titles on artists to further center artistic creation around him. Even prior to the existence of a music *Académie*, Louis named Lully the Master of the King's Music in 1661, allowing Lully to help shape the development of a royal aesthetic in music. Louis XIV chose Molière as the official playwright of the court in 1665, marking the beginning of their symbiotic relationship. Through the system of patronage, the works produced by these famous artists were associated with Louis by default, allowing his presence to further permeate art and society.

One must bear in mind this system of patronage and order created by the *Académies* while exploring the triangular relationship between Louis XIV, Lully, and Molière. Reciprocal in nature, all stood to gain from their ties. The system of patronage limited the author's autonomy; rather than compose work for an audience, the artist drafted plays and composed operas and

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<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Laurence B. Packard, *The Age of Louis XIV* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1963), 98.

musical pieces for his sponsor. These works were embedded in social hierarchies that determined a production's greatness as much and more than its artistic merit.

The system of patronage fit into Louis' larger relationship-building efforts of the decade. Again referring to the relation-based intendant system, Beik explains,

The king's particular genius lay in his capacity for personifying traditional relationships while making them work through improved coordination. More specifically, his success can be analyzed in terms of three techniques, each of which was a skillful new utilization of age-old resources. First was the transmission through newly-expanded bureaucratic channels of the classic absolutist message that obedience to a personal sovereign should be unlimited. The administrative system associated with intendants, secretaries of state, and royal councils was a 'statist' reality, but it was effective only because of this ideological energy, which activated all its parts. Second was the policy of restoring to provincial agencies an effective role in public life which gave them a more satisfying share of public power while curbing their excesses - of working 'through' not 'against' the provincial system. Third was the policy of shoring up class rule by a conscious reinforcement of hierarchy, personal and corporate, and by the regulation of authority conflicts, which had so undermined authority in the previous generation.<sup>21</sup>

The patronage system fit into a greater effort by Louis XIV to expand power through his relationships. His work to strengthen the intendant system greatly resembles his patronage system; these three techniques can be seen at play with his patronization. As he did with the bureaucratic channels to which Beik refers, Louis expanded the arts, and implemented new bureaucratic channels such as the *Académies*, to transmit his absolutist message with the same ideological energy. Patronized artists function as a sort of cultural intendant, and like the provincial agents, the artists received a form of increased power—cultural rather than political—by working “through not against” the patronage system. Finally, these patronized artists often produced works that projected the reinforcement of hierarchy, especially through portraying Louis as the highest-most authority and arbiter of justice. Lully and Molière's feud serves as another reinforcement of this third technique. Louis negotiated and collaborated with the artists

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<sup>21</sup> Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France*, 303.

on whom he bestowed his patronage, just as intendants negotiated with provincial nobles in their work as agents of the king. Viewing the patronage system as part of Louis' larger relationship-building trend shows how art served as a key aspect of his wider political agenda.

Louis established his absolute power with the nobles via venal offices and intendant systems. He did so in the arts through the establishment of patronage, endowing royal titles, and the *Académies*. While these institutions existed before Louis began his personal rule, Louis astutely appropriated and resituated to bolster his political project. By utilizing similar methods of implement control over artistic disciplines, Louis established new arenas for his powerful presence to permeate.

#### **IV. Power, Presentation and Performance: Physical and Performative Reinforcements of Louis' Power**

The institutions of the *Académies*, patronage, and privileges could only truly support the monarchy if the message was uniform. With growing aspirations for France, Louis XIV needed a clear public image as monarch that differentiated him from those who potentially challenged him for the throne. To establish this unified, monarchical image of himself, Louis XIV utilized a variety of performative rituals, such as the *lever* and galas, which strengthened his absolutist agenda in three ways: they established his singular power, created tangible representations of his singular kingship, and distracted the potentially divergent nobles. Molière and Lully helped contribute to this image through their *comédies-ballets* and their other work. However, before examining their work, it is important to first explore how Louis used other forms of performance to solidify this image.

When constructing Versailles, Louis XIV used art to reinforce his singular power and emphasize the performative side of rule. That he chose to call himself the "Sun King" indicates his passion for the arts; Apollo, god of the sun, is also god of the arts. Louis XIV filled the palace

with décor portraying himself as Apollo. The principal feature of Versailles, the Hall of Mirrors, manifested Louis XIV's absolutism. The mirror-clad corridor allowed courtiers to catch a glimpse at the king when he passed by, his image multiplied by the numerous mirrors. On the central ceiling panel hung a painting, *Le roi gouverne par lui-même*.<sup>22</sup> The image, painted by Charles Le Brun, depicts the moment Louis XIV became the sole ruler of France. Louis XIV sits on his throne in the center, surrounded by the talents granted to him by Heaven. Replete with symbols of wisdom, immortality, and glory, the painting served as an example of the propaganda Louis XIV commissioned to reinforce the image of an absolute ruler.

Louis XIV also used art to reinforce his sole holding of power by commissioning works that condemned those who threatened his sovereignty. Nicolas Fouquet, the Superintendent of Finances who hosted the extravagant gala at which *Les Fâcheux* first premiered, often engaged in the same lavish behavior as the king. He contracted the three men who later constructed Versailles to build his residence, which rivaled the royal estates in beauty and grandeur, rendering him too influential in the king's mind. Already skeptical about Fouquet's ambition to become chief minister following Cardinal Mazarin's death, Louis XIV's concern grew after seeing the extravagance of the *fête* at which *Les Fâcheux* premiered. Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who later took over Fouquet's role as finance minister, discovered suspicious financial transactions in Fouquet's accounts. Threatened, the king not only ordered the arrest and life imprisonment of Fouquet, but also commissioned painter Nicholas Mignard to depict Fouquet's culpability.<sup>23</sup> The painting, which hung in the Palais des Tuileries, portrayed Fouquet as a flaying Marsyas.<sup>24</sup>

*Ancien régime* court historiographer, André Félibien, describes the representation:

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<sup>22</sup> "The King governs by himself" (Translation is mine)

<sup>23</sup> Donald Chae, "Music, Festival, and Power in Louis XIV's France: Court Divertissements and the Musical Construction of Sovereign Authority and Noble Identity, 1661-1674" (PhD, University of Chicago, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Chae, "Music, Festival, and Power in Louis XIV's France", 5.

Le chastiment de Marsyas est une image de la punition que meritoient ces personnes grossieres et presomptueuses qui oseroient s'égaliser en l'art de conduire les peuples à un Prince qui sait s'en acquitter avec cette prudente harmonie qui n'est bien entendue que par ceux qui l'ont receue du Ciel.<sup>25</sup>

Louis XIV maintained an image as a righteous king and the only person capable of bringing harmony to the world. The painting serves as a graphic, tangible reminder to passersby of the unfortunate fate that would meet all those who sought to rival Louis XIV's grandeur, themes that frequently appear in Molière and Lully's work. Moreover, over the course of Fouquet's prolonged trial, he slowly gained the public's favor. Reinforcing Fouquet's crimes in art allowed Louis to counter Fouquet's increasing popular support. This painting serves as another reminder of the importance of the year 1661, as Fouquet was arrested in that year. Louis thus used art both to uphold his own power and remind others not to challenge it.

While Louis' relationship with the nobility of the robe was inherently strong, he worked to cultivate a partnership with the independently-powerful *grands*. Louis XIV channeled the landed nobility's focus and resources to the crown through the development of the royal court culture, which he based in art. He organized extravagant balls and performances to bring all the nobility together at his palaces. These spectacles were *divertissement*, a word meaning both entertainment and distraction. Arts and performances became important new means for Louis XIV to exercise power over his noble subjects. Indeed, he allocated 1.16 percent of the court's budget, twice that of his predecessor, to theatrical productions alone.<sup>26</sup> Louis XIV thus turned to playwrights, composers, and other artists to reinforce his political agenda and garner support from the potentially-rebellious nobility.

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<sup>25</sup> "The flaying of Marsyas is an image of the punishment that these crude and presumptuous people deserve who dare to equal in the art of leading people a Prince who know show to perform that art with this prudent harmony, which is not understood except by those who have received it from the Heavens." Translation from Chae, "Music, Festival, and Power in Louis XIV's France", 8.

<sup>26</sup> Jean Rohou, "L'influence de Louis XIV sur la vie littéraire," in Cameron and Woodrough, *Ethics and Politics in Seventeenth-Century France*, 248.

Louis also introduced a number of performative rituals that solidified his absolute power. Nobles who particularly impressed or pleased Louis could attend the *lever* ceremony, a ritual in which they witnessed the dressing of the king. Saint Maurice, a French noble, describes the *lever*: “At the king’s *lever* the court is the most beautiful thing in the world. I went yesterday. There were three rooms full of distinguished men and a crowd so thick that it is unbelievable how hard it is to get into the king’s bedroom.”<sup>27</sup> Nobles had to be specially invited to the *lever*; this exclusivity caused them to focus on honors, like helping the king with his left sleeve, rather than on their personal sources of power. The *lever* also reinforced the king’s power, as it was reminiscent of the coronation ceremony and reminded nobles daily of the king’s power. The *lever* focused attention on the king; the *lever* did not feature the nobles dressing together with the king, but rather aiding him in his personal process of dressing. However, the prestige of proximity to the king extended outside of his bedroom. Primi Visconti, a noble who frequently attended the *lever*, wrote:

When news spread of the attention I had received at court, I was besieged from morning to night: pursued by carriers, pages, and porters bringing messages ... ladies call[ed] to me, pursued me, pointed at me with their fingers, pulled me by the clothes.<sup>28</sup>

It was not just an honor to help with Louis’ sleeve, but also an honor to be seen to doing it. The advantages of association with the king strengthened the partnership as nobles could receive benefits beyond those given directly by the king. The ritual of the *lever* thus not only served as a performative ritual, but also solidified the notion that power and honor must be derived from the king.

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<sup>27</sup>Quoted in Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism*, 57.

<sup>28</sup> Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism*, 67-68.

Louis XIV further reinforced his absolute power by planning spectacles for nobles, which were also replete with performative rituals. A member of Louis XIV's court described the affairs:

If you were to reflect on all these things, you would find nothing among all the fabulous stories written in novels to equal this truth. We promenaded between two walls of water, we walked under a ceiling of fire, rocks opened up, trees split and the earth moved. We saw dances, ballets, masquerades, and comédies; we saw flowers, battles, night and day at the same time; we heard the sweetest harmonies; we ate all manner of meats, and we drank the most exquisite wines in the world.<sup>29</sup>

The courtier's depiction of the evening suggests Louis XIV's ball had the desired influence. His mention of "sweetest harmonies" upholds the absolutist idea that king makes world function. By deeming the wine the "most exquisite wines in world," he makes Versailles seem like the center of universe. The whole night seems like "fabulous stories"; his sensory description depicts the night as a fantastical story. Through such performances, Louis XIV sought to mystify the nobility into submission. French historian Jean-Marie Apostolidès summarizes this method:

L'aristocratie désarmée, dépossédée de ses coutumes, privée de ses prérogatives militaires, se mue alors en une caste spectaculaire. Toujours privilégiée, elle trouve d'imaginaires compensations dans des cérémonies où elle figure aux cotes du roi.<sup>30</sup>

The nobles served as participants in Louis XIV's performances. Apostolidès explains how the nobles seemed to have lost their political interests, distracted by Louis XIV's *divertissements*. Though they may have lost political influence, they were "compensate[ed]" with the grandeur and opulence of Louis XIV's rituals. Louis staged these spectacles and commissioned art to create what Apostolidès calls an "imaginary order." Performance allowed the king to impose order onto the formerly divergent nobility and reinforce his image.

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted from Chae, "Music, Festival, and Power in Louis XIV'S France," 4.

<sup>30</sup> "The aristocracy, disarmed, dispossessed of its customs, having lost its military prerogatives, was transformed into a spectacle caste. Still privileged, it found compensations of an imaginary order in the ceremonies in which it participated beside the king." Jean- Marie Apostolides, *Le Roi-Machine: spectacle et politique au temps du Louis XIV* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1981), 46.

Louis' power depended heavily on the participation of his bourgeois and noble subjects. Performative participation of the nobility was "complete with motions through which one could go with the king. This engendered not only a belief in his goodness but a feeling of oneness with him, perhaps not unlike a mystic's feeling of oneness with God."<sup>31</sup> Louis' participatory rituals provided nobles an easy and visible way to engage with the king that reinforced his elevated status. Arts supplemented the development of his absolutist ideology by creating tangible and direct representations of Louis' oneness.

The extravagance of these *divertissements* extended beyond those who attended them, allowing Louis to expand his extravagance beyond just the court. Many Paris newspapers reported on these galas. *The Gazette* described the 1668 *divertissements* at which the *comédie-ballet George Dandin* premiered:

[The fête] began at seven o'clock in the evening [of 19 July], following a collation that was deliciously prepared in one of the alleys of the park of this château, by a well-organized comedy that the Troupe de Roy performed on a superb stage erected in a large, verdant theatre. This comedy, which was intercalated in the entr'actes with another type of comedy in music and ballets, left nothing wanting in this first entertainment.<sup>32</sup>

Musical and dance performances were crucial aspects at these *divertissements*. These lavish dances and theatrical performances "celebrated the most commonplace events in the king's life with the same serious mien and enthusiasm given to the important achievements of the reign."<sup>33</sup> The equal treatment given to ordinary and extraordinary events in the king's life further reinforces the theme of the two bodies as well as the significance of the *lever*. The recognition of these performances in newspapers allowed these images to be diffused beyond those at Versailles, proliferating the royal image of king. Louis "came to the realization that if his image

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<sup>31</sup> Polsky, "Molière's Machines: Comedy, Narrative, and Politics," 116.

<sup>32</sup> Powell, *Music and Theatre in France*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> Isherwood, *Music in Service of the King*, 116.

as a glorious, wise, and beneficent monarch was projected often and vividly, it would be believed.”<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the production of art and literature itself was a means both to redirect the attention of the French nobility from political happenings as well as to attract attention from the world to the French court. When nobles and politicians visited from abroad, Louis XIV put on extravagant music and dance performances in the court as entertainment in order to “impress Europe and the whole world with the splendour and brilliance of French culture.”<sup>35</sup> These performances were successful, developing France a reputation for cultural excellence. “Foreign royalty and diplomats who attended these performances took back glowing reports of French culture and the state of the monarchy.”<sup>36</sup>

The arts provided Louis with the means to create tangible representations of his power, allowing him to expand beyond relationship building. Constructing Versailles and commissioning different works of art allowed Louis XIV to reinforce his sole holding of power. In addition to creating new rituals, Louis also appropriated existing ceremonies and institutions and redeployed them for his own benefit, further bolstering his image. Moreover, by creating rituals that allowed for the participation of nobles, he cultivated partnerships with a wider circle of nobles. His elaborate art and spectacles attracted attention from across France and Europe.

As we will see in the next section, Lully and Molière’s productions reinforced the uniform image of the king in their productions. Whether by turning the stage into state of chaos that could only be resolved by the king or including panegyric monologues, their works contributed to Louis’ royal reputation. Just as the nobles served as an audience for the

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<sup>34</sup> Isherwood, *Music in Service of the King*, 116.

<sup>35</sup> Chrystelle T. Bond, "Louis XIV," *Dance Teacher* 27, no. 9 (September 2005): 82 from ProQuest Academic Research Library.

<sup>36</sup> Julie A. Sadie, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. George Grove and Stanley Sadie (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 218.

*divertissements* and the *lever*, they were also the audience for Lully and Molière's performances, creating another domain in which Louis could reiterate his power.

## V. Molière and Lully's *Comédies-Ballets* in Service Of Louis XIV's Performative Propaganda

The *comédie-ballet* constitutes an under-studied and under-analyzed component of Louis' use of art as part of his absolutist agenda. Filled with themes of hierarchical systems and undergirded with Franco-centrism, the *comédies-ballets*' subjects and contextual elements, such as the particular patron-performer-audience relationship, are key to understanding its significance. One must bear this context in mind when examining the plays, in order to recognize how the genre was necessary to its single patron, Louis XIV. Over the course of Louis' first decade of personal rule, Molière and Lully produced twelve *comédies-ballets* together: *Les Fâcheux* (1661, 1664), *Le Mariage forcé* (1664), *La Princesse d'Élide* (1664), *L'Amour médecin* (1665), *Le pastorale comique* (1667), *Le Sicilien* (1667), *George Dandin* (1668), *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669), *Les Amants magnifiques* (1670), *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670), *Psyché* (1671), and *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* (1671). Before delving deeper into how Lully and Molière's collaboration on the *comédies-ballets* reinforced this political agenda, this section will first provide a brief description of how these two men gained the king's patronage. After establishing the patron-client relationship necessary for the genre to flourish, this section will then show exactly how the production and performance of the *comédie-ballet* supported Louis XIV's absolutist aspirations.

### Molière

Molière, born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin in 1622, is known as the one of the greatest French playwrights. However, he could not have achieved his fame, either during his life or posthumously, without royal patronage. From his childhood, Molière and his ensuing success

were intrinsically linked to the king. Though members of the Third Estate, the Poquelin family lived very well compared to others in their order. A family of upholsterers, Jean-Baptiste's father purchased the title of upholsterer-in-ordinary to King Louis XIII, which put him in close proximity to the realm of nobles and courtiers, an environment from which the Third Estate was typically excluded. Jean-Baptiste's upbringing thus appeared comparable to that of boys in the Second Estate. He studied at the Collège de Clermont, where he attended classes in the company of nobles and royals, including Prince de Conti, who later became his patron and later still his critic.<sup>37</sup> Although the Collège de Clermont exposed the young Jean-Baptiste to theater, the future playwright studied law and, following the completion of his studies, took over his father's upholstery position. Serving as upholsterer-in-ordinary gave him the opportunity to gain entrance to the royal bedroom and allowed him to travel with the king. Jean-Baptiste thus grew up with royal ties, establishing connections that would later catalyze his career.

Jean-Baptiste's choice to pursue a career in theater challenged traditional social expectations. French law historically limited actors and though Louis XIV eliminated many of these laws, society continued to stigmatize the profession. In 1634, Molière abandoned his family name Poquelin and his position as upholsterer-in-ordinary to join a theater troupe, relinquishing his family's title and abandoning all family associations. While he never explained his reasons for the new name, the choice clearly demonstrates a break from his past and from all connections to the king. Three years later, after gaining some prominence in the provinces, Molière started his own troupe, which performed tragedies written by other playwrights. Molière's *comédies*, however, gained him true fame. His comedic career began in 1655, when he first performed a farce in front of the twelve-year-old king at a time when "the gradual silencing

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<sup>37</sup> Ramon Fernandez, *Molière: The Man Seen Through the Plays* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), 4.

of satirical theater and the cultural reorientation of urban elites toward Paris and the king's court did encourage the predominance of a single public discourse—the discourse of absolutism.”<sup>38</sup> Molière's comedic success thus was intrinsically tied to the king's power.

In 1661, Molière was already recognized as a prominent playwright. Well-known for his farces that satirized societal customs, he based his comedies on reality, rather than on the imagined. This choice separated him from other comedic playwrights of his time. By highlighting the absurdity of court mannerisms, Molière's plays created an environment in which nobles found humor in behavior of which they may have been guilty themselves. As this section will later explore, Molière's mockery would prove useful to Louis' attempts to diminish the noble's image vis-à-vis his own.

#### Jean-Baptiste Lully

The other Jean-Baptiste was born Giovanni Battista Lulli in Florence in 1633. At fourteen, he was brought to France by Roger de Loiraine, son of Charles, Duke of Guise, to serve as *garçon de chambre* for his niece, Madamemoiselle de Montpensier. It is widely assumed that it was in the Grande Mademoiselle's service that he developed and honed his music skills. In 1652, Madamemoiselle de Montpensier was exiled to the French provinces because of her participation in the *Fronde*, which prompted her to release Lully from her service.<sup>39</sup> Georgia Cowart writes, “Although there is no record of Lully's role in Montpensier's musical establishment, the young Italian would have received an education in music and dance simply through his presence there.”<sup>40</sup> After his departure from Madamemoiselle de Montpensier's service, he joined the court violin ensemble of the Louis XIV and also danced several burlesque

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<sup>38</sup> Sara Beam, *Laughing Matters: Farce and the Making of Absolutism in France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 209.

<sup>39</sup> Isherwood, *Music in Service of the King*, 141.

<sup>40</sup> Georgia Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008), 18-19.

roles in the *Ballet de la nuit*.<sup>41</sup> His talent was so great, that in within weeks, Louis name Lully Royal Composer for Instrumental Skills. During the next two decades, Lully produced numerous ballets for Louis, both to watch and to dance in. Isherwood writes, “Having mastered the stylistic elements of French ballet music, Lully became the foremost composer of the royal ballets of the 1660s. In collaboration with renowned writer Isaac de Benserade, Lully presented his first important ballet (*Ballet de l’impatience*) at the Louvre in February 1660 for two queens, foreign ambassadors, and the court.”<sup>42</sup> While much less is known about Lully’s background than that of Molière, many similar themes are present. Lully also gained proximity to the king through his royal ties, in his case, chiefly Roger de Loirrairie and Madamemoiselle de Montpensier. Lully also changed his name, signaling a desire to take on a more French identity and to remove his Italian past.

Lully is remembered as the creator of “the *tragédie-lyrique*, the genre of greatest musical significance in the eighteenth century... Lully was far and away the most-performed composer of *tragédies-lyriques* in the early eighteenth century, and his works stayed in the repertoire to be review over a longer time than those of any contemporary.”<sup>43</sup> His Italian roots allowed him to create a uniquely French operatic style, based off the Italian one. Although Lully is best known for his work after the years discussed in this paper, this decade proved pivotal to Lully’s career, as his contribution to the *comédie-ballet* allowed him to gain the attention and trust of the king, which were necessary to catalyzing his career. Had he not become so close with the king, he would not have received the royal opera privilege, which provided him with a monopoly over musical productions in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>41</sup> Cowart, *Triumph of Pleasure*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> Isherwood, *Music in Service of the King*, 142.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 20.

### Development of the Comédie-Ballet

The *comédie-ballet* exemplifies many components of Louis' absolutist agenda analyzed thus far. By looking closely at the production and performance of these shows, one can see many of the structures of control at play, including the notion of cultural intendants, the commendation of political foes, and attempts to mystify the nobility through spectacle.

The production of the *comédie-ballet* demonstrates how Molière and Lully were effectively intendants of the arts. Molière and Lully's productions served as a means to portray how the king was "worthy of being satisfied and capable of rewarding proper conduct," as well as "to personify an updated version of the noble prince," and further placed Lully and Molière "in a proper relationship of dominance-voluntary submission," in which loyalty was greatly rewarded.<sup>44</sup> The nature of Louis' relationship with Molière and Lully and its resemblance with the intendant system shows how the *comédie-ballet* fit into broader political trends.

The establishment of the King's relationship with Molière and Lully was key to his quest for consolidation; Molière and Lully created and refined a genre that was unique to Louis' reign. Though Louis did not commission the creation of the genre, he shrewdly appropriated it to suit his project. A court performance that combined music, dance, and theater was novel and allowed Louis to project his power in a variety of artistic disciplines simultaneously. Lully and Molière's *comédies-ballets* comprised of Lully's ballet entrées in between the Molière's comedic scenes were less panegyric than earlier court ballets, but still served as a means to emphasize the king's power.<sup>45</sup> Rather than monologues and prefaces that glorified the king outright, Molière and Lully used musical and thematic elements, such as plot and score, to reinforce the royal image of the king. This next section will examine how the *comédies-ballets* produced by the Lully-Molière

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<sup>44</sup> Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France*, 303.

<sup>45</sup> Isherwood, *Music in Service of the King*, 143.

collaboration reflected the new political atmosphere of royal absolutism. While *Les Fâcheux* included the later addition of Lully's music, as their collaboration grew, there was "a progressive and marked increase in both the number and length of the vocal sections. ...[Lully] wanted to write for voices, and his collaborator had to write the words in order to permit him to do so."<sup>46</sup> This section will look closely into two *comédies-ballets*: *Les Fâcheux* (1661, 1664) and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1670), to demonstrate how the genre as well as the triangular relationship between the three men developed; *Les Fâcheux* marks the entry into this new genre, while *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* represents its highpoint.

### *Les Fâcheux*

The first *comédie-ballet*, *Les Fâcheux*, contributed to Louis' absolutist agenda as it allowed him to displace the role of rival sources of power, namely Fouquet, as well as the nobility as a whole. Replete with implicit allusions to struggle for influence, the plot mirrors Louis' own attempts to diminish opposing power sources. His use of patronage surrounding the production, both of Molière and Lully, emphasized his role as singular benefactor of the genre. The portrayal of nobility in the play and the elaborate spectacle during which *Les Fâcheux* was performed further increased Louis' nobility apropos to the nobility. *Les Fâcheux* utility derived from the play's ability to celebrate Louis' defeat of Fouquet and his precedence over the nobility, while also using spectacle to underscore the king's own power.

Lully and Molière's collaboration began with the 1664 addition of Lully's single sung courante to *Les Fâcheux*, which Molière premiered in 1661. Molière wrote the play when Fouquet originally commissioned him to produce a show for a gala at Vaux-le-Vicomte; Fouquet

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<sup>46</sup> Louis Auld "The Unity of Molière's Comedy-Ballet: A Study of their Structure, Meanings and Values," (PhD Dissertation, Bryn Mawr, 1968), 82-83, quoted in Thomas Glasow, "Molière, Lully, and the Comedy-Ballet" (PhD Dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1986), 13.

thus was the original patron of the genre. However, the play, since its original performance, bears the subtitle “Comédie faite pour les divertissements du Roi,” highlighting its close connection with Louis. It tells the story of Eraste, a young man who hopes to win the heart of Orphise. All his attempts are thwarted by nine *Fâcheux*, or annoying men. The *Fâcheux* disrupt Eraste’s efforts through ballet, the music for some of which Lully later composed.

Louis’ adoption of the genre after the initial performance of *Les Fâcheux* resembles the broader struggle for omnipotence of the decade. In addition to creating tangible representation of his condemnation of Fouquet through the Nicholas Mignard painting described earlier, Louis’ assumption of patronage of the *comédie-ballet* further diminished Fouquet’s legacy. After viewing the first performance of *Les Fâcheux* at Vaux, Louis established a relationship with Molière and requested he make changes to the plot. He continued to appropriate and refashion the genre by later commissioning Lully, as Master of the King’s Music, to contribute music, which in turn made the genre uniquely Louis, and shifted its production away from that of Fouquet’s. Louis’ appropriation of the genre was also an attempt to displace Fouquet and redirect the artists’ loyalties to him, through royal patronage. By doing so, Louis established the genre as one associated with him and his court.

The struggle between Fouquet and Louis over symbolic ownership of the genre can be seen in Molière’s preface for *Les Fâcheux*, in which Molière demonstrated consciousness on his part of Louis’ intentions. Not only was the addition of Lully’s music seen as appropriating the play for Louis himself, but Molière’s epistle and preface for *Les Fâcheux* also displays an attempt to rewrite the narrative around its origin. He wrote,

Il faut avouër SIRE, que je n’ay jamais rien fait avec tant de facilité, ny si promptement, que cét endroit, où VOSTRE MAJESTÉ me commanda de

travailler...Il n'y a personne qui ne sçache pour quelle réjouissance la Piece fut composée, et cette feste a fait un tel éclat, qu'il n'est pas necessaire d'en parler.<sup>47</sup>

Of first note, Molière's statement that the king commanded him to produce *Les Fâcheux* promotes the king as the patron for not only this play, but also all subsequent plays in the genre. This statement can also be seen as a further attempt to displace the role of Fouquet and appropriate the genre for Louis. This preface also demonstrates Molière recognized what he needed to say in order for his works to survive Fouquet's demise. Molière's preface demonstrates how "patronage could influence artistic content and audience reception." This can be seen as the beginning of a reciprocal patron-client relationship between the king and Molière; Molière promoted an alternative narrative of the origins of the genre and was in turn allowed and supported by the king to keep producing *comédies-ballets*.

The original staging of *Les Fâcheux* further highlights the broader struggle for influence during the time, both with Fouquet and more widely with the nobility. The show began with Molière, who played the role of all the *Fâcheux*, addressing the king and the audience. Gretchen Smith described the scene,

Molière steps on to the stage in the garden of Vaux-le-Vicomte, "en habit de ville," and addresses the audience, which includes Louis XIV, Nicolas Fouquet, and 6,000 audience members, primarily nobility. Molière refers to himself in his printed text as "un des acteurs" in regard to his entry; his speech is hasty, "des excuses en desordre." Despite his appearance, he is part of the performance, which becomes obvious once the Naïade, played by Madeleine Béjart, emerges from her shell with the twenty jets of water playing behind her, approaches the front edge of the stage, and recites the héroïque prologue written by M. Pellisson in verse.<sup>48</sup>

This beginning sets the tone for a struggle for control in influence that not only characterizes many of the later *comédies-ballets*, but also the political atmosphere of the decade.

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Richard Adams, "Vocal Signification and Musical Satire in Marc-Antoine Charpentier's Music for the Prologue to Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire*" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017), 51. Translation by Adams: It must be admitted, sire, that I have never done anything so easily, nor so quickly, as in this instance, where your Majesty commanded me to work. / Everyone knows of the joy with which the piece was composed. And this fête had such acclaim that it is not necessary to speak of it here.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, "Molière's Comédies-Ballets: Political Theatre for the Court of Louis XIV," 29.

Reading this scene in terms of the political trends, one can see similarities between Louis XIV and Fouquet, who briefly competed for attention, and later Molière and Lully. This struggle for expression becomes an important tool in the *comédie-ballet*, as we will see in the analysis of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, as it is often the king who serves as the arbiter of justice in these struggles. As the name of the genre suggests, the *comédie-ballet* is an inherent fight as well; comedy and ballet struggle for stage space. *Les Fâcheux* sets the precedent for this using the nine *fâcheux*; their attempts to disrupt Eraste are performed in the ballet sections, putting them in direct competition with Eraste's comedic scenes. Smith writes "The suspense of which part will hold the stage drives the play forward...the name of the genre, '*comédie-ballet*,' indicates this battle: the two halves exist still as separate units rather than as a new synthesis of their union."<sup>49</sup> This battle is symbolic of Louis' struggle with the aristocracy; his efforts to consolidate his rule result from a desire to escape the past, in which the nobility and the crown existed as two halves as separate units, and enter into an era of unity. This symbolic struggle renders the genre useful to Louis' overall mission.

Not only did *Les Fâcheux* distinguish Louis from Fouquet, but it also diminished nobility vis-à-vis king. The nine *fâcheux* characterize courtiers in a way that undermines the image of the nobility. The *fâcheux* are "portraits... modeled on courtiers, who perhaps were not themselves amused but who could hardly complain when they observed the King's pleasure." The satirized court personalities include "amateur de théâtre, poète compositeur, duelliste, joueur, précieux, savant et financier."<sup>50</sup> After the first production, Louis allegedly asked Molière to add an additional character, the *chasseur*, further indicating the political potential he saw in the *comédie-*

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<sup>49</sup> Smith, "Molière's Comédies-Ballets," 53.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, "Molière's Comédies-Ballets," 62.

*ballet*. Molière's ready agreement to the new character demonstrates how much sway Louis had; an artist willingly and rapidly changed his creative output in order to suit the king. Moreover, the decision to satirize the archetypes of the nobles further served as a tool to rein them in. It firstly showed that Louis was observing the nobility astutely; enough to know how to portray them on stage and to know which key archetypes were not present in the original production. The satirical depiction of the courtier further forces the nobles to laugh at themselves, exposing a sort of vulnerability in the king's presence. Finally, presenting the *fâcheux* in such a laughable way serves as a means to mark appropriate and inappropriate courtly behavior, allowing Louis to further direct the actions of the nobility.

Finally, the elaborate performance of *Les Fâcheux* was situated in the general grandeur of the evening's spectacle, further linking Louis' political agenda with his extravagant displays. In her mémoires, the Abbé de Choisy recounts

On représenta pour la première fois Les Fâcheux de Molière, avec des ballets et des récits en musique dans les intermèdes. Le théâtre était dressé dans le parc, la décoration ornée de fontaines véritables et de véritables orangers. Il y eut ensuite un feu d'artifice et un bal où l'on dansa jusqu'à trois heures du matin.<sup>51</sup>

The performance transitioned seamlessly into the rest of the night's festivities. The Abbé de Choisy's account of the evening is reminiscent of the courtier's depiction of one of Louis' balls, discussed in the previous section. The fantastical parties, replete with performative ritual, were a crucial means for Louis to reinforce his power with the nobles. The comédies-ballets, with their elaborate sets and spectacular combination of acting, ballet, and music lent themselves well to enhancing these balls.

The implications of *Les Fâcheux* extended beyond the plot and production themselves; this first performance showed Louis all the genre could offer to his absolutist agenda. As the

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<sup>51</sup> "Les Fâcheux," *Opera Baroque*, [https://operabaroque.fr/LULLY\\_FACHEUX.htm](https://operabaroque.fr/LULLY_FACHEUX.htm).

king sought to establish himself after taking personal rule, the *comédie-ballet* “allowed for a multi-faceted presentation of the king’s beneficence in panegyric,” through its combination of theater, music, and dance. By removing the associations with Fouquet and contributing ideas to the script, Louis put the genre and the artists who contributed to it in his service.

### *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*

Produced almost a full decade after *Les Fâcheux*, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* shifts away from a focus on establishing the king’s sovereign rule to a focus on using existing societal structures to reinforce an already strong royal image. Building on themes present, though not dominant, in *Les Fâcheux*, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* mocks nobles who attempt to violate the social order, thus diminishing their power vis-à-vis the king. *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* plays with social norms in a way that ultimately reinforces the power of the king. Scholars agree that Lully’s music “attains the level of Molière’s beautifully rhythmic prose.”<sup>52</sup> The collaboration between each man’s contribution is key to the king’s reinforcement of power. The production itself came out of a request from the king for a new *comédie-ballet* from Molière and Lully inspired by “the tales told by Laurent d’Arvieux about his trips to the Middle East, followed by the visit of a Turkish envoy that spring, [which] had made *les turqueries* fashionable at court.”<sup>53</sup>

Molière’s scenes went further into the service of the king beyond simply satisfying his request for a Turkish *divertissement*. Molière based the main comedy of the play around the interactions between aristocrats and bourgeoisie. Through his caricature of those who attempt to live beyond their means, Molière uses the Turkish *divertissement* to highlight the importance of obeying Louis’ strict social order. The depiction of class and gender roles in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* includes characters, who like the *fâcheux*, appear to challenge the social order. The

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<sup>52</sup> Claude Abraham, “On the structure of Molière’s comedies-ballets” *Biblio* 17, no. 19 (1984). 8, quoted in Stephen Fleck, “Molière’s comedy-ballets: A dramatic and musical analysis” (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Davis, 1993), 15.

<sup>53</sup> Powell, *Music and Theater in France*, 49.

play revolves around a bourgeois couple, the Jourdain, who seek to marry their daughter, Lucile. She has fallen in love with a man of the third estate, Cléonte. Obsessed with raising his social status, Monsieur Jourdain refuses Cléonte's request to marry his daughter, as Cléonte is not noble. However, the play concludes with Cléonte dressing up as a Turkish prince in order to trick Monsieur Jourdain to agree to the marriage.

Madame Jourdain's critiques of her husband challenged contemporary societal gender roles. Monsieur Jourdain spends exorbitant amounts of money to become a "man of quality," a practice Molière mocks. His wife, Madame Jourdain challenges gender stereotypes by openly critiquing her husband's frivolity. She understands his foolishness and criticizes him for it; upon seeing her husband dressed in an outrageous, flamboyant costume, Madame Jourdain exclaims "Aha! Here's a new one! What in the world, my dear husband, is that get-up? Is this some kind of joke, to have got yourself decked out like that, and do you want to have people everywhere make fun of you?"<sup>54</sup> Women in seventeenth-century France derived their social status from their husbands.<sup>55</sup> This imbalance of spousal power created expectations that the wife would be subordinate to and imitative of her husband. Madame Jourdain deviates from this expectation, however, when she leads the criticism of her husband's foolishness. Nicole, the Jourdain's servant, also mocks Monsieur Jourdain for his choices, defying not only gender expectations, but class expectations as well.

Paradoxically even as the criticism undermines gender norms, it upholds the overall social stratum. While the Molière emphasized Madame Jourdain and Nicole's reason, he also highlighted that this recognition stems from their acceptance of their place in society and their compliance with the social order. Moreover, the reversal of gender norms is legitimate because

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<sup>54</sup> Molière, "The Would-Be Gentleman." *The Misanthrope, and Other Plays*. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1959. Kindle Edition), 224.

<sup>55</sup> Gail Bossenga, "Society," in *Old Regime France: 1648-1788*, ed. William Doyle. (Oxford: Oxford U, 2001), 50.

Monsieur Jourdain's attempts become noble are so ridiculous; his social transgression validates her gender transgression. Molière most likely assumed the royal and noble audience would find humor in his mocking of the bourgeoisie and Madame Jourdain satisfies this desire. She recognizes she is a bourgeois and does not try to elevate herself to noble. In fact, it is something she actively avoids. When discussing the marriage of her daughter, Madame Jourdain says "Marriages above your station are always subject to unpleasant drawbacks. I don't want a son-in-law to be able to reproach my daughter for her parents, and for her to have children who are ashamed to call me their grandma."<sup>56</sup> As Madame Jourdain sees others mocking her husband, she knows that the same critique would be extended to her should she move up in society. She wants to remain a bourgeois not because she dislikes a more luxurious lifestyle, but rather because she does not want her grandchildren to be "ashamed" of her. The audience themselves most likely "reproach" Madame Jourdain's husband, demonstrating that Madame Jourdain embraces the mindset the nobility has set up. While Madame Jourdain upholds the merits of moderation, she also upholds the society that keeps her in her place. She willingly accepts her standing in life and allows herself to be limited by the social order. Her attempts to lead her husband to a path of common sense are advanced but futile. Although Molière portrayed Madame Jourdain as a woman capable of reasonable, independent thinking, she ultimately conforms to the old regime societal expectations.

Monsieur Jourdain further disregards the social expectations by attempting to move social stations, which Molière used to uphold the king's power. The commotion on stage reminded audience members that Louis played a role in keeping chaos at bay. While this in itself did not constitute a belief in the royal authority, it encouraged audience members to suspend

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<sup>56</sup> Molière, "The Would-Be Gentleman," 247.

disbelief in the crown's authority.<sup>57</sup> Molière created an environment on stage that is disorderly in order to highlight the important role of the king as the sole deliverer of justice. His plays also built on Louis' other performative propaganda by engendering oneness with the king. As Claire Crowston notes, "Molière heightens the dramatic tension by tantalizing the audience with the possibility of reciprocity across social divides, but then he reveals that the exchange must fail. In this satiric yet ultimately conservative vision of society, harmony reigns when each man returns to his place. Cléonte, the young suitor of Jourdain's daughter, is a scion of the noblesse de robe ; his honesty and hard work represent a reproach both to Dorante's arrogant privilege and Jourdain's misguided social pretensions, just as Madame Jourdain's commonsense dignity offers a defense of appropriate bourgeois values."<sup>58</sup>

Lully's musical contributions serve to enhance the ridiculousness of Monsieur Jourdain that Molière creates in his plot, thus further reinforcing the importance of remaining in one's place. Fleck writes,

Its pesante character is built on insistent, literal imitation at the barline (a rarity in first sections of Lully's overtures; see mm. 2 et seq. ex. 10), on slow harmonic changes (four bars of G minor, 1-4) and less-than-consequential faster ones (eight more bars to arrive at V, mm. 5-13), on repeated notes (the four D's in m.1), on banal motivic usage (the dotted, successive melodic minor 3rds on downbeats of mm. 2 to 3, 4 to 5, 6 to 7). These aspects eminently fulfill the requirements of the "topos" of royal ceremony entrance music (Kirkendale 27), which signifies more through its steady, empty pompousness than through anything else. Thus at first hearing; but even though the formal repetition of all this pomposity is unexceptional, does it not also begin to hint at excess, in fact at parody.<sup>59</sup>

The musical structure reinforces many of Monsieur Jourdain's characteristics the audience is meant to mock. The "literal imitation" on which the character of the music is built resembles Monsieur Jourdain's attempts to imitate higher nobles, without truly understanding the substance

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<sup>57</sup> Polsky, "Molière's Machines," 120.

<sup>58</sup> Clare Haru Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex: Economies of Regard in Old Regime France* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2013), 119.

<sup>59</sup> Fleck, "Molière's Comedy-Ballets," 156-157.

behind it. The similarity between the overture and “royal ceremony entrance music” hints at Monsieur Jourdain’s royal ambitions, while the “empty pompousness” highlights his reality.

Lully’s contribution can be seen most evidently in the scene with the Turkish king and the closing ballet. As previously noted, this scene is pivotal to the production, as it emphasizes the king’s power. This scene is concluded entirely with Lully’s music. As Glasow recounts,

Instead of the usual opening *ritournelle* and/or *air de cour*, the Turkish actors enter to a march accompanied (according to the livret) by "joueurs d'instruments à la turque". Other participants in Covielle's burlesque include the Muphti, or Grand Turk (a singing role taken by Lully at the premiere), four dervishes, six dancers and six vocalists. Never before in their comedy-ballets had Molière and Lully employed such elaborate forces for an intermede while still maintaining the overall character of the spoken play and allowing the plot to continue uninterrupted.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, Fleck notes,

Throughout the ceremony, the music exposes the simplicity of its “Turkish” veneer with its stereotypically “primitive” and “monotonous” use of cadence formulas. No one but a Jourdain could possibly be taken in by it. Yet the music operates on more than one level, so that it is directly enjoyable even as it declares its theatrical fakery. Lully joins its short sections through a great deal of melodic recall or similarity. The G-A-Bb figure of the “Se ti sabir” accompaniment has been prefigured as the march’s high point and recurs in the Mufti-and-chorus response patterns of “Star bon Turca Giourdina” and the second air.<sup>61</sup>

The music in this scene emphasizes the utility of the genre as it was both entertaining for the court and provided social commentary. Like a true *divertissement*, the court watched in awe, as Glasow notes, the intermede and speech were performed in unity, rather than in disjuncture, creating an elaborate spectacle. The music contributes to establishing a festival atmosphere, while also further emphasizing the farce of the Turkish king. The song also highlighted Jourdain’s own foolery as the “joueurs d'instruments à la turque” contribute to his own naiveté for believing the charade. Glasow continues his description,

At the start of Act 5i the Turkish ceremony finally over, Jourdain has been so totally enthralled by the Turks that he continues to dance and sing the refrains of the music heard in the ceremony itself...The Bourgeois is so completely wrapped

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<sup>60</sup> Glasow, “Molière, Lully, and the Comedy-Ballet,” 99-100.

<sup>61</sup> Fleck, “Molière’s Comedy-Ballets,” 189.

up in his fantasy, incarnated by the extravagant Turkish ceremony, that the subsequent verbal machinations of Covielle and Dorante make Jourdain's consent to the marriages of Cleonte/Lucile and Dorante/Dorimene easy to obtain. The final scene of the spoken comedy leaves the plot unresolved, permitting the musical divertissement which closes the comedy-ballet to proceed in the most dramatically coherent manner possible. Jourdain gives his permission for a notary to be summoned, and Dorante invites all to watch the ballet he has planned as the second part of his entertainment for Dorimene while they wait for the marriage contracts to be drawn up.<sup>62</sup>

The music here becomes an important part of the plot. Jourdain finds it so engrossing, he becomes distracted; his foolishness can no longer prevent the appropriate series of events from unfolding. As Glasow notes, speech is not able to resolve the plot, but music is. The length and ornateness of the musical spectacle means the problems set forth in the performance's theatrical scenes do not need to be fully solved. This diffuses the plot line, and rather puts emphasis onto the greater themes of the play, such as the important role of the king as the sole deliverer of justice. Lully's music thus served not as a reinforcement of Molière's plot, but as a means to elevate the salient themes and deliver them through multiple mediums: speech, dance, and music. The use of multiple art forms in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* is demonstrative of Louis' broader use of multiple disciplines to portray his power.

By analyzing *Les Fâcheux* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* closely, one can see how specific elements of both the production and the performance of the *comédie-ballet* contributed to Louis' greater absolutist agenda. Firstly, their production required reliable and talented artists who would alter their own artistic visions in order to support the king; the success of the *comédie-ballet* was contingent on Louis' success of building relationships with Molière and Lully. Secondly, the struggle for influence, a theme built into *comédie-ballet*, resembled Louis' own goal for the decade. The genre's patronage and plot elements allowed Louis to diminish the role of the nobility and reinforce his own image.

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<sup>62</sup> Glasow, "Molière, Lully, and the Comedy-Ballet," 102-103.

## VI. Molière and Lully's Feud as Reinforcement of the King's Power

After years of collaboration, Lully and Molière's relationship with each other deteriorated; they ceased producing works together and undertook public measures that seemed to undermine the other, all the while turning to the king for validation. Though the origins of Lully and Molière's feud remains unknown, their break from collaboration changed each man's relationship with the king. Each man's success stemmed from his ability to situate his work in the king's political agenda.

Molière and Lully's feud centered around the establishment of the royal opera privilege. In 1669, Louis granted the privilege for establishing the royal opera academy to Pierre Perrin, a poet. According to Philippe Beaussant, "l'Opera restera jusqu'a la fin du XVIIIe siècle un genre littéraire a part entière," so it is quite possible a playwright such as Molière may have coveted the patent for himself.<sup>63</sup> The battle over this patent, even after it was accorded to Perrin, defined much of Lully and Molière's relations in the subsequent years. Lully continued to seek ways his productions could be of service to the king, choosing to leave behind the *comédies-ballets* of his part and focus on developing a new genre, the French opera. This choice proved quite successful for Lully, as Louis saw opera as a preferred artistic means to demonstrate his power and eventually granted Lully the French opera privilege, providing the musician a near monopoly in his field. While Molière remained in the king's good graces, his choice to continue producing *comédies-ballets*, rather than switch to newer modes of production that would reinforce Louis' evolving agenda, led to the waning of his power and influence.

Lully's decision to shift art forms from the *comédie-ballet* to the opera afforded him with great fame and success, as it corresponded with Louis' shift in political agenda. In 1670, the king decided to stop dancing in his royal productions. This choice perhaps indicated to Lully that the

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<sup>63</sup> Glasow, "Molière, Lully, and the Comedy-Ballet," 111.

normal tools to demonstrate the king's power were no longer adequate; the king's presence in the plays could no longer be the main sign of his omnipotence. Isherwood maintains "after having made himself indispensable both to the king's pleasures and to artistic projection of his state's glory, Lully capitalized fully on that indispensability in order to monopolize French musical theater, especially the nascent opera."<sup>64</sup> This capitalization included purchasing the opera privilege from Perrin in 1672, after Perrin's failure to create a thriving opera. While there is still debate whether Lully's taking of the opera privilege was consensual, the transition was supported by Colbert and thus presumably Louis himself. On June 3, 1672, Lully wrote to Colbert:

Since the time you granted me the honour of directing the Académie Royale de Musique, I have been faced daily with new chicaneries—of which I make so bold as to send you the last one, by which you will realize, Monseigneur, that they lay false claim to everything in the first place when they say that they have obtained letters patent from the King under Perrin's name; and in the second place by claiming that I caught the King unaware—those who presented several petitions to His Majesty and who knew better than I his intentions. *You know, Monseigneur, that I have taken no course in this matter other than the one you have prescribed to me*, and that in the beginning I believed that they would take the same one. However, they were far from following your good judgment—knowing full well that you would not tolerate any deception of the sort alleged by them, and which they intend to present to the Parlement, and about which you know more than anyone else.<sup>65</sup>

This letter demonstrates Lully's attempts to cultivate an image as most deserving of the privilege because of his loyalty and dedication to the king. Though it was in fact Lully who took initiative to acquire the opera privilege, he maintains that he took "no course in this matter other than the one [Colbert] prescribed." By appealing to Colbert and the king, Lully hoped to solidify his monopoly over the opera. This strategy was successful, as Louis further granted Lully a series of ordinances limiting the number of singers and instrumentalists allowed in public theaters other than his own, making it incredibly difficult for other composers and playwrights to produce

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<sup>64</sup> Isherwood, *Music in Service of the King*, 181 and Fleck, "Molière's Comedy-Ballets," 15.

<sup>65</sup> Powell, *Music and Theater in France*, 56.

shows. The original privilege prohibited other artists from producing performances “de plus de deux airs et de deux instruments.”<sup>66</sup> Molière and his troupe, along with many other artists, protested this clause, and it was eventually struck. However, the final version “carried only a general prohibition against ‘having performed any piece set entirely to music either in French verse or other languages, without the written permission of Sieur de Lully, upon penalty of 10,000 *livres* fine and confiscation of the sets, machines, decorations, costumes, and other things’.”<sup>67</sup> By utilizing his patron-client relationship with the king, having built up years of service, Lully successfully leveraged full control of the opera.

Molière was not idle while Lully worked to secure a monopoly on all musical productions. While Perrin still had the opera privilege, Molière correctly believed that he did not have the authority to enforce it. In 1671, Molière decided to violate the privilege and “equip [his troupe’s] theatre with a transformation stage, machinery, and a permanent orchestra.”<sup>68</sup> Though Perrin’s privilege contained similar musical limitations as Lully’s later privilege, he had little ability to enforce the restrictions. When Lully took over the privilege, Molière continued to test the limits of the privilege. In 1672, he presented a new version of *Le Mariage forcé*, performed with music from Charpentier, rather than Lully’s original score.<sup>69</sup> Less than a month later, Lully enacted his first restrictions on music, detailed earlier. Lully’s imposition of his ordinance set the tone for the future of his relationship with Molière and exacerbated the existing feud; the two were no longer a pair in service of the king.

Molière further used the *comédie-ballet* as a tool to exacerbate his feud with Lully, choosing to partner with Charpentier to write new music for *Le Mariage forcé*, as the privilege

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>68</sup> Powell, *Music and Theater in France*, 50.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 59.

prevented him from using Lully's original music, as well as compose music for his next *comédie-ballet*, *Le Malade Imaginaire*. Though Molière stuck with this genre, he shifted its focus, choosing to use it as an arena to further his feud with Lully. In his dissertation, Richard Adams argues that "the prologue to *Le Malade Imaginaire* contains a musical satire of Lully, his music, and court entertainment in general that would have been audible to Molière and Charpentier's audience."<sup>70</sup> Rather than using the prologue to praise the king, Charpentier and Molière chose instead to satirize Lully by using "music as satire by building upon, disrupting, and pulling away from the conventions and standards that were at his disposal. ... [and] thus turns the prologue into a satirical attack on Lully's music at exactly the moment when Lully was making a final consolidation of his authority over Parisian musical life."<sup>71</sup> This prologue thus does not conform to the norms of performance in service of the king, but rather an attack on Lully, who was strongly supported by the king. Unlike Lully, Molière at this point in his career had come to prioritize his artistic ambitions and personal feelings over a strategic focus on serving the king, thereby gaining less from his relationship with Louis XIV.

The *Tartuffe* affair highlights difference between Molière and Lully's relationships with the king; Molière did not enjoy the same artistic freedoms as Lully. Written in 1664, *Tartuffe* tells the story of Orgon, who welcomes a religious hypocrite, Tartuffe, into his home. Tartuffe claims to speak with divine authority; Orgon takes his word as true and refuses to make decisions without consulting Tartuffe. Orgon's family, who recognizes Tartuffe's deceit, conceives a scheme to expose Tartuffe as a fraud but their attempts only draw Orgon further into Tartuffe's influence. The play concludes with royal announcement that the righteous king had heard of the Tartuffe's treachery and ordered his arrest. Though Louis XIV received the play well, the church

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<sup>70</sup> Adams, "Vocal Signification," 2.

<sup>71</sup> Adams, "Vocal Signification," 4.

and many nobles quickly denounced it. The church felt targeted by Tartuffe's fraudulent piety and hypocrisy and the nobility objected to the depiction of the noble Orgon as a fool. Molière claimed that *Tartuffe* served as a universal message about hypocrisy, rather than one aimed specifically at religion. Molière had only referenced the church ambiguously, recalling his disclaimer in the *L'amour des medecins* preface that his true meaning was not always obvious. Unsatisfied by Molière's response, the Archbishop of Paris issued an edict announcing that anyone who read, watched, or performed in it would be excommunicated. Over the course of the next five years, Molière revised *Tartuffe* twice penned a series of three petitions to the king to accompany his revisions in hopes of receiving royal approval. There are no surviving copies of the original version, performed in May 1664 under the name *Tartuffe*. Molière presented a second version of the play with two additional acts, called *L'Imposteur*, in August 1667. The king again banned this play before any additional performances. The final version, performed in August 1669 under title *Le Tartuffe*, was very successful. The play's contentious debut may have resulted in Molière never again receiving full support of the king, suggesting Molière's decision to persist with *comédies-ballets* rather than opt for the strategic opera genre garnered him less royal support.

The language in Molière's petitions to the king rely on the deferential language, indicating his awareness of the need to be of service to the king in order to receive any level of artistic freedom. In his *First Petition Presented to the King Concerning the Comedy Tartuffe*, penned in 1667, Molière writes:

Sire, la pensée que je ne rendrais pas un petit service à tous les honnêtes gens de votre royaume, si je faisais une comédie qui décriât les hypocrites, et mit en vue, comme il faut, toutes les grimaces étudiées de ces gens de bien à outrance, toutes

les friponneries couvertes de ces faux-monnayeurs en dévotion, qui veulent attraper les hommes avec un zèle contrefait et une charité sophistiquée.<sup>72</sup> Molière maintained that the controversy regarding *Tartuffe* must actually be seen as a “service” to the king all the “honnêtes gens” of Louis’ kingdom, which was in effect a service to the king. He believed he exposed the hypocrites and rascals who threaten the stability of Louis XIV’s reign. Here, he explicitly identified himself as a political tool for the king. Whether his words were sincere or disingenuous, he played in the end into absolutist ideology.

In the same petition, Molière also deferred to the king, emphasizing that he held no individual power: “Les rois éclairés, comme vous, n’ont pas besoin qu’on leur marque ce qu’on souhaite ; ils voient, comme Dieu, ce qu’il nous faut, et savent mieux que nous ce qu’ils nous doivent accorder. Il me suffit de mettre mes intérêts entre les mains de Votre Majesté.”<sup>73</sup> Molière used language such as “les rois éclairés” and “comme Dieu” which supports the absolutist image of the king. He recognized he could do very little in this situation and he must put his fate in “les mains de Votre Majesté.” The role of the king as guarantor of justice parallels the portrait of the king Molière depicts in his plays. This deferential language was not enough for Molière to be granted unfettered control of his art. He could not frame his work to be seen as supportive to the king’s agenda, thus he did not receive the same measures of control as Lully.

The *Second Petition to the King*, also written in 1667, emphasized the changes Molière made to the play, highlighting his willingness to change in order to be accepted. He emphasized how private audiences greatly enjoyed the play and maintained it was the very hypocrites about

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<sup>72</sup> Sire, that I should render no small service to all the upstanding people of your kingdom, if I wrote a comedy which would discredit hypocrites and properly expose all the studied grimaces of those excessively pious folk, all the covert rascalities of those counterfeits of piety who try to trap men with spurious zeal and sophistical charity. (Translation is mine). From Hartle, R. W. "First Petition." Petitions to the King and Preface, (University of Oregon, Web).

<sup>73</sup> Enlightened kings like yourself have no need to have our wishes pointed out; they see, like God, what we need, and know better than we what they should grant to us. It is sufficient to place my interests in the hands of your Majesty and to await respectfully whatever it may please your Majesty to ordain. (Translation is mine). From Hartle, R. W. "First Petition." Petitions to the King and Preface, (University of Oregon, Web).

whom he wrote who persuaded the king to condemn it. In the second edition, Molière implemented a number of changes to defuse religious criticism, such as changing the title, removing the religious dress of Tartuffe, and changing the character's name to Panulphe. He explained: "For naught I presented it under the title of *The Impostor* and disguised the character under the trappings of a man of the world... and carefully eliminated everything that I thought could give the slightest shadow of a pretext to the famous original models of the portrait I wished to make; all that was of no use."<sup>74</sup> Molière thus changed Tartuffe from the "portrait [he] wished to make" to one which the king expected of him. His criticism of hypocrisy was no longer as sharp nor was his message as clear. He abandoned his authorial integrity in order to gain the king's approval, regarding a play about hypocrisy no less. Yet even this sacrifice was not sufficient to please the king. While these strategies worked when Molière produced his first performances, they were no longer fully compatible with the new political atmosphere. The controversy around Tartuffe represents the limits of their reciprocal relationship.

In contrast, Lully's decision to turn away from the *comédies-ballets* and towards a new genre that reinforced Louis' shifting agenda. His work on these *comédies-ballets* allowed him to develop the new genre of opera that the king began to favor. The relation between the two genres can be seen thematically; Lully's operas demonstrated similar dedications to Louis and allusions to his power and glory. Johnson explains,

If the works didn't always inspire tragic emotions, they were capable of stirring political passions. The prologue to *Thésée*, for example, takes place in the gardens of Versailles as Love, Grace, Pleasure, and Games regret the King's absence while Mars sings of his victories in war....Lully's use of the prologue for political references was so widely assumed in the early part of the century that spectators found analogies in other works where the rapport was less certain. The *Mercur* was sure it had discovered the true meaning of the prologue to Destouche's *Issé*, the garden of the Hesperides was Abundance, the Dragon guarding it was War,

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<sup>74</sup> From Hartle, R. W. "Second Petition." Petitions to the King and Preface, (University of Oregon, Web).

and Hercules was the exact image of the King, who only fights to end war and give his people...the abundance they desire.<sup>75</sup> The operas, like the *comédies-ballets*, thus also had political elements. The “wide assumption” that Lully’s works were political in nature could not have been developed without his decade of collaboration with Molière, building this reputation. Moreover, this description of his operas is clearly panegyric to the king; by emphasizing the glory and justness of the king, Lully made his works useful, thus making him more valuable to the king. This utility allowed him to pursue more personal control over the opera.

In 1673, just two months after Molière’s death, Lully further leveraged his relationship with the king to convince him that the members of the Académie Royale de Musique were more deserving occupants of the royal theatre than Molière’s troupe.<sup>76</sup> Though Molière had already passed away, this was seen as an assault on his memory, as his troupe was now left without a leader, royal patronage, and a theater. The same year, Lully added an additional clause to the privilege that prohibited theaters from having more than two singers and six instrumentalists, and further banned the employment of “any external singers, or of a greater number of strings for their entr’actes, or likewise of having any dancers, or an orchestra pit.”<sup>77</sup> Lully’s ordinances severely limited the performances of other troupes and theaters, leaving him to be the sole composer of spectacular performances. His relationship with the king allowed him to continue adding restrictive clauses to the privilege. As other artists protested Lully’s monopoly in April 1673, Louis XIV brought his court to watch the première of Lully’s opera, *Cadmus et Hermione*, after which *The Gazette* reported, “the company departed extraordinarily satisfied with this superb spectacle,” the king so much satisfied that he granted Lully rent-free use of the royal

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<sup>75</sup> Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 21.

<sup>76</sup> Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Powel, *Music and Theater in France*, 62.

theatre.<sup>78</sup> Lully's privilege allowed him to implement outrageous restrictions on other artists that could hardly be defended before the public. However, Lully's backing by the king protected him from public criticism.

While the *comédie-ballet* created a foundation of fame for Molière and Lully, their later success stemmed from their ability to frame their work for the king's benefit. Before his death in 1673, Molière continued to pursue the *comédies-ballets*, rather than shift to a different genre, limiting the level of success he could achieve. Moreover, his choice to thematically expand his productions further restricted his artistic and financial prosperity; Molière began to use his plays as a vehicle for criticism, namely of Lully and the church, making the genre less centered on Louis and thus less important to his political agenda. Lully shifted to a new genre, French opera, that could be appropriated and redeployed by Louis to serve his changing political agenda. This shift proved lucrative to Lully. Gaining almost a full monopoly on musical life in France, he developed notoriety beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of 17<sup>th</sup> century France.

## VII. Conclusion

On February 17, 1673, Molière collapsed on stage while performing in his *Le Malade Imaginaire*. He insisted on finishing his performance and collapsed again, fatally, only a few hours after the play's conclusion. He passed before he could receive his last rites; the priests had refused to visit him because of his controversial work. Furthermore, French law prohibited actors from being buried in a cemetery. Molière's own ending was as chaotic as of those in his plays.

Fourteen years later, Lully died in March of 1687 from a gangrenous wound he developed when he stabbed his foot with stick while conducting an orchestra in honor of the king. In stark contrast to Molière's ending, Lully was buried according to church rules, in the

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<sup>78</sup> Powell, *Music and Theater in France*, 62.

Basilica of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. Lully's burial represented the level of glory and notoriety he enjoyed during his life.

Even in their deaths, Lully was more successful than Molière, yet both men were recognized posthumously for their dedication to the king. Both men died for their performances; they were committed to their art and to their patron, even at the cost of death; both were recognized for their service to the king. Titon du Tillet's *Le Parnasse Français*, the monument dedicated to the musicians and artists who contributed to the glory of Louis XIV features both Molière and Lully prominently, highlighting their importance to his reign. While Molière and Lully both received recognition, Lully's more elaborate burial further reinforced the levels of success each man achieved during their lives.

The *comédie-ballet*, introduced by Molière and Lully at the beginning of Louis' reign, was a product of a symbiotic relationship between the three: the artists reinforced the image that the king wanted to project and the king gave the artists some artistic license and power. Louis did not order and orchestrate the development of the genre, rather he appropriated and redeployed the *comédies-ballets* by negotiating a relationship with Molière and Lully. The patron-client relationship resembles many other relations Louis built during his rule. Just as the intendants negotiated with provincial nobles, so the king himself negotiated and collaborated with the artists constructing his image.

The *comédie-ballet* served to reinforce the idea of Louis as absolute monarch by portraying him in each production as all-powerful agent, as well as by reinforcing his social order. The performances, building off other performative rituals, also worked to secure Louis' precedence over the nobility and served as another use of spectacle to underscore his own power. Just as Louis sought to be the sole power over France, he was the sole patron of *comédie-ballet*,

which he ensured by removing Fouquet as patron and maintaining control over all artists and content.

After Louis had successfully established himself as absolute monarch, his agenda began to shift toward becoming a more powerful ruler who would be recognized throughout in Europe. By the end of his first decade of personal rule, Louis turned to new means, such as the opera, to further his changing political agenda, which looked more broadly out toward Europe for a larger audience. The *comédie-ballet* could not be adapted to this new goal and therefore fell out of favor, by Louis as an art form. It was uniquely French and was not capable of establishing France's cultural dominance on the world stage.

While Molière and Lully both benefited from their relationship with the King, the success that they attained related to how adaptable they were to the king's political agenda. Lully adapted to this shift by creating the French opera, establishing France's place next to the Italians as creator of great opera. By creating the genre of French opera, Lully helped establish Louis' power in the eyes of Europe. His content also continued to support Louis' message of king as absolute monarch. Lully's steadfast artistic support of the Sun King contributed to the success and power the musician gained in his later years; he successfully enacted outrageous ordinances that limited the power of other artists as a result of this support. He used the royal privilege that was accorded to him to create a monopoly, while also keeping the art pure as praise for Louis.

Louis rewarded Molière with the right to be the king's official theater group and use the *Palais Royal* as their main theater. However, Molière's relationship with the king suffered irreparable damage with the publication of *Tartuffe*. Molière did not include in the play enough panegyric to Louis to make Louis stand of for the play in light of the church's negative reaction. When the church banned the play, Louis upheld the ban. Molière struggled to gain Louis'

support for *Tartuffe* by changing content to include more panegyric and reduce criticism of the church. Molière, because he was less useful to the king, was not accorded the freedom that Lully had. Lully stayed focused on the King's agenda and through his privilege was able to severely limit Molière's artistic freedom. All Molière could do in response was mock Lully in his plays. Though Molière struggled to gain the same level of authority over arts as Lully, Louis did eventually establish the *Comédie-Française* in 1680, seven years after Molière's death. Perhaps if Molière had focused on the King's agenda to the same extent as Lully, the *Comédie-Française* might have been built earlier and Molière would have been alive and granted the *privilège*.

Though Molière only lived during the first twelve years of Louis' fifty-four year reign and Lully twenty-six, Molière's biographer, Grimarest, wrote in 1706 that Louis XIV stated, "there were two men he could never replace, Molière and Lully."<sup>79</sup> The men's usefulness stemmed largely from the timing of their careers; they produced plays at the beginning of Louis' personal rule and aided the development of the king's absolutist ideology.

Louis' patronage of Molière and Lully demonstrates how the arts were a key driver of his absolutist agenda, as they served as another field on which to impose his political goals. Examining Louis' relationship with these artists allows one to better understand how his broader political agenda played out on a smaller scale. By considering Molière and Lully specifically, one sees just how the patronage impacted the artists and their artistic output and how nuances in the evolution of these relationships impacted the artists' financial and artistic power and success. All three men shaped the formation of each other's legacies; together they helped France achieve cultural dominance that contributed to the prestige of the nation during the latter half of the seventeenth century.

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<sup>79</sup>Matthew Branders, *Molière: His Life and His Works* (C. Scribner's sons: New York: 1916), 149.

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### ***BIOGRAPHY***

Serena Frechter was born in 1995 in Newton, Massachusetts. She will graduate from Johns Hopkins University in May 2018 with a BA in International Studies and History with a minor in French Cultural Studies and a MA in History. As a sophomore, she wrote a research paper entitled “A Paradoxical Partnership: An Exploration of Molière’s Comedies during the Reign of Louis XIV” for the Undergraduate History Seminar. After graduation, she will work as a fellow in policy and research in Washington DC through the Public Interest Fellowship.