

Dystopic Marital Narratives at the Opéra-Comique during the Regency

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Abstract: In the early eighteenth century, most comedies that featured lovers conclude in marriage or the promise of marriage. Comedies adapted from the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, a widely known comic genre, rigorously applied the conventional comic formula even if lovers have to be shuffled around at the denouement to ensure that each character ended up with a mate. However, in the early decades of the eighteenth century, two comedies premiering at the Opéra-Comique in Paris experimented with this traditional formula, and critiqued the happiness promised by such an ending. The first was Louis Fuselier, Jacques-Philippe D'Orneval, and Alain-René Le Sage's *Le Tableau de mariage* (*The Tableau of Marriage*, 1716), which explored the theme of domestic abuse, while the second, D'Orneval and Le Sage's *L'Isle des Amazones* (*The Island of the Amazons*, 1718), featured an Amazonian utopia where women married only once and for only three months. These *opéras-comiques*, like dystopic fairy tales before them, critique marriage, and experiment with the conventional ending because it no longer seemed to offer, without irony, the promise of lasting happiness.

Keywords: *commedia dell'arte*; Opéra-Comique; dystopic marital narratives.

Introduction

In the winter of 1716 a comedy called *Le Tableau de mariage* (*The Tableau of Marriage*) premiered at the Parisian Opéra-Comique theater. It satirized France's almost non-existent policies regarding domestic abuse. The main character, Diamantine, awakens from a terrible nightmare on the morning of her wedding day. Although she dreamed of two lovebirds preparing their nest, it quickly took an ugly turn. The female bird tenderly caressed the male, but she suffered two furious punches to the face in return. Remorseless, the male bird then flew away. Sensing that it was a baleful premonition, Diamantine tells her servant, Olivette, that she will not sign her marriage contract and will have to ask her fiancé, Octave, if they can postpone their wedding. Before she has a chance to break off her impending marriage, her notary and her ribbon merchant arrive to help her with nuptial preparations. Unfortunately, they only bolster her fears; to the tunes of well-known love songs, the men sing about how they abuse their wives, and how they dream of their spouses' deaths. When Diamantine's aunt and uncle arrive to ameliorate her anxiety, even they come to blows, and the whole cast must work together to wrench them apart. After seeing and hearing about so many disastrous effects of marriage, Diamantine resolves not to marry. Instead of celebrating a wedding, the characters convert the wedding plans into a party to celebrate a "contre-fiançailles" or broken engagement. Her servant, Olivette, proclaims happily that she and her mistress were not silly (*sottise*) enough to get married.

Such an ending is largely unheard of in the early modern comic repertoire. Most comedies that feature lovers in this period conclude in marriage or the promise of marriage. The *commedia dell'arte* tradition became especially emblematic of these kinds of narratives in this period when its Italian actors began performing all over Europe. In this comic tradition, the conventional comic formula was rigorously applied, even if lovers have to be shuffled around at the denouement to ensure that each character ends up with a mate. Although this period saw the rise of the *commedia dell'arte*, their comic antics were hardly new. Rather, the *commedia dell'arte's* comic formula was of ancient vintage. Northrop

Frye has shown that this formula descends from the classical works of Plautus and Terence.¹ Typically in such plots, a young hero desires to wed a young lady, but some obstacle, often paternal, arrests his progress. Through a plot twist, the hero unites with the heroine, and their union symbolizes the crystallization of a new world order. This movement from a corrupt or outdated society to another, modern and more optimistic one makes up the basic thrust of most comedies.² These classical formulas even continue to inform today's romantic comedies.

However, two comedies premiering at the Opéra-Comique in the 1710s experimented with this formula, and critiqued the happiness promised by such endings. The first was *Le Tableau de mariage*, which featured the theme of domestic abuse, while the second, *L'Isle des Amazones* (*The Island of the Amazons*, 1718), presented an Amazonian utopia, where women married only once and for only three months simply to ensure the continuation of their race.³ When a husband's three months are up, he is immediately shipped off the island. Many scenes from this musical comedy feature husbands' tearful departures. Thus, when the cast celebrates a wedding at the end, the audience already knows that it is not destined to last. For the Amazon, happiness was not born of marriage, but from the social and political power she wielded in her matriarchal republic. Thus, unlike in early modern France, the Amazons looked beyond marriage as their greatest goal in life along with motherhood, and instead took pleasure in controlling the state, their bodies, and the institution of marriage. Ultimately, this comedy portrays marriage as more of a duty than the path to lasting happiness.

These two *opéras-comiques*, as the genre was known, are two exceptions in this tradition. Most *opéras-comiques* end in marriage, like the *commedia dell'arte* repertoire that inspired this French genre. A couple of things may account for these experiments with the conventional comic formula. The primary reason for such an enterprise was the recent proto-feminist thinking about marriage. The seventeenth-century women known as *précieuses* began articulating progressive

¹ Frye, 1957, particularly p. 163-186.

² See *ibid.*, p. 163.

³ Since the sixteenth century in France, marriage was a legal precondition for childbearing. The edict of 1556 prohibited clandestine pregnancy and childbirth. The edict of 1708 renewed these prohibitions.

stances about the role of women in society. Although their salon conversations, as well as the literature that issued from them, considered a number of issues, prominent concerns were love, marriage, and motherhood. In particular, some *précieuses* protested women's submissive role in marriage and the toll it took upon a woman's body to be continually pregnant. *Le Tableau de mariage* and *L'Isle des Amazones* can be seen to explore some of these themes.

But it is not just that the authors of these *opéras-comiques* incorporated *précieuse* politics into their comedies. The *forains* – the writers, musicians, and actors at the Opéra-Comique – also explored the ramifications of proto-feminist thought upon traditional comic structure. To do this, they adopted proto-feminist literary developments, as well. Women had become important innovators in literature (primarily) and drama, recrafting older formulas to suit their progressive social agendas. Some writers, for example, ended their stories without the union of the central couple despite the fact that this was a conventional way to end both novels and fairy tales. Librettists at the Opéra-Comique adopted these literary experiments to rethink conventional comic structure for the stage. Although such endings are by far the exception in both the literary and dramatic realms, dystopic *opéras-comiques* are directly related to these women's contestation of conventional ideas about marriage and happiness, as well as their experiments with narrative formulae. Like female writers in the seventeenth century, early eighteenth-century librettists for the Opéra-Comique explored new endings as a way of grappling with the problems marriage could pose for women. *Le Tableau de mariage* shows that violence and neglect may await a woman after marriage, and *L'Isle des Amazones* asserts that women hardly need long-lasting marriages to run a successful society. As such, both question the *raison d'être* of the conventional comic ending – that it presupposes lasting happiness.

This essay begins by examining the tradition from which these *opéras-comiques* sprang, to demonstrate that these comedies are exceptional in their treatment of marriage, both in terms of plot and in terms of structure. Next, I turn to the *opéras-comiques* themselves, situating them in contemporary thought and literary practices.

Commedia dell'arte conventions and repertoire

To establish that the comedies in this essay represent a departure from more conventional examples of the repertoire, I first discuss the typical features of the *commedia dell'arte* as it developed in France, and then I show how the *forains* adapted this material for the Opéra-Comique, while continuing to use, for the most part, traditional comic formulas.

Before the *forains* began adapting *commedia dell'arte* repertoire, the Italian comic tradition had already had a long history in Paris. Italian comedians first performed for Charles IX's court in 1571, and would continue to travel to France intermittently until King Louis XIV established a permanent troupe in Paris in 1662.⁴ Although it is notoriously difficult to pin down a largely improvised repertoire, a few stable consistencies exist in the comedies that the Italians brought with them to France. The oldest extant Italian scenarios have helped historians pinpoint some of the typical features of this repertoire. In 1611, actor and troupe leader, Flaminio Scala published *commedia dell'arte* scenarios in Venice.⁵ Rather than written out dialogue, these scenarios summarize the situations of each comedy. These descriptions illuminate what kinds of comedies the Italian troupes brought with them to France in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Standard features of the *commedia dell'arte* include stock gags or stage business called *lazzi* and fixed character types known as *tipi fissi*. These fixed characters included at least one pair of lovers, one or more old men, and clown characters, who often portray servants.

Of the forty-eight plays in Scala's collection, thirty-nine of these scenarios feature the standard love plot, in which a pair of lovers struggle to unite, obstructed by some obstacle, such as a father or a rival. Whatever stands in the lovers' way is eventually overcome, and in the end, all the characters celebrate the lovers' union. Occasionally, a second set of lovers also marries, such as two

⁴ To read about the history of Italian comic troupes in seventeenth-century Paris, see Scott, 1990.

⁵ See Scala, 1611. For English translations, see *The Commedia dell'arte of Flaminio Scala: A Translation and Analysis of Thirty Scenarios*, trans. Richard Andrews (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008).

servants. While not all of Scala's plays were comedies, most fit this mold, and all of the comedies that feature lovers do end in marriage, even if lovers must be traded at the last minute so that each marriageable character ends up with a mate.

While Scala's publication features scenarios rather than fully transcribed dialogue, few of the scenarios treat proto-feminist ideas in any large-scale way.⁶ Instead these scenarios document more traditional thoughts and practices, particularly in terms of the relationships between men and women. For example, violence against women remains unquestioned.⁷ In Scala's collection, several characters are raped and then, if the victim is unmarried, she marries her rapist.⁸ While she may initially protest her stolen virtue, she is always convinced in the end to marry her seducer. In part, such an ending reflected contemporary practices, since sex before marriage was considered a *fait accompli* after which the couple must officially marry. But such scenarios also show how rigorously the "happy" ending featuring marriage was applied.

The only comedy that addresses contemporary women's arguments against marriage in a documented way is *Il Pellegrino fido amante* (*The Faithful Loving Pilgrim*), where Isabella does not like the idea of submitting to a husband. Throughout the scenario, Isabella (in disguise as a page named Fabrizio) discourages other characters from love and marriage, offering tales of suffering lovers and generally scoffing at love. But Isabella's resistance is eventually overcome by her suitor's fidelity, and she marries him in the end.

It was not until the Italians became a permanent fixture at the French court that they began to appeal specifically to French taste. At this time, we have the first documented evidence that the *commedia dell'arte* addressed contemporary French concerns about women's place in love, marriage, and society. Other aspects of these comedies, however, had already begun to diverge from the general features of Scala's scenarios. The comic scenes (as opposed to the love scenes) became increasingly more important. In part, the clowns or *zanni*

⁶ For an overview of women's limitations in Renaissance Italy, see Kelly, 1977, p. 137-164.

⁷ For more on contemporary thinking about rape in Italy, see Cohen, 2000, p. 47-75.

⁸ See, for instance, *Il capitano*, *Flavio finto negtomante*, and *Il vecchio geloso* in the Scala collection.

often dominated the action of the plays outside of Italy since it was easier for foreign audiences to understand physical comedy, rather than the more subtle language play of the lovers. A few years after Louis XIV had granted the Italian troupe permanent residence in Paris (1662), the Italians began adapting their comedies to the French taste with its production of *Le régal des dames* (*The Delight of the Ladies*, 1668).

The Italian troupes in Paris began to blend French comedy with their traditional repertoire in response to their permanent status in the theatrical landscape. When they were an itinerant troupe, they only needed to maintain a small stock of plays. But once an Italian troupe became a permanent fixture in Paris, they needed a much larger repertoire. By 1668, when they began to appeal to the French taste, they had likely exhausted their traditional repertoire. Luckily for the troupe, the rising demand for new material was met by the talents of a new generation of French-speaking Italian actors born in France to their Italian actor parents, as well as several French dramatists, who contributed French comedies to the Italian theater.

In this new repertoire, however, love plots ending in marriage are still standard fare. But to appeal to contemporary French tastes for the marvelous (*merveilleux*), dramatists enhanced these traditional plots with music, dance, magic, and exotic fantasy. Most, but not all of this later repertoire, end in marriage when they feature lovers. If one consults Evaristo Gherardi's six-volume collection of plays performed in the seventeenth century at the Théâtre Italien, as it was known, one finds only a few exceptions. In the first volume, for instance, only one comedy does not end in marriage, but not out of any proto-feminist consideration. This comedy, called *La Matrone d'Ephese* (1682), does not end in marriage because the main character, a greedy attorney (*procureur*), tries to marry polygamously.⁹ His attempt fails and he is arrested before he can carry out his scheme to marry a very wealthy old widow, whom he hoped would quickly die and leave him all her money.

⁹ See Gherardi, 1695, p. 101-37.

Unlike Scala's collection, Gherardi's comedies consist of fully written out dialogue, although improvisation was still an important component of the show. As a result, historians can better establish some of the topical references in this later collection of comedies. Many of the comedies in Gherardi's volumes treat contemporary women's concerns. Nevertheless, almost all of the comedies end with the conventional marriage.

The Théâtre Italien's explorations of contemporary courtship practices stuttered to a halt, however, when Louis XIV exiled the Italian troupe in 1697, allegedly for their thinly veiled farce about his second wife entitled *The False Prude*.¹⁰ After the king expelled the Italian actors, acrobatic troupes from two Parisian fairgrounds – the fairs of Saint-Germain and Saint-Laurent – refashioned the Italians' repertoire and continued the Italians' tradition of comedy in a genre later called opéras-comiques.¹¹ By 1715, because of their common source material, the two fairground theaters became known together as the Opéra-Comique.¹²

When the repertoire changed hands, the troupe at the Opéra-Comique made greater use of song. In the years before their exile, the Italians had started incorporating popular French tunes into their works, but the *forains* made song central to their repertoire. Like the Italians before them, the music arrangers for the Opéra-Comique chose pre-existing and well-known songs, and deployed them in ways to highlight contemporary anxieties. Additionally, the *forains* added new, often satirical, verses to heighten their comic scenarios, particularly since the new texts are often in tension with the song's original text. These songs were

¹⁰ William Brooks has shown that the Italian's expulsion was precipitated by a number of factors, financial, as well as thematic. *La Fausse prude* seems to have been only slightly more than pretext for relieving the Italians. See Brooks, 1996, p. 840-847.

¹¹ For a general history of the eighteenth-century Opéra-Comique in English, see Isherwood, 1986; and Barnes, 1965. For a general history in French, see Martin, 2002.

¹² In the seventeenth century, King Louis XIV granted exclusive artistic rights to the theaters he curated. For instance, the Comédie Française alone could produce dramas in French, while the Opéra held sole rights to song and dance. As the popularity of the Opéra waned and the king's financial support declined, the Opéra's management sought to secure extra funds. The *forains* purchased the rights to song and dance from the Opéra in 1708, but the deal dissolved when the management of the fairground theaters changed hands. In 1713, after the Opéra director's death, the management of the bankrupt Opéra again sold the *forains* the right to use music.

particularly useful for satire, since the Parisian public had been using song as a means to criticize aspects of its culture for over a century already.

Popular song had already long been a means to disseminate gossip, news, and political critique in the streets of Paris. The *forains* thus harnessed a well-known musical practice to help attract audiences, but also to critique contemporary society. This spontaneous song tradition had developed a rich life in Paris over the previous century,¹³ becoming associated with the Pont Neuf, a bridge that opened in 1607 in the heart of Paris. Song vendors huddled at one end of the bridge near the Samaritaine, a hydraulic machine that pumped water into central Paris. These songsters sang well-known tunes with newly contrived verses about all aspects of Parisian life, such as court gossip, criminals' executions, news about military campaigns, and updates on religious and academic quarrels. Concealed in the vendors' coat pockets were seditious verses, which they peddled quietly to an eager clientele. The hucksters invented some of the verses themselves, while courtiers anonymously furnished others that illuminated intimate details of courtly life. In this tradition, the verses were more important than the tune to which they were set. Generally, the music bestowed structure for the verses and helped a semiliterate public remember the words. Occasionally, a tune would be chosen to underscore the subject of the poetry. A songwriter might choose a march, for instance, to set verses about military campaigns.

In the late years of Louis XIV's reign, these songs had become so commonplace that librettists adapted them for officially sponsored musical theater. In 1690, authors weaved *pont-neufs* into French farces, performed by the king's Italian *commedia dell'arte* troupe. For instance, Charles Dufresny deployed

¹³ For a review of this history in English, see Isherwood, 1986, p. 3-21 and p. 60-67. Historians have wrangled over the history of the *vaudeville* for centuries. Some historians claim that the *vaudeville* came from a sometime poet and musician Olivier Basselin, who wrote political songs in mid-fifteenth century Normandy against the invading English. For this version of history, see Genest, 1925, p. 65-66; Font, 1894, p. 9-17; Prioleau, 1890; and Barnes, 1965, p. 131-175. Other historians attribute *vaudevilles* to Jean Le Houx, an attorney, who claimed to have "edited" Basselin's songs, but most likely wrote them, using Basselin's name as a pseudonym. For this version of the *vaudeville's* history, see Gasté, 1887. Julien Tiersot agrees with Gasté, but also argues that the *vaudeville* was not a Norman invention, citing evidence from sixteenth-century song collections from throughout France printed with the term *voix de ville* in the title. See Tiersot, 1889, p. 226-239. See also Muirhead, 1875.

pont-neufs in three of his opera parodies: *Opéra de campagne* (1692); *Les Unions des deux opéras* (1692); and *Le Départ des comédiens* (1694). The Gherardi collection also includes a number of songs at the end of each volume. After the Italian troupe's exile, the *forains* continued and expanded the use of *pont-neufs* (called *vaudevilles* when they are performed as part of an *opéra-comique*).

While *opéras-comiques* would eventually include newly composed *ariettes* and choruses, in their developmental years, the *forains* did not write much original music. Like their Italian predecessors, they pilfered tunes from a vast treasury of publically accessible melodies. The fairground librettists and their composer-arrangers selected songs from a range of pre-existing musical material, from drinking songs and love tunes to airs from Jean-Baptiste Lully's *tragédies en musique*. Unlike the Italians, the *forains* mostly composed new words to these pre-existing melodies, often playing upon its original text. The *forains* could use the audience's memory of the original text to underscore the tune's new dramatic context or to contradict it. For instance, a love song might be used in a courtship scene, or, alternately, a character might sing a love song ironically in an argument with his or her lover. In either case, these *vaudevilles* were carefully selected to convey a specific emotional state. Although the early *forain* composer-arrangers did not contribute much new music to the repertoire of the French Baroque, they did incorporate and even subvert existing musical codes, as we will see below.

Despite the expanded use of music, the *forains'* dramatic repertoire remains largely consistent with that of their predecessors. For the most part, they adopted the comic formula in which marriage constitutes a happy ending.¹⁴ In such cases, the obstacle between the couple and their union is some contemporary villain, such as a corrupt tax collector or a notorious gambler. Through various comical schemes, the villain is displaced and the lovers are married, representing the dawn of a new society free of the villain's meddling.

But in other cases, the *forains* responded to specific contemporary issues. They eschewed the conventional comic formula, and questioned the happiness that marriage promised at the end of comic spectacles. In the following two

¹⁴ See, for instance, *Arlequin Mahomet* (1714); *Arlequin défenseur d'Homère* (1715); *Arlequin traitant* (1716); and *Le Pharaon* (1717) in Le Sage and d'Orneval's, 1968.

examples, the plots feature various breakdowns in conventional comic structure as the opéras-comiques slide from comedy into satire of contemporary marital practices and concerns including domestic abuse and, generally, the power imbalance between men and women in marriage. In these comedies, music plays an important role in the shoring up or undermining each character's authority.

Le Tableau de Marriage

Le Tableau de mariage (The Tableau of Marriage, 1716) combines a plot addressing contemporary women's concerns about marriage with experimentation of the conventional comic formula. This opéra-comique specifically addresses power dynamics in contemporary marriages, and, although it seems to have a happy ending, it does not end in marriage. Music plays a prominent role in creating the ironic distance necessary for the audience to reflect upon the physical force that might accompany marriage. For instance, husbands sing verses about domestic abuse to the tunes of popular love songs. While the effect is comical, it also helps to shine an unfavorable light upon these characters and their violent utterances.

The male characters in Le Tableau de mariage eagerly describe their mistreatment of their wives. Their descriptions speak to contemporary issues of marital violence.¹⁵ French laws in this period did not protect women from domestic abuse. Unlike today, a batterer faced no criminal charges unless abuse ended in homicide. The Custom of Normandy (common law), for instance, stated that judges would only consider cases where a husband had repeatedly tried to murder his wife.¹⁶ Thus, there was not much legal recourse for spousal battery in old-régime France, in part, because French men and women generally condoned a small amount of conjugal force.¹⁷ Husbands were permitted to slap, punch, or kick their wives as long as it was perceived to be a disciplining measure. The difference

¹⁵ For more information on domestic violence in seventeenth-century France, see Hardwick, 2006, p. 1-36.

¹⁶ See Desan, 2009, p. 17.

¹⁷ See Phillips, 1976, p. 208-211. See also Trouille, 2009, p. 13-56.

between “correction” and abuse was determined by the cause and the amount of force used to improve it. Typically, family, friends, and neighbors mediated marital disputes, including violent ones.¹⁸

The *Tableau de mariage* treats both contemporary domestic violence and the community’s role in negotiating its limits. In the first scene, Diamantine reveals to her servant Olivette that she is on edge after last night’s dream, in which a male pigeon punched his female companion as they prepared their nest.¹⁹ According to the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1694), a pigeon fills largely the same role as a white dove or a lovebird does today – it was a symbol of love and domesticity.²⁰ Diamantine suspects that her dream warns her not to get married. Indeed, Diamantine’s narration of the dream foreshadows her interactions with the series of men who arrive to help her finish the details of her wedding. Each man turns out to be as abusive as the winged creature in her nightmare. As each of the men recounts his own version of marital abuse, Diamantine and Olivette voice their opposition to such behavior in their expressions of disgust and disappointment, ironically calling each of them a *pigeon*.

The *forains’* critique of husbands’ abuse occurs only in part through Olivette and Diamantine’s shock and dismay. It is also imparted through ironic musical choices. Just as the lovebird is used ironically to describe abusive men, the husbands’ use well-known love songs to express conjugal force and spousal neglect. Scene 2 exemplifies how the librettists and their music arranger employed music to highlight the distance between the effusions of affection typical to love songs and the husband’s cold accounts of spousal abuse. The effect is that the audience and the characters on stage reflect upon the relationships between men, love, and abuse of power.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Cattelona, 1993, p. 13-33.

¹⁹ This may allude to Io’s similar premonition in Act I, scene 3 of Lully’s opera *Isis* (1677). See Philippe Quinault, *Isis* (Paris: 1687), 18. Io is promised to Hierax, but she fears a deadly premonition: an eagle devoured a sweetly singing bird right in front of her eyes. As a result, she delays their union.

²⁰ See “pigeon,” in *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 1st ed. (1694). For conventional *pigeon* imagery, see Jean de La Fontaine’s fable “Les deux pigeons” (Book IX.2). Pierre Corneille also used “pigeon” as a way to describe Éraсте as a “good catch” in his comedy 1625 *Mélite* (Act IV, scene 1).

Although the first two male characters are described as complete opposites, they equally serve to amplify Diamantine's apprehensions. The notary for the wedding contract, Monsieur Minutin, and a ribbon merchant, Monsieur Francoeur, come to settle some of the details of her nuptials. Unfortunately for Diamantine's fragile state, they also elucidate their cruel perspectives on marriage. Monsieur Francoeur alarms Diamantine and Olivette when he croons a love song with the following insulting words:²¹

Air: Belle Brune, belle brune.
La Carogne!
La Carogne!
C'est un esprit à rebours,
C'est un vrai gâte-besogne.
La Carogne!
La Carogne!

Air: Beautiful brunette.
The slut!
The slut!
She's difficult to deal with,
She's a real piece of work.
The slut!
The slut!

Example 1 - "Belle brune, belle brune."

The musical score is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It consists of four staves of music. The lyrics are in French, with English translations provided below each line. The score begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The first staff contains the lyrics 'La Ca - ro - gne! La Ca - ro - gne!'. The second staff, starting at measure 5, contains 'C'est un es - prit à re - bours,'. The third staff, starting at measure 9, contains 'C'est un vrai gâ - te - be - so - gne.'. The fourth staff, starting at measure 13, contains 'La Ca - ro - gne! La Ca - ro - gne!'.

La Ca - ro - gne! La Ca - ro - gne!

⁵ C'est un es - prit à re - bours,

⁹ C'est un vrai gâ - te - be - so - gne.

¹³ La Ca - ro - gne! La Ca - ro - gne!

The tune, "Belle brune," belongs to an entire genre of popular love songs known simply as *brunettes* typically sung by chivalric narrators to beautiful, brown-headed shepherdesses.²² Instead of recounting his own unrequited passion,

²¹ Le Sage and d'Orneval, 1968, p. 202.

²² For more on *brunettes*, see Masson, 1911, p. 347-368; and Cammaert, 1957, p. 35-51. The original words to the tune were:

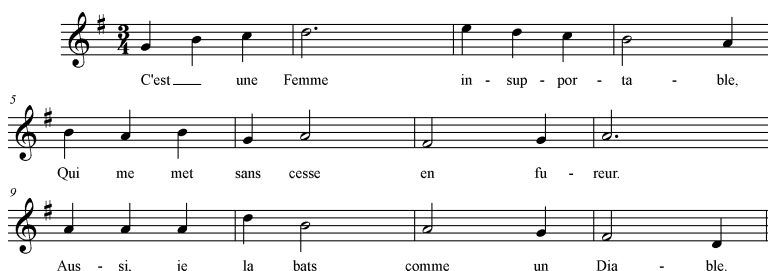
Francoeur insults the very foundation of a contemporary woman's integrity, which was built upon sexual virtue.²³

To make matters worse, Diamantine and Olivette are stunned to find out that Francoeur is singing about his wife. Monsieur Minutin suppresses a laugh, and protests gallantly that Francoeur must have compelling reasons to speak of his wife in such pejorative terms. To the tune of a tender love song, Monsieur Francoeur continues, blaming his wife for provoking him.

Air: Comme un Coucou que l'amour presse.
C'est une Femme insupportable,
Qui me met sans cesse en fureur.
Aussi, je la bats comme un Diable.

Air: Like a Cuckoo that Love Pursues.
She's an insufferable wife,
Who always makes me angry.
Also, I beat her like the devil.

Example 2 - "Comme un Coucou que l'amour presse."



Shocking in their hypocrisy, Francoeur's two songs highlight the distance between the traditional messages of love songs and his own callous words. The effect is that the audience and the characters on stage identify him as a pigeon like that in Diamantine's nightmare.

Air: Belle brune, belle brune.
Ah! Bergere, ah! bergere:
Je sens pour vous dans mon coeur,
Un feu qui me désespère,
Ah! Bergere, ah! bergere.

Air: Beautiful brunette.
Ah! Shepherdess, ah! Shepherdess;
I feel in my heart
A fire for you that makes me desperate,
Ah! Shepherdess, ah! Shepherdess.

See *La Clef des chansonnières (1717)*, ed. Herbert Schneider, 2005, p. 37.

²³ In contemporary London, one could sue someone for such sexual defamation. See Gowing, 1993, p. 1-21. In France, a woman could use her husband's false accusations to petition for a marital separation.

Stifling a smile, Minutin protests that Francoeur's reasoning seems a little thin. Francoeur takes offense, and he and Minutin then volley insults to the love song entitled, "Yes, I love you; Cupid, too."²⁴ Olivette turns to Minutin in hopes that he is a better husband than Francoeur. He assures her that he has never loved his wife more. Diamantine politely inquires about his wife and he reveals that she is dying and he has left her in agony. To a popular drinking song, Minutin rejoices that his wife will be dead by the end of the day. Shocked by Minutin's heartless revelation, Diamantine is hardly comforted about her impending marriage. She refuses to sign her wedding contract, and dismisses the gentlemen. As they leave, the men alternate singing verses to the strains of a minuet, an intimate couple's dance. Francoeur claims that he is going home to beat (rosser) his wife, while Minutin resolves to pay off his wife's doctor (a profession often equated with murder in this repertoire).²⁵ Olivette observes that they are both pigeons.

Le Tableau also treats the limited role the community can play in negotiating the limits of spousal abuse. In scene 9, Arlequin, Olivette's *fiancé*, reveals his feelings about spousal correction in a dialogue with his long-lost friend Scaramouche, a confectioner, who has brought fruit preserves for Diamantine's nuptials. Scaramouche unspools the tale of how he wooed a widow *confiseur*. The

²⁴ See *Le Chansonnier français, ou recueil de chansons, ariettes, vaudevilles, et autres couplets choisis* (1760), VII: 36. "Oui, je t'aime; L'Amour même" is a "faux timbre," meaning that this song is known not by its original words, but by a later version of the song whose verses began "Oui, je t'aime." These words are below:

Air. Prens ma Philis prens ton verre.
Oui je t'aime,
L'Amour même
N'aime pas plus tendrement;
Ma tendresse
Croît sans cesse:
Prens pitié de mon tourment.

Air. Take my Philis take your glass.
Yes I love you,
Cupid himself
Does not love as tenderly;
My tenderness
Grows steadily;
Take pity on my torment.

Si le beau feu qui m'enflamme
Pouvait passer dans ton ame,
Que mon sort seroit charmant!

If the beautiful fire that inflames me
Could pass to your heart,
How charming my fate!

²⁵ See, for instance, d'Orneval's *Arlequin traitant* (1716). A demon is showing Arlequin around Hell, and as they survey the territory, the demon points out a very famous doctor. Arlequin corrects him, "You mean, a very famous assassin." *Théâtre de la foire*, II: p. 179. See also Lesage's *La Princesse de Carizme* (1718), Act III, scene 7, in *ibid.*, I: p. 308, where the doctor is also called an assassin.

marriage is an unhappy one, he explains, because his wife constantly disagrees with him and destroys everything he makes. Arlequin advises the following method to tame (*dompter*) his friend's intractable wife:²⁶

Je dirois à ma très-honorée Epouse:
Regardez, ma Mie. J'ai le bras vigoureux, le
poignet ferme, le geste vif. Ensuite, je
prendrais ma canne....

I would tell my very honorable wife: Look,
my dear. I have a powerful arm, a clenched
fist, quick movement. Then, I would take
my cane....

Arlequin interrupts his story when he spots his *fiancée*. Olivette dares him to continue. Aware that his method exceeds conventional expectations, he counters that he would take his cane...and start walking around with it. Suspicious of the strange turn in his story, Olivette echoes Diamantine's fear of marriage, and proclaims that Arlequin has become a pigeon, too.

Even Diamantine's aunt and uncle cannot exemplify a happy marriage. Though they come to dispel their niece's misgivings, they grapple over whether they have been married thirty-eight or forty years. The couple trades insults, and as the argument swells, Madame Pepin pointedly reminds her husband about the candelabra she threw at his head the other day. The other characters attempt to control the escalating argument, but the Pepins eventually come to blows. The entire cast joins together to separate them, after which Diamantine renounces marriage altogether. In the end, Diamantine and Olivette resolve to celebrate a "contre-fiançaille" or broken engagement, where they rejoice that they weren't silly enough to get married. In other words, if abuse, neglect, and hypocrisy characterize the future promised by marriage, Diamantine and Olivette reject it.

Indeed, avoiding marriage was one of the only ways to ensure that one did not get stuck in an unhappy union. France did not at this time accommodate divorce. Wives could, however, petition for marital separations, not based on charges of abuse alone, but if their husbands failed to provide for them. Traditionally, women were expected to endure their difficult marriages, even if they included domestic battery. Not all women were as lucky as the famous writer, Françoise de Graffigny, who would successfully petition for a separation

²⁶ Ibid., I, p. 207.

from her gambling, abusive husband in 1718.²⁷ Obedience, patience, and prayer were women's conventional resources for troubled home lives.²⁸ Thus, *Le Tableau de mariage* provides a radical solution to marriage problems: do not marry at all!

While *Le Tableau de mariage* was not the first French comedy to treat domestic abuse, it was the only one to treat it in such a large-scale way, and the only one that did not ultimately end in marriage. For instance, in a late-seventeenth-century Italian comedy, Gherardi's *Arlequin Empereur de la lune* (*Arlequin, Emperor from the Moon*, 1684) Colombine mentions domestic abuse, but as a way to achieve separation from an unwanted husband.²⁹ In *Le Banqueroutier* (1687), Arlequin advises his son that just as one seeks to conserve one's tapestries, "it is necessary from time to time to beat your wife to better retain her."³⁰ But he also promises his son's fiancée, Isabelle, that his son will never be overly brutal, drunk, or debauched. This comedy ends happily in marriage. Thus, the *forains'* treatment of issues concerning women was not new to this repertoire in France, but its ways of experimenting with the comic formula as a result certainly was.

²⁷ In 1718, Graffigny was granted a *separation des biens*, and in 1723, she was granted a *separation des biens et d'habitation*, which allowed the couple to live separately, whereas the former only gave her greater control over her assets.

²⁸ Hardwick, 2006, p. 24-25. For instance, Robert Pothier noted in his eighteenth-century treatise on marriage that a wife "must consider her husband's mistreatment as taking place on God's order as a cross that he is sending her for the expiation of her sins." (Quoted and translated in DeJean, 1991, p. 152.)

²⁹ See Gherardi, 1721, I, p. 12-13.

³⁰ "C'est d'en user envers votre femme, comme on en use envers la Tapisserie pour la garantir des vers et de la poussière; c'est-à-dire que de temps en temps il la faut bien battre pour la mieux conserver." See *Le Theatre Italien de Gherardi, ou le Recueil generale de toutes les Comédies et Scènes Françaises jouées par les Comédiens Italiens du Roy, pendant tout le temps qu'ils ont été au service de sa Majesté*, 5th ed., 6 vols. (Amsterdam: Michel Charles le Cene, 1721), I, p. 174. This later version has added scenes not included in the 1695 edition. This expression is an adaptation of a French proverb: "Les femmes sont comme les côtelettes; plus on les bat, plus elles sont tendres." ("Women are life pieces of meat; the more you pound them, the more they become tender.")

L'Isle des Amazones

A later example, *L'Isle des Amazones* (1718) weds contemporary concerns about unhappy marriages to the figure of the Amazon. The Amazon already had a long history, from which Lesage and d'Orneval drew to craft their story about a matriarchal utopia. Since the classical era, the Amazon has been associated with an appropriation of masculine military bearing and skills. However, this image attained specific, contemporary resonances in the seventeenth century. During the civil war known as the Fronde (1648-1653), French women secured an extraordinary amount of political agency. The Fronde began as a protest against the influence of the Queen Regent's Italian prime minister, Cardinal Mazarin, who, like his predecessor Cardinal Richelieu, aimed to limit the power of feudal leaders, leading to a consolidation of power in the monarchy. The protests soon expanded into a larger struggle against the monarchy itself.³¹ Women dressed as men, and rode on horseback defending themselves and their feudal cities from their king. These women, such as the Princesse de Condé, the Duchesse de Longueville and the Grande Mademoiselle (Mlle. de Montpensier), became known as Amazons, and attracted much attention, especially from male writers and painters, who at once mythologized them and condemned them.³² Guez de Balzac, for one, in a letter to Madame Desloges, wrote that men are fascinated by military women because they are threatened by it; he considers "Amazons not as women but as monsters."³³

After being exiled after the Fronde, several of these Amazons continued the "unnatural" task of circulating in a man's world, as Joan DeJean argues, by turning to writing memoirs and novels.³⁴ For instance, the Grande Mademoiselle

³¹ To read more about the Fronde, see Ranum, 1993.

³² The Grande Mademoiselle famously turned the Bastille's cannon on King Louis XIV and his royal army in an effort to keep *frondeur* control of Paris. Even before the Fronde, some authors created impressive heroines. Such heroines can be found in Gilbert Saulnier, sieur Du Verdier's *Roman des dames* (1629), Marin Le Roy, seigneur de Gomberville's *Polexandre* (1632), and Le Maire's *La Prazimène* (1638).

³³ Balzac, *Lettres* 1636, p. 238; quoted and translated in DeJean, 1991, p. 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24-33. DeJean gives accounts of two military women who turned to writing, Barbe d'Erneourt, Comtesse de Saint-Baslemont, and Catherine Meurdrac de La Guette.

began writing her memoirs, and also wrote fiction. In the final volume of her ten-volume *Artamène* novelist Madeleine de Scudéry, not an Amazon herself, promoted their cause. In a novel that focused on the exploits of the male hero Cyrus, the last installment (1653 the last year of the Fronde) turns to Sapho, the ancient poetess, claiming that she went to live with the Amazons. In a volume thought to be autobiographical at least in part, de Scudéry reexamines Sapho's life and rewrites her story not as the tragedy of a woman abandoned, but as a tale of triumph. According to the traditional narrative, when her beloved Phaon did not return her affection, Sapho's ability to write poetry allegedly faded, and she jumped off a cliff, or was, according to some, sacrificed in an annual ritual.³⁵ De Scudéry, on the other hand, claims that Sapho was neither murdered, nor suicidal (nor a lesbian), but instead repaired with Phaon to the land of the Amazons – a place where she continued her relationship with Phaon on her own terms and without marriage. Prolonged courtship and delayed marriage are common features of these kinds of novels. But the story of Sapho notably does not end in marriage.

Le Sage and d'Orneval's opéra-comique *L'Isle des Amazones* revives Scudéry's matriarchal island inhabited by Amazons.³⁶ The opéra-comique characters are drawn from a number of well-known sources. In the first scene, stock *commedia dell'arte* characters Arlequin and Pierrot are taken captive just off the coast of their island. Two ladies, Marphise and Bradamante – both women warriors from Ariosto's Renaissance epic *Orlando furioso* (the source for Lully's *tragédie-lyrique Roland*) – have enchained them and are conducting them at gunpoint towards land. Leaving the men at the shore, the ladies withdraw to attend the convocation of the island's Senate, which will determine the prisoners' fate. When Marphise and Bradamante return, they proclaim that the gentlemen shall be married to fellow Amazons, Zénobie and Hypolite.³⁷ Arlequin and Pierrot

³⁵ For a more detailed account of this history, see DeJean's 1989, especially Chapter One.

³⁶ In the same year that the Grande Mademoiselle's *Mémoires* were first published, but quickly suppressed. Thus the voice of the Amazon appeared both in autobiographical literature and in fictional accounts on the stage.

³⁷ Zenobia was a Queen and ruler of Egypt who was also a well-educated philosopher. Abraham Bosse famously depicted her in an engraving for Le Moyne's *La Galerie des femmes fortes* (1647). Hypolita is the name of an Amazonian queen.

are thrilled because, according to their friend Scaramouche, women take care of everything on this island.³⁸ The catch, however, is that the Amazons forsake their husbands, casting them off the island after three months. The two clowns are overjoyed to be free from cares, of course, and try to devise a way to stay on the island for a year, thinking that they could just marry different women every three months. But Scaramouche tells them that this, unfortunately, is impossible, since the Amazons put their husbands on the quickest boat leaving the island once their time is up. Scaramouche's own time is running out since he has been on the island for eight weeks already. To exemplify the strict nature of this rule, the next few scenes are dedicated to the departure of three husbands. The opera ends with a celebration of the double marriage between Arlequin, Pierrot, and their new Amazonian wives. But the happiness of this wedding scene is tempered by the comically tear-filled sequences that precede it. While Arlequin and Pierrot's marriages will no doubt be happy, the audience knows already that they will not last.

Building on the anti-marriage associations of the Amazon, the *forains* constructed an unconventional romance in which men have little power. As one of the Amazons, Marphise, explains, love and marriage on this isle is a whole different affair than what Arlequin and Pierrot are used to. On the Amazonian isle, marriage is not about emotional attachment, but is a political necessity.³⁹ Women marry only to repopulate the island, and then discard their husbands after three months, never to marry again. Like the Amazons in Greek mythology who erected altars to Artemis (the chaste goddess of the hunt), rather than Aphrodite (goddess of love), Marphise explains, love has no altars of worship here.

L'Isle des Amazones also critiques their suitors, who come from a variety of national backgrounds, but who all embody women's common complaints against their husbands. In scenes 6, 7, and 8, Amazons bid their husbands adieu.

³⁸ "Une Femme ici / A tout le souci, / Le soin de la dépense; / Et n'exige de son Mari / Qu'un peu de complaisance." ("A woman here / has all the worry, / The care of expenditures; / And for her husband/She demands only deference.") Le Sage and d'Orneval, 1968, p. 347.

³⁹ Although overall I think this opéra-comique is mostly an expression of proto-feminist sentiment, the fact that marriages are created for political purposes might also be seen to critique the practices among the aristocracy to marry to create political alliances rather than love matches.

Marphise, for example, shuns her Swiss husband for snoring and excessive drinking, whereas Bradamante discards the lovesick Spaniard Don Carlos. Atalide disentangles herself from the fickle Frenchman Dorante.⁴⁰

In scene 7, Bradamante has a difficult time ridding herself of the Spaniard, Dom Carlos. The scene opens as Bradamante insists that his entreaties are superfluous, and that his boat is about to depart the isle. This throws Dom Carlos into histrionics, and he sings his despair to the tune called “The Follies of Spain”:⁴¹

Air: Folies d’Espagne.

Il faut partir; et vous-même, Cruelle,
Vous me pressez d’abandonner ces lieux!
Ayez pitié de ma douleur mortelle;
Soyez du moins sensible à mes adieux.

Air: Follies of Spain.

It is necessary to part; and you, cruel one,
You pressure me to abandon these places!
Have pity on my mortal sadness;
At least be sensitive to my farewells.

Example 5 - “Folies d’Espagne.”

Il faut partir; et vous-même, Cruelle,
Vous me pressez d'abandonner ces lieux!
Ayez pitié de ma douleur mortelle;
Soyez du moins sensible à mes adieux.

This tune makes fun of the Spaniard’s melodramatic reaction in several ways. Although by this time, the *folia* had become a slow, stylized dance for the

⁴⁰ The series of scenes in which the Amazons dump their husbands is a loose parody of Campra’s opera-ballet *L’Europe galante* (1697). Campra’s opéra-ballet is a series of four entrées, each depicting lovers from four nations: France, Spain, Italy, and Turkey. Although *L’Isle des Amazones* only depicts three nationalities, its French and Spanish lovers are remarkably similar to those in *Europe galante*. In both operas, Frenchmen are predominantly unfaithful, whereas the Spaniards take pride in their steadfast fidelity. The Spaniard in *L’Isle des Amazones* even takes his name from one of the Spanish lovers in *L’Europe galante*: Both are named Dom Carlos.

⁴¹ Le Sage and d’Orneval, 1968, p. 351.

stage, in its original incarnation the *folia* referred to young boys who, dressed as women, performed loud music upon the shoulders of men.⁴² In this context, the *folia* points back to some of its earlier resonances with effeminacy. Furthermore, the name of the tune “The Follies of Spain” suggests mental instability thought to be particular to Spain.

Bradamante does not indulge his pleas. The following duet exemplifies their exchange of gender roles. Dom Carlos sings of his suffering, while Bradamante remains unmoved. Perhaps Bradamante is not won over by his despair because his suffering is set to a lively branle (!). With the strong, upward movement of a fifth, she tells him to go. Bradamante takes up her husband’s musical language in the second phrase, telling him that his absence will cure him, though this is undoubtedly a self-interested remark. Dom Carlos is not truly a tragic figure; rather, he is quite the opposite. He “tra-la-las,” when he sings that he is dying of love.⁴³

(First half of the duet)

Dom Carlos.

Air: *L’Amour me fait, lon-lan-la.*

Sans plaindre ma constance,

Peut-on me voir souffrir!

Don Carlos.

Air: *Love makes me, tra-la-la.*

Without complaining of my constancy,

One can see me suffer!

Bradamante.

Allez, allez, l’absence

Sçaura bien vous guérir.

Bradamante.

Go on, absence

Will know how to cure you.

Dom Carlos.

L’amour me fait, lon-lan-la,

L’amour me fait mourir.

Don Carlos.

Love makes me, tra-la-la.

Love makes me die.

⁴² See Esses, 1992, I, p. 637.

⁴³ Le Sage and d’Orneval, 1968, I, p. 351.

Example 6 - "L'Amour me fait, lon-lan-la."

Dom Carlos

Sans plain - dre ma con - stan - ce, Peut - on me

6 Bradamante

voir souf - frir! Al - lez, al - lez l'ab - sen - - - ce Sçau -

12 Dom Carlos

ra bien vous gué - rir. L'a - mour me fait, lon - lan -

18

la, L'a - mour me fait mou - - - rir.

The scene ends with a final duet. To a sea-faring tune, Bradamante continues to push Dom Carlos towards the sea. She urges him to save his tears for the journey ahead.⁴⁴

Bradamante

Air: *Embarquez-vous Mesdames.*

Embarquez-vous, Nicaise,

Entrez dans nos vaisseaux;

Vous ferez à votre aise

Vos plaintes sur les eaux.

Bradamante.

Air: *Leave, ladies.*

Leave, Nicaise,⁴⁵

Get into our boats;

You will be at your leisure

To cry upon the waters.

Dom Carlos.

Ah! quels adieux!

Que ne puis-je en ces lieux

Perdre le jour,

Ou mon funeste amour!

Don Carlos.

Ah! What a farewell!

Can I not in this place,

Lose my life,

Or my fatal love!

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ I believe that the Nicaise here is that of La Fontaine's poem of the same name. In it, a young maiden declares her love for Nicaise, only to fall in love with another man before their wedding day. It is a way of calling him a simpleton, since that is the origin of the name. See Fontaine, 1822, II, p. 44-52.

Example 7 - "Embarquez-vous Mesdames."

Bradamante

Em - bar - quez-vous, Ni - cai - se, En - trez dans nos vais-seaux; Vous

Dom Carlos

fe - rez à vo-tre'ai - se Vos plain - tes sur les eaux. Ah! quels a-dieux! Que

ne puis-j'en ces lieux Per-dre le jour, Ou mon fu-nes - te'a-mour!

Originally, this song, known as "Embarquez-vous, mesdames," was meant to be sung by a seafaring man or men. The original words were:⁴⁶

Embarquez-vous, Mesdames.
Embarquez-vous, mes Dames,
Ne craignez point les eaux:
Pour éteindre vos flâmes,
Entrez dans nos vaisseaux;
Pour bien aimer,
Faut être homme de mer,
Les matelots
Aiment au milieu des flots.

Embark, my ladies!
Embark, my ladies,
Have no fear of the water at all:
To extinguish your flames,
Enter our boats;
To love well,
It is necessary to be a man of the sea,
Seamen
Love amidst the waves.

The song calls women to sea. Its context in *L'Isle des Amazones* is diametrically opposed, since Bradamante is pressing Dom Carlos to embark with the other forsaken husbands. Unlike Bradamante's narrow melody, Dom Carlos's melody spans an octave and his tune moves up and down the fifth in g minor, which expresses his emotional volatility. Furthermore, each singer might have used the dotted rhythms for different effect. As has been the case with the Amazons, the dotted rhythms can sound militaristic and resolute. Dom Carlos's dotted rhythms, on the other hand, may have sounded instead like comic sobbing.⁴⁷ Overall, Bradamante maintains her military bearing throughout the scene. Dom Carlos, on the other hand, becomes increasingly weepy and tiresome in his pleas.

⁴⁶ See Schneider, 2005, p. 126-27.

⁴⁷ The French depiction of a histrionic and effeminate Spaniard may resonate with the fact that France had defeated Spain in the War of Succession (1701-1714) and put Bourbon royalty on the Spanish throne.

By juxtaposing the Spaniard with an Amazon, the character becomes weak and effeminate.

Scene 8 is an interesting contrast to the preceding scene. Here, Atalide must disentangle herself from her husband Dorante, a Frenchman. Ashamed of herself for falling in love, Atalide asks if she is really an Amazon: “O Dieux! Suis-je une Amazone?”⁴⁸ Dorante scoffs at her tears arguing that it is unreasonable for a Frenchman to love his mistress more than twelve weeks. The Frenchman admits here that his dabbling in the art of faithful love has disgraced him. Such things apparently happen rarely in France; his fidelity will be the stuff of fable when he returns.⁴⁹

Air: Je suis né ni Roi, ni Prince.
J'ai brûlé pour vous d'une flamme
A me deshonoré, Madame.
De nos jeunes Seigneurs François
Je serois la fable éternelle,
A mon retour si je disois
Que j'ai trois mois été fidelle.

Air: I was born neither King, nor Prince.
I burn for you with a flame
Such as to dishonor me, Madame.
I would be an eternal fable,
Of our young Frenchmen
If upon my return, I said
That I was faithful for three months.

Example 8 - “Je suis né ni Roi, ni Prince.”

J'ai bru - lé pour vous d'u - ne flam - me A me dés - ho - no -

7 rer, Ma - da - me. De nos jeu - nes Sei - gneurs — Fran - çois

13 Je se - rais la fa - ble é - ter - nel - le, A mon re - tour si

19 je di - sais Que j'ai trois mois é - té fi - del - le.

The Frenchman begins his *branle gay* in D minor when he expresses that he loved her. Significantly, when he sings of his love and faithfulness to Atalide

⁴⁸ Le Sage and d'Orneval, 1968, I, p. 353. It is here that Atalide begins to take on the tragic posture. As Erich Auerbach has noted “tragic personages identify themselves by their rank. They do not say ‘I wretched,’ but ‘I, wretched prince!’” See Auerbach, 1974, p. 375-376.

⁴⁹ Le Sage and d'Orneval, 1968, I, p. 353.

(phrases one and six), the Frenchman intones these words in the only truly minor melodies of the piece, almost as if to say he regrets it. Furthermore, these two phrases sit higher than any other and might have had a strained quality to them.

Atalide responds that she has read books filled with faithful French lovers—likely a nod to those written by France’s seventeenth-century literary Amazons.⁵⁰ Dorante laughs at this, and claims that this notion is outdated. She continues to plead with him, but he takes his leave singing:⁵¹

Air: *D’Amadis de Grèce*.⁵²

Le vent nous appelle,
La Saison est belle,
Il faut s’embarquer.

Air: *From Amadis of Greece*.

The wind calls us,
The season is beautiful,
It is necessary to embark.

Example 9 - “*D’Amadis de Grèce*.”



In contrast to the other gentlemen’s leave takings, the Frenchman’s exit is not a sad affair – at least not for him. His final tune is a short, chipper tune in D major. The dotted rhythms might have been matched by his buoyant skip to the sea.

Once Dorante departs, Atalide’s ambivalent emotional outpouring embodies her rite of passage as she becomes fully Amazonian. In the subsequent scene, Atalide takes time to reflect on her tears. Here she resolves to let go of her “superfluous” emotions. Like heroes in Lully’s late operas, Atalide must renounce love and its torments.⁵³

Air: A Paris ces Filles.
C’en est trop, Perfide!

Air: To Paris these girls.
It is too much, perfidious one!

⁵⁰ “J’ai lû dans un certain Auteur / Qu’on voit en abondance / A Paris des Amans constans.” See Le Sage and d’Orneval, 1968, I, p. 353.

⁵¹ Ibid., I, p. 354.

⁵² This tune is from Act IV, scene 4 of André Cardinal Destouches and Antoine Houdar de La Motte’s opera, *Amadis de Grèce* (1699).

⁵³ Le Sage and d’Orneval, 1968, I, p. 354.

Crois-tu qu'Atalide,
Toujours dans les pleurs,
Nourrisse ses langueurs,
Se livre à ses douleurs?
Non, non, je n'aimerai plus,
L'Amour est un mauvais guide;
Non, non, je n'aimerai plus:
Adieu, regrets superflus.

Do you think that Atalide,
Always in tears,
Nurtures her languor,
Gives in to her sadness?
No, no, I will love no more,
Love is a bad guide;
No, no, I will love no more:
Good-bye, useless regrets.

Example 10 - "A Paris ces Filles."

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a time signature of 8/8. It consists of five staves of music. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words split across lines. The lyrics are: C'en est trop, Per- fi - de! Crois-tu qu'A - ta - li - de, Tou-jours dans les pleurs, Nou-ris - se ses lan - geurs, se livre à ces dou - leurs? Non, non, je n'ai - me-rai plus, L'A - mour est un mau - vais gui - de; Non, non, je n'ai - me-rai plus: A - dieux re-grets su - per - flus.

Atalide sings a very powerful piece—one that approaches the nineteenth-century *scena ed aria* in the sense that her aria propels her into a new state of mind, though in miniature. The song develops Atalide's emotional maturity. In the first section, measures 1-7, Atalide expresses the kinds of emotional states associated with the literary stereotype propagated by Ovid in his *Heroides* (widely read in this period); such stereotypes claim that a woman in love is a woman scorned. What is fascinating, however, is that, beginning in measure 8, Atalide changes course. Instead of succumbing to her sorrow, she claims that she will bid farewell to the superfluous feelings of love.⁵⁴

Overall, in *L'Isle des Amazones*, the *forains* drew from the ideals of France's seventeenth-century Amazons, both from warriors such as La Grande

⁵⁴ This reworking of Ovid's stereotypes in his *Heroides* is reminiscent of Madeleine de Scudéry's own reworking of this text. See Scudéry, 1641. Here, instead of women lamenting lost love in letters, men are the authors of this fictional letters of woe.

Mademoiselle, as well as her literary counterparts, all of whom imagined utopias where women lived beyond the conventional cultural narrative of marriage and childbirth. While the *forains* may mock women's attempt to create a society where women have agency, they also, through their irony, expose the disparities in French culture between men and women. It also hardly suggests that marriage is a woman's ultimate goal, nor does it claim that marriage provides lasting happiness.

Dystopic Narrative and Women's Writing

What these two comedies reveal is experimentation with the conventional comic formulae to address specific contemporary issues. I argue that this experimentation was in part a result of recent challenges to male dominance in love and marriage. Particularly beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, women had begun articulating progressive perspectives on marriage. Some prominent *précieuses*, as these women were known, published both fictional and non-fictional works that argued against marriage entirely, as in Scudéry's *Histoire de Sapho*.

Several other authors experimented with conventional narrative closure in the seventeenth century. Surprisingly, the genre most known for ending in marriage, other than comedy itself, is likely a source for the *forains'* experiments with form. The fairy tale, a genre that became popular in the late seventeenth century, is certainly known for its "fairy tale" endings, but a number of them end by casting doubt upon the happiness promised by marriage. A few examples of dystopic fairy tales can serve to help us see similarities between the fairy tale and *Le Tableau de mariage* and most especially *L'Isle des Amazones*. First of all, like *Le Tableau de mariage* several fairy tales written by women did not end in marriage. These stories include Louise de Bossigny, Comtesse d'Auneuil's "Le Prince Curieux" ("The Curious Prince") and her "La Princesse Patientine, dans la Forêt d'Erimente" ("The Patient Princess, in Erimente's Forest"). In the latter, the author spins out a tale in which marriage is characterized as slavery, which recalls the heroine's complaint in Scudéry's *Histoire de Sapho*. In Catherine Bernard's "Le Prince rosier"

("The Rosebush Prince"), the prince is so unhappy with his marriage that he asks to be transformed (back) into a rosebush. Although several other tales end in marriage, love and marriage are not idealized in them. For instance, Charlotte-Rose Caumont de La Force's "La Puissance d'Amour" ("The Power of Love") and Murat's "L'Heureuse peine," temper the happy ending with critical comments on love and marriage. Catherine Bernard wrote that the fundamental goal of her stories were to "only show unhappy lovers so as to combat as much as I can our penchant for love."⁵⁵

Such stories often begin with a fairy's prediction that the protagonist will be unlucky in love. Thus, Diamantine's nightmare in *Le Tableau de mariage* might easily serve as a more realistic counterpart. Furthermore, in dystopic fairy tales, the protagonist may be aided by friends or fairies, but even their powers cannot undo the protagonist's unhappy destiny. For instance, in Murat's "Peine perdue" ("Wasted Effort"), the heroine's mother, a fairy, does all she can to help a prince fall in love with her daughter, but to no avail. Likewise, while Diamantine's aunt and uncle come to ameliorate her fears about marriage, they only serve to solidify Diamantine's resolve not to marry.

But as proof that the *forains* were familiar with such fairy tales, the other *opéra-comique* that premiered on the same bill as *Le Tableau de mariage* was an adaptation of one of these dystopic fairy tales. Lesage and Louis Fuzelier's *opéra-comique* called *L'Ecole des amants* (*The School for Lovers*, 1716) adapts Murat's "Le Palais de la vengeance" ("The Palace of Revenge"). In the original story an evil magician, Pagan, has enclosed lovers in a crystal palace, where the couples cannot escape each other's sight. After several years, the narrator notes that the lovers have grown tired of each other. The tale ends with this final moral:⁵⁶

Avant ce temps fatal, les amants trop
heureux
Brûlaient toujours des mêmes feux,
Rien ne troublait le cours de leur bonheur
extrême;
Pagan leur fit trouver le secret malheureux,

Before that fateful time, these too happy
lovers
Always burned with the same fire,
Nothing troubled the course of their
extreme happiness;
Pagan made them discover the unhappy

⁵⁵ Escola, 2004, p. 312.

⁵⁶ Murat, 2006, p. 158.

De s'ennuyer du bonheur même.

secret,

Of becoming bored with happiness itself.

Likewise, in *L'Ecole des amants*, the characters are living on an island, under the power of the sorcerer named Friston. To his apprentice Pierrot, Friston explains that one day when travelling in a flying chariot over Florence, he spotted the beautiful Isabelle. Unfortunately, a cavalier was already courting her. To rid himself of his rival, he transported them both to his island where they could live in complete tranquility and without ever having to lose sight of one another. He explains that despite all the serenity and amusing entertainments, Isabelle and her lover have quickly tired of one another. He sings to Pierrot:⁵⁷

Air: Mon Père, je viens devant vous.
 Apren que l'amour sort d'un coeur
 Aussitôt qu'il s'y voit tranquile:
 Que, pour dégoûter d'un bonheur,
 On n'a qu'à le rendre facile.

Air: Father, I come before you.
 Learn that love leaves a heart
 As soon as it becomes tranquil;
 To repel happiness
 One only has to make it easy.

And indeed Leandre and Isabelle have become bored with one another, as have their servants Arlequin and Olivette. They all begin to quarrel. They beg Friston to let them leave the island and the company of their former lovers. Since the women are now unencumbered by their suitors, Friston lays claim to Isabelle and Pierrot to Olivette. Their rivals cede their former mistresses without a fight, and the ladies are happy to marry these new suitors. But Olivette says that they may marry on one condition: that they never have to stay shut up with these men as they were with their former lovers. Pierrot agrees and suggests that they only have to see each other very rarely. At the end of the show, Leandre and Arlequin go to Paris, the ladies go to Rome, and Pierrot and Friston stay on the enchanted isle.⁵⁸

L'Isle des Amazones, furthermore, features several similarities with fairy tales. Several fairy tales have islands that are forbidden to men, including Marie-

⁵⁷ Le Sage and d'Orneval, 1968, I, p. 213.

⁵⁸ These two works may be poking fun at the contemporary vogue for couples to sleep separately and generally to live their lives apart. See Gibson, 1989, p. 72.

Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, baronne d'Aulnoy's *Prince Lutin* and Murat's *Prince of Leaves*. Additionally, as Holly Tucker has shown, fairy tales often use pregnancy as a motif, in part as a response to the increasing encroachment of male doctors in childbirth.⁵⁹ Likewise, in *L'Isle des Amazones* the women of the island have taken control of reproduction. They reproduce once and never again.⁶⁰ This fictional scenario was quite contrary to real life, where a woman's fertility was tested upon marriage, and she was expected to produce children every two years until she was no longer able.⁶¹ Guillaume Le Roy's 1675 treatise on motherhood, *Du devoir des mères avant et après la naissance de leurs enfants* (*On the duty of mothers before and after the birth of their children*) reminds women that part of their duties as wife is to bear as many children as possible.⁶²

Furthermore, Tucker has also shown that, despite the cultural preference for boys, fairy-tale mothers show a preference for girls. Tucker contends that the preference for boys in this period was so acute that the birth of a girl was often synonymous with infertility.⁶³ Fertility was linked instead to the ability to produce a male heir. In *L'Isle des Amazones*, as in fairy tales, the women prefer to have girls and will trade their sons for daughters with the families of nearby nations.

⁵⁹ The opéra-comique *Le Monde Renversé* (*The Topsy-Turvy World*) may comment on this phenomenon when in scene 10 Arlequin and Pierrot meet a female doctor. They are surprised to see a woman practicing medicine. Hippocratine, as she is known, asks whether or not people are healed in France, where only men practice medicine. Arlequin laughs since doctors were associated with assassins in this repertoire. Unlike men in France who only study books in Latin and Greek for their remedies, ladies consult only nature. Arlequin and Pierrot then reason that maybe it would not be so bad to have a female doctor. See Le Sage and d'Orneval, 1968, I, p. 323-24. Tucker shows that some female authors used the fairy tale to proclaim that medical doctors crafted their own fictions to declare their superiority in helping women give birth to children. See Tucker, 2003.

⁶⁰ One can sample some of the male reaction to women's complaints about numerous pregnancies in Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, *Les Visionnaires*, Act V, scene 5. Sestiane complains that if she is always pregnant and giving birth then she will not be able to go to the theater. See *Les Visionnaires* 2nd ed. (Paris: Jean Camusat, 1639), p. 72. In Donneau de Visé's *La Mère coquette*, Act III, scene 1, Lucinde fears having children. Jacinte responds that it is true that once a woman has children, she loses her figure. See *La Mère coquette, ou Les Amans broüillez* (Paris: Theodore Girard, 1666). In Molière's *Les Femmes savantes*, Act I, scene 1. Armande dreams of something better than being tied down with a husband and a bunch of children. She claims that dreaming of this kind of life is for common people. Instead, she wants to devote herself to intellectual pursuits.

⁶¹ See Gibson, 1989, p. 70.

⁶² See Guillaume Le Roy's *Du devoir des mères avant et après la naissance de leurs enfants* (Paris: Gaillaume Desprez, 1675), p. 269.

⁶³ Tucker, 2003, p. 80.

Overall, these opéra-comique adaptations and their affinity with women's dystopic fairy tales make it clear that part of the *forains'* motivations for experimenting with traditional comic formulae was driven in part by changing ideals of love and marriage as a result of proto-feminist protest and literary experimentation.

Conclusions

One might be tempted to claim that these opéras-comiques with their independent women are feminist. But, women are just one among many conventionally oppressed figures to whom the *forains* grant power. Nor were women exempt from the *forains'* satire. What remains consistent, however, is that courtship and marital practices provide a window into the *forains'* examinations of unequal distributions of power. Unlike entertainments specifically for aristocrats, opéras-comiques, which catered to general audiences, were freer to explore more progressive views of gender relations in love and marriage.

Nevertheless, elements of this repertoire do seem to profess proto-feminist sentiments. Throughout the repertoire, opéras-comiques that treat love and marriage specifically hardly suggest that women are bound to the patriarchal narrative that requires them to sublimate their own aspirations into a romantic partnership. None of the women in these types of opéras-comiques aspire to traditional feminine virtues such as passivity and self-sacrifice. *L'Isle des Amazones* especially denies the idea that a woman's only function is a reproductive one. Instead, women in opéras-comiques desire economic freedom, social mobility, and self-governance, often at the expense of husbands who believe that they have absolute authority over their wives. Furthermore, women in *opéras-comiques* often have the freedom, after various schemes, to marry the man of their choice.

To conclude, I suggest that we can understand the importance of these choices through Raymond Williams's definition of "hegemony."⁶⁴ He writes that while the hegemonic culture is dominant, its power is not static or total. Rather it is in a perpetual state of defense and renewal as it grapples with internal, counter-

⁶⁴ See Williams, 1977, p. 108-114 and p. 121-27.

hegemonic forces. These oppositional forces may take two forms: the residual and the emergent. Experiences, meanings, and values from the past that have been incorporated into dominant culture constitute the residual. In *Le Tableau de mariage* and *L'Isle des Amazones*, the emergent is found in the feminist presence that threatens to collapse the reigning order, which was built upon women's submission in marriage and the family. For the dominant order to maintain its power it must acknowledge and diffuse the threat of the emerging force. But in doing so, the dominant culture must transform as well. The tension in these opéras-comiques between the emergent and the dominant can be found in such comedies as *L'Isle des Amazones* and dystopic fairy tales where women continue to marry, but these marriages no longer promise happy endings. As such, these tensions represent women's growing presence in social, cultural, and political discourse.

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