

University of Northern Colorado

Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC

Master's Theses

Student Research

5-7-2021

Queerness in French Baroque Opera: The Relationship Between Achilles and Patroclus in Jean Baptiste Lully's Achille et Polyxène

Jason Thompson
tt77688@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Thompson, Jason, "Queerness in French Baroque Opera: The Relationship Between Achilles and Patroclus in Jean Baptiste Lully's Achille et Polyxène" (2021). *Master's Theses*. 210.
<https://digscholarship.unco.edu/theses/210>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. For more information, please contact Jane.Monson@unco.edu.

© 2021

JASON TRAVIS THOMPSON

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

QUEERNESS IN FRENCH BAROQUE OPERA:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
ACHILLES AND PATROCLUS
IN JEAN-BAPTISTE LULLY'S
ACHILLE ET POLYXÈNE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Music

Jason Travis Thompson

College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Music
Music History and Literature

May 2021

This Thesis by: Jason Travis Thompson

Entitled: Queerness in French Baroque Opera: The Relationship Between Achilles and Patroclus in Jean Baptiste Lully's *Achille et Polyxène*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Master of Music in the College of Performing and Visual Arts in the School of Music, Program of Music History and Literature.

Accepted by the Thesis Committee:

Deborah Kauffman, D.M.A., Chair

Jonathan Bellman, D.M.A., Committee Member

Accepted by the Graduate School

Jeri-Anne Lyons, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
Associate Vice President for Research

ABSTRACT

Thompson, Jason Travis. *Queerness in French Baroque Opera*. Unpublished Master of Music thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2021.

The myth of Achilles has long been considered a narrative model for homosexual relationships. Jean-Baptiste Lully set the story of Achilles and Patroclus to music in the first act of his last opera, *Achille et Polyxène*. In 17th-century France, various queer men held positions of significant influence, including members of the royal family, such as Louis XIII and Philippe of Orléans. Another powerful queer man was Louis Joseph de Bourbon, the duc de Vendôme who was part of an influential group of libertines. Lully entered the service of the duc in 1685, when he was banished from court after he was caught in an affair with another man, Brunet. In Vendôme's service, Lully collaborated with Jean Galbert de Campistron, a dramatist and the secretary to Vendôme, to write two operas. *Achille et Polyxène* was the second of these operas and the last Lully would work on. In the opera's first act, Campistron's text and Lully's music work together to imply a romantic relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, which has been used to portray homosexuality since ancient Greece.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	QUEERNESS IN LOUIS XIV’S COURT AND AMONG THE FRENCH NOBILITY.....	3
III.	THE DUC DE VENDÔME AND THE LIBERTINE CABAL.....	10
IV.	ACHILLES AND PATROCLUS.....	12
V.	ANALYSIS OF ACT I OF ACHILLE ET POLYXÈNE.....	14
VI.	CONCLUSION.....	19
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	20
	APPENDIX	
A.	Review of <i>Achille et Polyxène</i> in <i>Le Mercure Galant</i> , November 1687.....	21
B.	Score for Act I, Scene 2 of <i>Achille et Polyxène</i>	24

LIST OF EXAMPLES

I. Example 1..... 17

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, as queer identities have typically been rejected by mainstream culture, queer people have found various safe spaces in which to express themselves.¹ Contrary to what we might expect, the noble classes in 17th-century France were more open about queer identity than other contemporary cultures and social classes. During the reign of Louis XIV, various social circles of queer nobility functioned as safe spaces for queer nobles, such as the cabal that surrounded Louis Joseph de Bourbon, the duc de Vendôme, who provided refuge for Jean-Baptiste Lully when he was caught in an affair with another man. After being turned away from court, Lully went into the service of the duc de Vendôme, during which time Lully wrote two operas, *Acis et Galatée* and *Achille et Polyxène*. The subject matter of the latter is intriguing, given the queer nature of the circle around Lully and the duc de Vendôme. Achilles' relationship with Patroclus has long been thought to be homoerotic in nature, ever since *The Iliad* was written. Because Lully composed an opera whose first act highlights this relationship, at the time he was working for Vendôme, who himself was queer and surrounded by a libertine cabal that included many queer people, the libretto and music of Lully's opera seem to reflect the existing interpretation of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus as homoerotic. It is likely that

¹ Since the exact sexual or gender identity of any particular figure can be difficult to ascertain and our modern terms were not in use at the time, I have decided to use the term queer to in reference to LGBTQIA+ identities. The term can be used in a general sense to refer to LGBTQIA+ identities, thus avoiding the need to establish the exact sexual or gender identity of any particular person. I do use the word homosexual, homoerotic, or homosexuality when dealing with relationships between two people of the same sex. This is not to classify the person within that identity but in reference to engaging in sexual activity with a person of the same sex.

Lully wrote this opera intending to represent the queer nature of the relationship, at least in the first Act.

CHAPTER II
QUEERNESS IN LOUIS XIV'S COURT AND
AMONG THE FRENCH NOBILITY

Throughout the 17th-century in France, various people in positions of power, both social and political, were queer. It has been shown that Louis XIV's father, Louis XIII, had sexual affairs with several men during his lifetime. The ten-year-old king apparently maintained an intimate relationship with his 33-year-old falconer, Charles d'Albert de Luynes, who was moved into the apartment above Louis XIII on the order of the young king.² It was said that Louis XIII spent more time with Luynes than with his wife, the queen, Anne of Austria.³ It was also rumored that the king was attracted to his coachman and the keeper of his dogs, according to biographies written by Gédéon Tallemant de Réaux, a gossip of the period.⁴ After Luynes' death, Louis XIII continued to direct his emotional attention toward other men. According to Tallemant de Réaux, the king became infatuated with an equerry, François de Baradas, who later fell out of favor.⁵ The king's first minister, Cardinal Richelieu, introduced the king to Henri Coiffier de Ruzé, the marquis de Cinq Mars, who became the king's lover.⁶ According to Tallemant de Réaux, another courtier found the marquis anointing himself in jasmine oil as the king arrived to see him.⁷ On another occasion, the king sent the marquis to undress.⁸ After the marquis returned

² Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 336.

³ Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 336.

⁴ Gédéon Tallemant de Réaux, *Historiettes* (1659), cited by Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 336. Although the *Historiettes* were completed in 1659, they remained unpublished until the 19th century.

⁵ Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 338.

⁶ Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 338.

⁷ Gédéon Tallemant de Réaux, *Historiettes* (1659), cited by Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 338.

⁸ Gédéon Tallemant de Réaux, *Historiettes* (1659), cited by Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 338.

looking like a bride, the king directed him to the bed, kissing the marquis' hands before they got in bed together.⁹

Louis XIII and Anne of Austria struggled to produce an heir, possibly because of Louis XIII's attraction to men. Nevertheless, they had two sons, Louis XIV and Philippe, duc d'Orléans.¹⁰ Louis XIV ascended to the throne in 1643, on his father's death; because he was only five years old when he became king, his mother ruled in his name. By all accounts, Louis XIV was straight: he married twice and took several official mistresses. On the other hand, Louis XIV's brother, Philippe, was rather open about his attraction to and relationships with other men and would have been considered flamboyant even by modern standards.

As a general rule, the nobles of Louis XIV's court were rather open about their queer identities in this period, despite the king's apparent homophobia.¹¹ His position on sexuality seems to have been rather selective. In some circumstances, such as the case of his illegitimate son with Madame de la Vallière, the king readily punished people for sodomy; in other circumstances, he was willing to overlook sodomy committed by people such as the duc de Vendôme or his own brother. Political considerations appear to have informed Louis XIV's position on sexuality. The duc de Vendôme was valuable to the King for his military prowess; thus it would not have been advantageous for the king to dismiss the duc for his sexuality. Similarly, Louis XIV was tolerant toward his brother, Philippe d'Orléans, known as "Monsieur," who was once called "the silliest woman who ever lived" by a contemporary.¹² Monsieur's flamboyance seems to have been supported by his mother, who referred to him as "my little girl"

⁹ Gédéon Tallemant de Réaux, *Historiettes* (1659), cited by Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 338.

¹⁰ In *Homosexuality and Civilization*, an event is described where Luynes, an apparent lover of Louis XIII, carried the king into Anne of Austria's chamber and threw him onto the bed; the journal of the king's personal physician indicates that the royal marriage was not consummated on the wedding night. This series of events seems to imply Louis XIII's sexual attraction to men, particularly when viewed alongside the accounts of the relationship between Louis XIII and the marquis de Cinq Mars.

¹¹ Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 339, 344.

¹² Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 341.

and kept him in girls' clothes.¹³ In addition to encouraging his more flamboyant nature, Cardinal Mazarin and Queen Anne seem to have noticed Philippe's interest in other men; that they encouraged him to pursue other men is shown by the fact that Mazarin knowingly found Philippe a sexual partner, likely the first man with whom he had a sexual relationship — Mazarin's nephew, Philippe Jules Mancini, the duc de Nevers.¹⁴

In his indispensable memoirs, the duc de Saint-Simon described Monsieur as follows:

Monsieur was a little round-bellied man, who wore such high-heeled shoes that he seemed mounted always upon stilts; was always decked out like a woman, covered everywhere with rings, bracelets, jewels; with a long black wig, powdered, and curled in front; with ribbons wherever he could put them; steeped in perfumes, and in fine a model of cleanliness. He was accused of putting on an imperceptible touch of rouge. He had a long nose, good eyes and mouth, a full but very long face. All his portraits resembled him.¹⁵

It was common, at that time, for boys to wear a dress until they were breeched — dressed in breeches — around age five. Nevertheless, Monsieur continued to wear dresses even after he was breeched. One such instance occurred when he attended a ball with a female cousin, both of whom dressed as shepherdesses.¹⁶

During the War of Devolution between 1667 and 1668, Philippe d'Orléans met Philippe of Lorraine, the Chevalier de Lorraine.¹⁷ The king's brother fell for the chevalier, and according

¹³ Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 340.

¹⁴ Nancy Barker, *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orleans* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 58.

¹⁵ Louis de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon, *The Memoirs of Louis XIV, His Court, and The Regency*, trans. Bayle St. John, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3875/3875-h/3875-h.htm> (2006), accessed 20 February 2021.

¹⁶ Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 341.

¹⁷ Barker, *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orleans*, 100.

to a number of accounts, the two became sexually and romantically involved, allowing the chevalier to exert control over Monsieur.¹⁸ Saint-Simon noted that Monsieur was very generous to the chevalier, giving him “the finest apartments in the Palais Royal and Saint Cloud, and a pension of ten thousand crowns.”¹⁹ Monsieur’s romantic relationship with the chevalier seems to have been the strongest of his life. It is clear that his contemporaries noticed Monsieur’s predilection; Madame de La Fayette stated that “the miracle of inflaming the heart of this prince was not reserved for any woman.”²⁰ Nevertheless, evidence suggests that Monsieur felt some attraction to women; he seems to have had genuine interest in his first wife, Henriette, although Philippe later indicated that his love for her was only temporary.²¹ Henriette was an English princess, the daughter of King Charles I, but as her mother was from the French royal family, Henriette was raised in France from infancy because of the English Civil War, the execution of Charles I, and Oliver Cromwell’s rise to power. As with many royal marriages, that between Henriette and Philippe was primarily of political importance; her brother, Charles II, had just been crowned King of England with the restoration of the English Monarchy, and an Anglo-French alliance was necessary to counter the power of Spain.²² At the end of the 1660s, negotiations between France and England were led by Henriette. Resenting the relationship between her husband and the chevalier, Henriette used her position as the sister of Charles II and the essential part she played in the diplomatic relationship between England and France to have Louis XIV order the arrest of the Chevalier in 1670.²³ Philippe moved to his chateau at St. Cloud and refused to return to court unless the Chevalier was released. Although we do not know exactly what was negotiated between the King and his brother, Philippe eventually agreed to

¹⁸ Barker, *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orleans*, 100.

¹⁹ Saint-Simon, *The Memoirs of Louis XIV, His Court, and The Regency*.

²⁰ Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 341.

²¹ Barker, *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orleans*, 61,74.

²² Barker, *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orleans*, 71.

²³ Barker, *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orleans*, 103-6.

return to court. On the condition that the chevalier was released; although, he was not allowed to return to court, so the chevalier left for Rome.²⁴ In June 1670, shortly after returning from England, Henriette began complaining of pain in her side, which resulted in an ailment that led to her death later that month.²⁵ Some in the court thought she had been poisoned and that the chevalier was behind her death.²⁶ In 1671, Philippe married Elisabeth-Charlotte von der Pfalz, known as Liselotte. With Henriette out of the way and Philippe remarried, the chevalier was able to return to court in 1672, but he would never regain the control he previously had over Philippe.²⁷

The letters of Liselotte, the duchesse d'Orléans, to her family in the Holy Roman Empire offer insight into queer life at court. She wrote that nobles talked of homosexuality rather openly and that they reconciled homosexuality with their faith:

Those who have the taste and believe in the Holy Scripture suppose that it was only a sin as long as there were few men in the world and what they practiced could hurt the human race... But now that the world is completely populated they consider it a simple divertissement. They hide it as much as they can as to not scandalize the common people, but they speak openly of it amongst people of quality.²⁸

Liselotte also stated that these nobles believed that no one had been punished for homosexuality since Sodom and Gomorah.²⁹

The atmosphere at the court became more somber toward the end of Louis XIV's reign.

After the death of his queen, Marie-Thérèse, in 1683, Louis XIV secretly married Françoise

²⁴ Barker, *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orleans*, 107.

²⁵ Barker, *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orleans*, 114.

²⁶ Barker, *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orleans*, 114.

²⁷ Barker, *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orleans*, 139-140.

²⁸ Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 344.

²⁹ Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 344.

d'Aubigny, the marquise de Maintenon. Around this same time, Louis XIV became more devout and was greatly influenced by the *parti des dévôts*, a political faction in France that supported the Catholic church and the strict adherence to its doctrines.³⁰ The clergy used this influence with the king to try to convince him to rid the court of sodomites. For example, at the king's Christmas mass in 1684, the priest Louis Bourdaloue made an appeal in his sermon for the king to purge the court of sodomites:

Scripture forbids me to name them, but it is sufficient that Your Majesty knows and detests them... They will not withstand your disfavor nor the weight of your indignation, and when you will it, these vices, shameful to the name of Christianity, will cease to outrage God and to scandalize men, It is for that, Sire, that heaven has placed you on the throne.³¹

In the sermon, Bourdaloue's mention of "these vices" would have been clear to those in attendance; he was referring to sodomy, which was known variously as the Italian vice, the "beau" vice, or simply "that vice." François-Michel le Tellier, the marquis de Louvois and secretary of war and first minister to the king, was able to convince the King to overlook "that vice" among his generals, as they were invaluable to France.³² Others did not fare as well. In January 1685, about a month after this sermon was given, Jean Baptiste Lully was caught in an affair with a man named Brunet.³³ In a letter dated January 24th, 1685, Rodolphe Reuss mentioned the affair, explaining that Lully was no longer to appear in the king's presence.³⁴

Precisely when the king became aware of Lully's affair is not known, but the performance of *Roland* at Versailles on January 18th, 1685, as reported by the *Mercure Galant*, seems to indicate

³⁰ Georgia Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure Louis XIV & the Politics of Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 139.

³¹ Louis Bourdaloue, *Oeuvres complètes de Bourdaloue*, quoted by Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 347.

³² Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 347.

³³ Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 139.

³⁴ Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 139.

that Lully was still at court at the time.³⁵ Lully's affair, then, was likely brought to the king's attention between January 18 and January 24, 1685, as Lully was still attending court on the 18th, and the affair and subsequent consequence was mentioned in Reuss' letter on the 24th. Although Lully was banished from the king's presence, he retained his official position.³⁶ Sometime thereafter, Lully entered the service of the duc de Vendôme and began collaborating with the duc's secretary, Jean Galbert de Campistron, the librettist for *Acis et Galatée* and *Achille et Polyxène*.³⁷

³⁵ Anonymous, *Le Mercure Galant* (January 1685), 327-329.

³⁶ Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 139.

³⁷ Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 139.

CHAPTER III
THE DUC DE VENDÔME AND THE
LIBERTINE CABAL

It was well known that the duc de Vendôme engaged in sexual relationships with other men. The Saint-Simon touches on this throughout his memoirs:

The most wonderful thing to whoever knew the King—so gallant to the ladies during a long part of his life, so devout the other, and often importunate to make others do as he did—was that the said King had always a singular horror of the inhabitants of the Cities of the Plain; and yet M. de Vendome, though most odiously stained with that vice—so publicly that he treated it as an ordinary gallantry—never found his favour diminished on that account.³⁸

As noted above, the phrase “that vice” was used to refer to same-sex sexual relationships between men. It was reported that Vendôme paid the peasants at his estate, Anet, for sex.³⁹ Saint-Simon implied that Vendôme had relations with his valets as well: “As for M. de Vendome, [he was] without any resource, save what he found in his vices and his valets...”⁴⁰ By mentioning “his vices and valets” together, Saint-Simon was clearly referring to Vendôme’s sexuality, as he did in the earlier passage. Despite his sexuality, the duc de Vendôme enjoyed popularity at the court. According to Saint-Simon, whenever Vendôme attended the opera, the seats were packed, he was met with applause, and ticket prices were doubled.⁴¹ Vendôme’s cabal

³⁸ Saint-Simon, *The Memoirs of Louis XIV, His Court, and The Regency*.

³⁹ Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 348.

⁴⁰ Saint-Simon, *The Memoirs of Louis XIV, His Court, and The Regency*.

⁴¹ Saint-Simon, *The Memoirs of Louis XIV, His Court, and The Regency*.

was another source of the duc's protection at court. Saint-Simon provides an example of this in recounting a controversy with Monseigneur de Bourgogne. In this entry, Saint-Simon mentions Campistron, the libertine dramatist that was part of the cabal surrounding Vendôme, and who collaborated with Lully on his last two operas. In chapter XLII, Saint-Simon recalls that

... Campistron—a poor, starving poet, ready to do anything to live—went further. He wrote a letter, in which Monseigneur le duc de Bourgogne was personally attacked in the tenderest points, and in which maréchal Matignon was said to merit a court-martial for having counselled retreat...

A powerful cabal was, in fact, got up against Monseigneur de Bourgogne. Vaudeville, verses, atrocious songs against him, ran all over Paris and the provinces with a licence and a rapidity that no one checked; while at the Court, the libertines and the fashionables applauded; so that in six days it was thought disgraceful to speak with any measure of this Prince, even in his father's house.⁴²

Campistron was queer, like his employer, Vendôme: a contemporary chanson proclaimed that Campistron had a taste for ugly women and pretty boys.⁴³ As noted above, Campistron collaborated on two operas with Lully, *Acis et Galatée* and *Achille et Polyxène*. The choice of the subject of Achilles for what would be Lully's last opera was well suited to the queer social circle that surrounded the duc and to which Lully was now belonged.

⁴² Saint-Simon, *The Memoirs of Louis XIV, His Court, and The Regency*.

⁴³ Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 140.

CHAPTER IV

ACHILLES AND PATROCLUS

It is well known that the attitudes of the ancient Greeks on issues of sexuality differ greatly from our own. Sexual activity that we now call homosexual was a generally more accepted part of society. Accordingly, the issue of the sexuality of the mythic figures of Achilles and Patroclus has been debated since they appeared in the *Iliad*. In his dialogues, Xenophon rejects the idea of Achilles and Patroclus as lovers, but it would seem that the ancient world generally accepted that the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus was sexual in nature.⁴⁴ Aeschylus unambiguously referred to Achilles and Patroclus as lovers in his writings.⁴⁵ Despite the ongoing debate about the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, whether Homer intended to depict the two as lovers when writing the *Iliad* is not important to understanding their sexuality and its implications for Baroque opera. Achilles and Patroclus have long been considered a classic example of homoerotic love throughout history.⁴⁶ Moreover, the gender ambiguity of Achilles and the sexuality of Achilles and Patroclus clearly had contemporary reference points during the Baroque period. As seen with Louis XIV's brother, Philippe, 17th-century French society seemed to link effeminate and flamboyant expression with sexuality, a number of examples of which were discussed above. Portrayals of Achilles in other operas from the Baroque period suggest a certain femininity. In one such opera, *La Finta Pazza* (1641),

⁴⁴ W.M. Clarke, "Achilles and Patroclus in Love," *Hermes* 106, no. 3 (1978), 381.

⁴⁵ Clarke, "Achilles and Patroclus in Love," 381. Aeschylus was an author of tragedy in Ancient Greece and fundamental to the development of Greek tragedy.

⁴⁶ Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 142.

libretto by Giulio Strozzi and music by Francesco Saccati, Achilles, dressed as a woman, takes up the sword to go off to war with Ulysses at the end of Act 1.⁴⁷ In this portrayal, Achilles' existence between male and female identities was permissible because of a more fluid conception of gender and sex during the 17th-century.⁴⁸ In the 17th century, it was thought that the female reproductive organs were merely a version of the male genitalia.⁴⁹ As a result of this conception of sex, it was reluctantly conceded by contemporary writers that one could conceivably transform into the other sex.⁵⁰ The conception of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus in the ancient world and the portrayal of Achilles in other operas of the Baroque period suggests that the notion of Achilles as queer would not have been unfamiliar in the cultural consciousness of the Baroque period.

Lully was working on *Achille et Polyxène* when he died in 1687, and the work was completed by his student, Pascal Collasse. Collasse deviated from Lully's style by including more dances and leaving the vocal melodies more open for decoration.⁵¹ *Achille et Polyxène* premiered at the Paris Opera in November 1687 and it was only a moderate success. In *Le Mercure Galant*, the anonymous reviewer is hesitant to give a clear opinion of the work but in doing so, he makes his opinion very clear: it would seem that in his eyes the opera was unremarkable.⁵²

⁴⁷ Wendy Heller, "Reforming Achilles: Gender, 'opera seria' and the Rhetoric of the Enlightened Hero," *Early Music* 26, no. 4 (Nov. 1998), 574. Wendy Heller also points out that *La Finta Pazza* was a widely disseminated opera (p. 562).

⁴⁸ Heller, "Reforming Achilles: Gender, 'opera seria' and the Rhetoric of the Enlightened Hero," 572, 575.

⁴⁹ Heller, "Reforming Achilles: Gender, 'opera seria' and the Rhetoric of the Enlightened Hero," 572.

⁵⁰ Heller, "Reforming Achilles: Gender, 'opera seria' and the Rhetoric of the Enlightened Hero," 572-3.

⁵¹ Caroline Wood, "Collasse [Colasse], Pascal," *Grove Music Online*, 2002, accessed 11 April, 2021.

⁵² Anonymous, "Opera d' Achille et Polyxène," *Le Mercure Galant* (November 1687), 267-75. A translation of this review is in Appendix A.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF ACT I OF *ACHILLE ET POLYXÈNE*

As noted above, in academic studies, Achilles and Patroclus are considered a *locus classicus* for homoerotic love.⁵³ An anecdote told by Lecerf de la Viéville, a contemporary of Lully, seems to imply that the homoerotic implications of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus was known at the time of Lully's composition of *Achille et Polyxène*. According to Lecerf, in 1687, while Lully was working on the opera, the composer became seriously ill and seemed to be on his deathbed; the attending priest refused to give Lully absolution until he burned the manuscript for *Achille et Polyxène*.⁵⁴ The priest seems to have recognized the illicit nature, in the eyes of the church, of the characters' relationship. There is evidence to suggest that Campistron was willing to undertake controversial topics in his other works as well. In 1687, the same year as the composition and performance of *Achille et Polyxène*, Campistron's tragedy, *Phraate*, was performed only twice before it was removed from the stage.⁵⁵ Campistron remarked on his misfortune: "They did not say I was a poor poet. They said that I was imprudent and I would get myself thrown into the Bastille."⁵⁶ In his history of French drama, Alfred Bates mentions that, in *Phraate*, "the tyranny and vices and prodigality of kings were assailed with great spirit."⁵⁷ Because Campistron's play does not survive, the exact subject of the tragedy is not known, but Bates' reference to "vices and prodigality" suggests that what was imprudent in the

⁵³ Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 142.

⁵⁴ Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 142-3.

⁵⁵ Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 143.

⁵⁶ Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 143.

⁵⁷ Alfred Bates, *The Drama: Its History, Literature, and Influence on Civilization* (London: the Athenian Society, 1903), 44.

tragedy may have been, at least in part, homosexuality. In *Achille et Polyxène*, Lully himself may have contributed to the implications of a homoerotic relationship in the libretto. Lully typically collaborated with his frequent librettist, Philippe Quinault, in writing the libretto; after the libretto was reviewed by the Academie Française, Lully would make any changes he saw fit and send it back to Quinault.⁵⁸ It is likely that Lully worked on the libretto in the same way with Campistron, leaving open the possibility for Lully to have exerted a great deal of influence over the content of the text of *Achille et Polyxène*.

In *Achille et Polyxène*, the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus is portrayed in the first act, the only one that Lully completed before his death. Throughout Act I, Achilles demonstrates intense affection for Patroclus, which is expressed most clearly in Achilles' *recit*, sung after Patroclus decides to go to fight in the Trojan war. The text is consistent with topics of 17th-century French airs about love.

Patroclus will fight? And I consented such that he ran to the dangers that threaten his life? Ah! I must stop him from leaving, Alas! What regrets will follow his death? If heaven is inflamed to overwhelm my heart, it will make it expire under the iron of a conqueror. Just gods, ward off my terrible despair! This noble friend is the last of mine that remains. Have pity and protect his life! I have been deprived of the object that I adore, it will be horrific to deprive me again of the object of my friendship.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ James R. Anthony, *French Baroque Music from Beaujoyeux to Rameau*, revised and expanded edition (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1997), 95.

⁵⁹Jean-Baptiste Lully and Pascal Collasse, *Achille et Polyxène* (Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1687), 16-9. "Patrocle va combattre? & j'ay peu consentir Qu'il courût aux dangers qui menacent sa vie? Ah! Je devois l'empêcher de partir, Helas! De quels regrets sa mort feroit suivie? Si le Ciel irrité pour accabler mon cœur Le faisoit expirer sous le fer d'un vainqueur. Prevenez justes Dieux, mon desespoir funeste! Cét amy genereux est le seul qui me reste Conservez ses jours par pitié! On m'a privé de l'objet que j'adore, Ce feroit trop d'horreur de me priver encore De l'objet de mon amitié."

The texts of the 17th-century airs that focus on painful love are characterized by agitated passions and by confessions of love, intense complaints, and threats of vengeance.⁶⁰ Among the agitated passions is *desespoir*, despair, to which this recit makes explicit reference in the line “Just Gods, ward off my terrible despair!”⁶¹ The recit text also features intense complaints and a confession of love. Achilles’ *recit* is a lament as Patroclus goes off to war, in which Achilles utters the intense complaint; “Patroclus will fight? And I consented that he ran to dangers that threaten his life? Ah! I must stop him from leaving. Alas! What regrets will follow his death?”⁶² The use of “Ah” and “Alas” after two of the lines adds to the dramatic intensity of the text, which is highlighted by Lully’s setting, seen in Example 1 on the following page. On the word “Ah,” the melody jumps up a 6th from the previous syllable and back down a 6th to the next. The word “Helas” is set to an ascent of an octave from the previous syllable and a descent of a fifth, a common way to set this word.

At the end of the *recit*’s text is Achilles’ admission of love, but it is not as direct as might be from a man to a woman; “I have been deprived of the object that I adore; it will be horrific to deprive me again of the object of my friendship.”⁶³ Although homosexual relationships were largely referred to using euphemisms in that period, given the use of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus as a classic example of homoeroticism going back to the ancient world, the phrases “the object that I adore” and “the object of my friendship” may clearly be interpreted as a confession of love for Patroclus.

⁶⁰ Catherine Gordon-Seifert, *Music and the Language of Love: Seventeenth-Century French Airs* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 98.

⁶¹ Gordon-Seifert, *Music and the Language of Love: Seventeenth-Century French Airs*, 64-5, and Lully and Collasse, *Achille et Polyxène*, first edition, 16-9. “Prevenez justes Dieux, mon desespoir funeste!”

⁶² Lully and Collasse, *Achille et Polyxène*, first edition, 16-9. “Patrocle va combattre? & j’ay peu consentir Qu’il courût aux dangers qui menacent sa vie? Ah! Je devois l’empêcher de partir, Helas! De quels regrets sa mort feroit suivie?”

⁶³ Lully and Collasse, *Achille et Polyxène*, first edition, 19. “On m’a privé de l’objet que j’adore, Ce feroit trop d’horreur de me priver encore De l’objet de mon amitié.”

Achilles
gers qui me-na - cent fa vi - e? Ah! je de - vois l'em - pef - cher de par - tir, He - las! de quels re -

Dessus

Haut-Contre

Taille

Quinte

Basse

Example 1. Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Achille et Polyxène* (1687), Act I, Scene 2, mm. 15-8.

The interpretation of this recit within the context of French love airs is supported by Lully’s use of musical devices. According to Catherine Gordon-Siefert, musical settings of texts about painful love can be characterized as “unequal, or devoid of a regular cadence and moderate tones of voice; phrases are interrupted by the ‘diverse movements’ (different passions) that agitate the animal spirits.”⁶⁴ The characterization of airs about painful love as “unequal, or devoid of a regular cadence” could be why Lully set Achilles’ lament as *recitatif mesuré*, as opposed to a proper air. The changing meter of *recit* is consistent with the inequality and lack of regularity seen in airs portraying the affect of painful love. Moreover, the first half of the *recit* features a number of leaps of a third or more to reflect the diverse movements of painful love, rather than the stepwise motion that is a typical characteristic of French Baroque melodies.

Later in Act I, the libretto uses the device of *deus ex machina* to foreshadow the love Achilles will have for Polyxena. Venus, who in mythology is associated with love, descends

⁶⁴ Gordon-Seifert, *Music and the Language of Love: Seventeenth-Century French Airs*, 98.

from the heavens with *les Graces* and *les Plaisirs*. After a *Passacaille*, one of the *Plaisirs* sings “if Love is the cause of your alarm, its favors have more charms, prepare your heart for a more perfect happiness.”⁶⁵ The beginning of this text tells us that Achilles’ grief over the death of Patroclus in the subsequent scene is a result of love. The text juxtaposes Achilles’ love for Patroclus with his future love for Polyxena, implying that both are romantic love.

⁶⁵ Lully and Collasse, *Achille et Polyxène*, 47. “Si l’Amour a causé vos allarmes, ses faveurs en auront plus de charmes: Preparez vostre coeur Au plus parfait bonheur.”

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

French society at the end of the 17th century defies some of our pre-conceived notions about queer identities in Europe at that time. Among the nobility, it would seem that queer identities were accepted to some degree and even openly discussed, despite the proscription against homosexuality. Louis XIV demonstrated that he was willing to overlook issues of sexuality and gender for the sake of political gain, as in the case of his generals. Considering the status of Louis XIII, Philippe of Orléans, and the duc de Vendôme in the royal court, it is clear that queer people held considerable political and social power in France throughout the 17th century. Indeed, at the end of the 17th century, the social dominance of the duc de Vendôme allowed him to offer protection to others, such as Lully, by building a strong libertine social circle around the duc. Given the social context of *Achille et Polyxène* and the implications in the music and libretto of the first Act of Lully's opera, it is clear that Lully and Campistron collaborated to portray a homosexual relationship between Achilles and Patroclus in *Achille et Polyxène*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anonymous. "Divertissements du Carnaval." *Le Mercure Galant* (January 1685), 230-35.
- Anonymous. "Opera d'Achille et Polyxène." *Le Mercure Galant* (November 1687), 267-75.
- Anthony, James R. *French Baroque Music from Beaujoyeux to Rameau*, revised and expanded edition. Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1997.
- Barker, Nancy Nichols. *Brother to the Sun King: Philippe, Duke of Orleans*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
- Bates, Alfred. *The Drama: Its History, Literature, and Influence on Civilization*. London: The Athenian Society, 1903.
- Clarke, W.M. "Achilles and Patroclus in Love." *Hermes* 106, no. 3 (1978), 381-396.
- Cowart, Georgia J. *The Triumph of Pleasure Louis XIV & the Politics of Spectacle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Crompton, Louis. *Homosexuality and Civilization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Gordon-Seifert, Catherine. *Music and the Language of Love: Seventeenth-Century French Airs*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.
- Heller, Wendy. "Reforming Achilles: Gender, 'opera seria' and the Rhetoric of the Enlightened Hero." *Early Music* 26, no. 4 (Nov. 1998), 562-581.
- Lully, Jean-Baptiste, and Pascal Collasse. *Achille et Polyxène*. Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1687.
- Rouvroy, Louis de [duc de Saint-Simon]. *The Memoirs of Louis XIV, His Court and The Regency*. Translated by Bayle St. John. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3875/3875-h/3875-h.htm>. 2006; Accessed 20 February 2021.
- Wood, Caroline. "Collasse [Colasse], Pascal." *Grove Music Online*. 2002; Accessed 11 April, 2021.

APPENDIX A

REVIEW OF ACHILLE ET POLYXÈNE IN LE
MERCURE GALANT, NOVEMBER 1687

A new opera was premiered entitled *Achille et Polyxène*. The overture and first act are the composition of the late Monsieur de Lully and are the last works of music that he wrote before his death. The prologue and the four remaining acts were composed by Mr Colasse, one of the four masters of music of the royal chapel and a student of Mr Lully. The libretto is by Mr Campistron, who wrote the opera *Acis et Galatée* and *l'Idille*, which was performed at Anet for the entertainment of Monseigneur le Dauphin, and which I wrote of a few months ago. Although Mr Campistron has written many other notable works, I will only speak of two here because, concerning this opera, I must familiarize you with the way the text was set to music. I refer you to the published opera, so you can judge for yourself by reading it; I have nothing to say of it. I listened to it attentively and if I were to explain to you what I think, it would seem that I would wish to reveal in advance the opinion of those who read my letters and prevent others from disagreeing with me; there would be too much vanity in this. I have reason to challenge my knowledge and am convinced that there are many people more enlightened than I am. As for the music and the spectacle that you cannot hear or see here, more must be said first. Nevertheless, I will speak little of the music because it does not have a fixed point of goodness like many other things. The least of those who work in music often compose according to the rules, as well as the most talented, and this is generally seen in all kinds of arts. Nevertheless, it does not at all follow that their works are equally beautiful. All men are composed of the same parts, and although each has all that is necessary to form the human body, it cannot be said that all men are of equal beauty. One finds more regular features in one than in others; there are blonde beauties and brown-haired beauties; there are lively ones and languid ones, and among all of them you will always be met with a certain something that is striking in those that are the least perfect. All of these different types of beauty are appreciated according to the taste of those that see them. It is

the same with regard to music. Some want liveliness, others want languishing; some want to laugh, others want to cry, and this is why each judges the beauty of a work of music according to how the work conforms to his taste. Thus, that which I could say about the music of Mr Colasse, and what I would say about it would not be generally received, and a private person must, as a rule, never give his opinion on a topic that can be judged so differently. What I could say, however, to the credit of Mr Colasse, is that it is nearly impossible for a man who is talented enough to fill one of the four positions of music master of the chapel of the king, and to have remained a student of the famous Mr de Lully for some years, not to have much style and not to make beautiful things. Also, I will tell you that there is much in his opera that was applauded by connoisseurs. The rest of the spectacle is by M. Berrin, of whom I have spoken so frequently. [He has staged] many operas, carousels, the illuminations of Versailles, Festival of Sceaux, and a thousand other things of that nature; he has acquired quite a reputation for all these, and has been found so talented that he does nothing that is not in the best taste. It is these talents that are found in the costumes for the opera *Achille et Polyxène*, which have received universal applause. They looked very rich, very appropriate, and according to the personality of the characters.

Translated by Jason Travis Thompson

APPENDIX B
SCORE FOR ACT I, SCENE 2 OF
ACHILLE ET POLYXÈNE

Act I, Scene 2

ACHILLES alone.

Prelude

Achilles

Dessus de Violon

Haut-Contre de Violon

Taille de Violon

Quinte de Violon

Basse de Violon

6

Achilles

Dessus

Haut-Contre

Taille

Quinte

Basse

11

Achilles

Dessus

Haut-Contre

Taille

Quinte

Basse

Pa - tro - cle va com - ba - tre? & j'ay peû con - fen - tir Qu'il cou-rût aux den -

p

p

p

p

15

Achilles
gers qui me-na - cent fa vi - e? Ah! je de - vois l'em-pef-cher de par - tir, He - las! dequels re -

Dessus

Haut-Contre

Taille

Quinte

Basse

19

Achilles
grets fa mort fe - roit fui - vi - e? Si le Ciel ir - ri - té pour ac - cab - ler mon coeur Le fai-foit ex - pi -

Dessus

Haut-Contre

Taille

Quinte

Basse

23

Prelude

Achilles
rer fous le fer d'un vain - queur. Pre-ve-nez juf-tes

Dessus

Haut-Contre

Taille

Quinte

Basse

29

Achilles

Dieux, mon def - ef - poir fu - nef - te! Cét a - my ge - ne-reux eft le feul qui me ref - te

Dessus

Haut-Contre

Taille

Quinte

Basse

33

Achilles

Con - fer - vez fes jours par pi - tié! On m'a pri - vé de l'ob - jet que j'a - do - re, Ce fe-roit trop d'hor -

Dessus

Haut-Contre

Taille

Quinte

Basse

37

Achilles

reur de me pri - ver en - co - re De l'ob - jet de mon a - mi - tié.

Dessus

Haut-Contre

Taille

Quinte

Basse