

ARIOSTO'S *ORLANDO FURIOSO*: PERFORMANCE AT THE VALOIS AND BOURBON COURTS

by Virginia Scott

In May 1664 the young king of France, Louis XIV, organized a festival at Versailles known as *Les plaisirs de l'Île enchantée*.¹ The theme chosen to unify this three-day mélange of processions, tournaments, banquets, plays, ballets and fireworks was the story of Roger and Alcine, the former a knight-errant, the latter a sorceress holding Roger and his fellow knights captive on her magic island. This conceit comes from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, one of several Renaissance romances that fed the neo-feudal revival in France in the sixteenth century and remained a popular source of paintings, plays, and operas well into the eighteenth.

Exactly a hundred years earlier the queen mother Catherine de' Medici had also produced a festival, this one at Fontainebleau to celebrate the carnival season. It, too, lasted several days and on one of those days, Sunday 13 February, the guests were entertained by a play mounted in the Salle du Bal. The play was *La belle Genièvre*, based on cantos four to six of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Both festivals featured performances by royal princes and nobles. Between these two events many less notable but still important performances of actions taken from Ariosto's romance took place at court by members of the royal family, particularly royal children. The various uses made of classical myth to promote the imperial ambitions of the French monarchy are familiar to us, but the presentation of royalty, and especially royal children, to re-enact medieval chivalric themes, originally refashioned to promote the court culture of Renaissance Ferrara, has not often been considered. The events have been noted by literary historians, but with the exception of *Les plaisirs de l'Île enchantée* not examined in detail.²

The first problem we face in examining *La belle Genièvre* is that the text does not exist. There are four references to the performance at Fontainebleau, but they are not consistent. Abel Jouan's chronicle of the fête merely mentions a play, 'une belle Comédie en la grand salle du bal,' but gives no title.³ Nor does Antoine Sarron, secretary to the Spanish ambassador, who writes in a letter of February 24, 1564:

pendant les Quaresmeaulx, ilz s'est fait plusieurs Bancquetz, Tournois, Joustes and Comédies; ausquelles sont entrez le Roy, Monsr D'Orléans, Monsr. de Guyse, & tous ces petitz Princes & Srs. de la Court, qui ont fort bien fait; mesmes les dictz Srs. Roy, *Ducz d'Orléans* & de *Guyse*; j'entens pour enfans, comme ils sont: aussi a fort bien représenté personnages, Madame *Marguerite*, seur dudict Roy, aux Comédies, & avecq fort bonne grace & audace.⁴

¹ In Molière, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. George Couton, Paris, Gallimard (1971) I, 749-829

² See esp. Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le Roi-Machine: spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit (1981), pp. 93-101. Apostolidès pays particular attention to the blending of characters and situations from Ariosto with classical mythology and golden age imagery.

³ Abel Jouan in Victor Graham and W. McAllister Johnson, *The Royal Tour of France by Charles IX and Catherine de' Medici. Festivals and Entries, 1564-6*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press (1979), p. 75

⁴ *Mémoires de Condé*, London (X vols. 1743), II, 191

This reference is especially interesting because of its focus on the royal children who were the leading performers of the entire *fête*. It also helps us evaluate the other two available descriptions. The first of these, which does include the subject of the play, comes from Brantôme, the chronicler of the Valois courts, who was writing at least twenty years later. He tells us that the Queen Mother's day included 'une comédie sur le subject de la belle Genièvre de l'Arioste, qu'elle fit représenter par Madame d'Angoulesme et par ses plus honnestes et belles princesses, et dames et filles de sa court, qui certes la représenterent très-bien, et tellement qu'on n'en vist jamais une plus belle.'⁵

The final piece of evidence is from the memoirs of Michel de Castlenau, a French diplomat, who also was writing many years after the event.

J'estois... semblablement d'une tragi-comedie que la Reyne, mère du Roy, fit jouer en son festin, la plus belle, et aussi bien et artistement représentée que l'on pourrait imaginer, et de laquelle le duc d'Anjou, à present roy, voulut estre, et avec luy Marguerite de France sa soeur, à present reyne de Navarre, et plusieurs princes et princesses, comme le prince de Condé, Henry de Lorraine duc de Guise, la duchesse de Nevers, la duchesse d'Uzès, le duc de Retz, aujourd'huy mareschal de France, Villequier et quelques autres seigneurs de la *Cour*.⁶

Castlenau's account is considered the most trustworthy because we are certain he was actually present at the festival; Ronsard wrote an epilogue that Castlenau himself spoke at the conclusion of a performance. Yet, because his cast list is improbable, especially his inclusion of the prince de Condé, the proclaimed 'hero' of the festival for his generalship at the siege of Le Havre, arguably Castlenau has confused this production with a performance on the same day of Pierre Ronsard's *Bergerie*. Brantôme's memory of a play starring the late king Henri II's legitimized daughter Diane, later duchesse d'Angoulême, accompanied by 'the most noble and beautiful princesses, ladies, and girls of the court' is more appropriate and is supported by other pieces of evidence.

One of these comes from Ronsard, who addressed an ode to Queen Catherine, published two years after the *fête*, that includes a reference to the production of the *Belle Genièvre*. In it he asks the queen:

Quand voirrons nous une autre Polynesse Tromper Dalinde...⁷

The interesting point here is 'une Polynesse', because the character is male. And this is not a typographical error, as some editors and scholars have wanted it to be.⁸ Ronsard retained the feminine article through all six of the editions published during his lifetime and under his supervision.

⁵ Brantôme (Pierre de Bourdeille), *Recueil des dames, poésies et tombeaux*, ed. Etienne Vaucheret, Paris, Gallimard (1991), p. 53.

⁶ *Mémoires de messire Michel de Castelnau* in M. Petitot, *Collection complète des mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France*, Tome XXXIII, Paris, Foucault (1823), p. 323. The reference to the former duc d'Anjou, presently king Henri III, dates the writing to after 1574.

⁷ Pierre Ronsard, 'Comme une belle mère...' *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean Céard, Daniel Ménager, and Michel Simonin, Paris, Gallimard (1994), I, 323.

⁸ Jacques Madeleine, in a study of the *Belle Genièvre* as the first French tragic-comedy (*Revue de la Renaissance* IV (1903), pp. 30-46), simply changes the article to the masculine without remarking on it. The editors of the 1994 Pléiade edition of Ronsard's *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, note that 'Le féminin employé ici est curieux.'

It is proposed here that this tale of maidens in distress was performed largely, and probably exclusively, by maidens, and that such a performance was part of a tradition that Catherine de' Medici introduced to France. The first recorded play at the court of France performed by members of the royal family was Mellin de Saint-Gelais's translation of Trissino's *Sophonisba* produced, Brantôme tells us, for the wedding celebration of M. de Sipierre at Blois in 1556. Catherine de' Medici herself organized the production. Although Brantôme's cast list includes 'Mesdames ses filles et autres Dames et Damoiselles et Gentilhommes de sa court,' records from the *argenterie* give a more specific cast list that does not include any gentlemen. The players were the princess Elizabeth, aged 11, the princess Claude, aged 8, Mary Queen of Scots, aged 13, Diane d'Angoulême, then aged 18, Mlle de Rohan and the Maréchale de Saint-André.⁹

Private theatrical performances by young women and children may have been a novelty in France, but not in Florence, the native city of Catherine de' Medici. Beginning in the 15th century, confraternities of boys, modelled on the men's confraternities, gave productions of both *sacre rappresentazioni* and secular comedies.¹⁰ So did women and girls in Florentine convents, especially at carnival. In the years before the monastic reforms imposed by the Council of Trent, nuns and their pupils also produced both *sacre rappresentazioni* and comedies, playing both male and female roles.¹¹ Catherine de' Medici spent a brief but happy period of her generally miserable childhood at a Benedictine convent outside Florence where plays were performed, the Benedictines having had a long dramatic tradition dating back at least to Hildegard von Bingen in the twelfth century. According to Brantôme, it was Catherine herself who 'prenoit plaisir de donner tousjour quelque récréation à son peuple ou à sa court,' for she was 'fort inventive en toutes choses.'¹²

Other people, of course, carried out Catherine's ideas, and it would be interesting to know who had the idea of using *Orlando Furioso* as the source for a play in 1564, eighteen years before Robert Garnier's *Bradamante*, the first surviving example of such a usage. The author of *La belle Genièvre*, however, remains unknown. Mellin de Saint-Gelais would be an obvious possibility, except for the fact that he had died in 1558. He was a court poet, a royal librarian, and a translator, not only of *Sophonisbe*, but also of the first third of the story of Genevra from *Orlando Furioso*. This was later completed by Baïf and published in 1572. It is probable that Mellin de Saint-Gelais's manuscript was available to the playwright of 1564, with the standard French translation by Jean De Gouttes, first published in 1543, and the Italian original, which was in the Fontainebleau library.¹³

A French tragedy could have been chosen for performance, but Catherine would not have accepted a tragedy as part of her day's entertainment. She was superstitious, and after the tragic accident that killed her husband Henri II in 1559, she formed the

⁹ Raymond Lebègue, 'Le Répresentation d'une tragédie à la cour des Valois, *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres. Comptes Rendues des Séances de l'Année 1946*, Paris, Henri Didier (1946), pp. 138-44.

¹⁰ See Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, New York, Academic Press (1980), pp. 368-386.

¹¹ Elissa Weaver, 'Spiritual Fun: A Study of Sixteenth-Century Tuscan Convent Theater', in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: literary and historical perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press (1986), p. 176-7.

¹² Brantôme, *Oeuvres*, ed. Ludovic Lalanne, Paris, Jules Ruard (XX vols. 1864-82), VII, 369, 373.

¹³ Alexandre Cioranescu, *L'Arioste en France des origines à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, L'Éditions des presses modernes (2 vols. 1939), I, 15-20.

opinion that the production of *Sophonisbe* had ‘porté le malheur aux affaires du Royaume,’ and would see at court nothing but farces, comedies, and tragi-comedies.¹⁴ In 1564, however, Italian tragi-comedy in France was as yet unborn, and it has been impossible to find a model in Italy for using Ariosto’s romance as the source of a scripted play before 1564. Three years later, in Mantua, the actress Faminia played a tragedy based on Canto XXXVII of *Orlando Furioso*.¹⁵ This was the story of Drusilla, which has a plot similar to those of many Italian Renaissance revenge tragedies and ends with a king being tortured and flung from a tower. It is not a tragi-comedy and Catherine would have vetoed it.

A slightly later critic, Vauquelin de La Fresnaie, wrote in his *Art poétique Français* in praise of tragi-comedy, claiming that nothing is ‘plus dous qu’une aigreur adoucie / Par le contraire event de la Peripetie.’¹⁶ The first example he gives of the bitter-sweet, tragi-comic subject is the story of Genevra where:

Polinesse croyoit la mort d’Ariodant,
 Esperant voir jetter dans une brasier ardent
 L’innocente Genevre, alors que miserable
 Au contraire il se void mourir comme coupable.

This suggests that by the last quarter of the century, *Orlando Furioso* was thought to be an acceptable source for French tragi-comedy and that the Genevra story was to be taken as one of the models, but does not reveal why it was deemed appropriate for performance by the Queen Mother’s household at Fontainebleau in 1564.

One obvious motive for turning to *Orlando Furioso* is found in the first stanza of Canto I announcing that the central subject of this epic romance will be the attempt of the Moorish king to avenge his father’s death on the great emperor Charles, that is, Charlemagne, the ancestor of French monarchs. The new king of France was also a Charles, Charles IX, a timid and sickly boy of 13. On other days of the festival, he would appear in various staged combats and tournaments to demonstrate his power and glory. On this day, although as king he could not participate, the chosen play comes from a well-known source that would reinforce the metaphor of Charles IX as the new Charlemagne and also as a reborn Charles V, the recently deceased Holy Roman Emperor, who is apotheosized in *Orlando Furioso* and whose device of the pillars of Hercules Charles IX would borrow.¹⁷ The Genevra story may have been selected from the epic because it is self-contained, because most of its action can be staged – or because it contains a long narrative for the character Dalinda that does not require staging. Finally, it may have been selected because its subject is a princess being unfairly treated in Scotland, a possible reference to Mary’s problems with the Calvinists in Edinburgh. Mary Stuart Queen of Scots was, of course, the widowed sister-in-law of Charles IX and queen dowager of France.

¹⁴ Brantôme, *Receuil*, p. 36.

¹⁵ Kenneth Richards and Laura Richards, *The Commedia dell’Arte: A Documentary History*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell (1990), p. 98.

¹⁶ Vauquelin de La Fresnaie, *Les diverses poesies*, Caen, Charles Maré (1605), p. 88. According to the author, most of the work was written ‘il y a long temps’. However, the section on tragic subjects makes reference to Tasso’s *Aminta*, so it must have been written after the appearance of Tasso’s *Aminta*, which was not published, in Italy, until 1580.

¹⁷ Frances A. Yates in *Astraea: the imperial theme in the sixteenth century*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul (1975), reports on the similarity of the devices. See p. 127 and plates 3a, 20a and 21.

How the play might have been constructed in 1564 is hard to conjecture. There is a 1610 version of *Genevre* by Claude Billard, and Jacques Madeleine thought that it might be based on the earlier version, but this idea is contradicted by Ronsard's question: 'Quand voirrons nous une autre Polynesse / Tromper Dalinde?' In Billard's version the villain Polynesse has only one line and Dalinde never appears.¹⁸ We can only assume that like all playwrights of this period, the 1564 author constructed a number of tirades for his central characters. The 'balcony scene', where Dalinde pretends to be her mistress Genevre and welcomes Polynesse while Genevre's beloved Ariodante watches in horror, may have been staged as a mimed scene or may not have been staged at all if Dalinde's confession was the centrepiece of the play. Ariodante's supposed suicide is reported, and the combat that is to decide Genevre's fate takes place 'off-stage' even in Ariosto, as Reynaud tells the king the true story of Polynesse's deceit and Dalinde's betrayal.

The royal children grew up, religious wars devastated France, and royal theatricals – if they continued – did so privately and inconspicuously. The great 'magnificences' of entry of Charles IX into Paris in 1571, for the marriage of Marguerite de Valois and Henri de Navarre in 1572, and Henri III's two-week celebration of the marriage of his favourite, the duc de Joyeuse in 1581, did not draw on themes from *Orlando Furioso* but from classical romance and myth, from Petrarch, and from neo-platonism.¹⁹ The tales of 'dames, knights, arms and loves delights' were left to a commercial playwright.

When Robert Garnier wrote *Bradamante* in 1582, he could not have known that the first Bourbon monarch, Henri IV, would adopt it as an appropriate vehicle for his children's education, nor that amateur theatricals would once again be an important element of court life. Thanks to Garnier, the royal family had a ready-made dramatization from *Orlando Furioso*, although it seems unlikely that the whole play was performed on every occasion. For instance, according to the meticulous journal kept by Jean Héroard, the dauphin Louis's doctor, when the boy was seven he was taken to his father's rooms at Fontainebleau with several of his young companions to rehearse some verses of *Bradamante*. He was to recite seven lines as Charlemagne, but when it was his turn he said simply, 'J'ay oublié mon roulet.'²⁰

Performance was evidently not the dauphin's forte, especially with his father in the room, but some of his siblings were more accomplished. On 2 August 1611, when Louis, now the king, could only observe, his sisters and brothers performed *Bradamante* in a production that drew Malherbe, the chancellor, the first president of the Parlement, and other notables, from Paris to St.-Germain-en-Laye. The setting was the ballroom with a stage 'tout accommodé en ceremonie.'²¹ The actors were largely children apparently cast with little regard for gender. Charlemagne was played by the baron de Palnau but Aimon, the father of Bradamante, by Mlle de Renel. M. d'Aubasine played Léon, Mlle Darambuie played Roland. According to Malherbe, Madame Elisabeth, who was eight years old, played Bradamante dressed

¹⁸ Madeleine, p. 41. It should be noted, however, that Claude Billard was brought up in the household of the duchesse de Retz and was later secretary to Marguerite de Valois, so he was connected to the court. H.C. Lancaster, *A History of Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, XX vols.*, Part I, I, 147n.

¹⁹ For a discussion of these various festivals see Yates.

²⁰ Jean Héroard, *Journal*, ed. Madeleine Poisil, Paris, Fayard (2 vols. 1989), 2 vols., I, 1603

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 1940

‘en Amazone’, and astonished everyone with her performance.²² Héroard tells us, however, that Madame Elisabeth played Marphise, also a female warrior, but a considerably smaller role, and that the title role was played by Mlle de Vendôme, a fourteen-year-old legitimized daughter of Henri IV.²³ Monsieur, the king’s four-year-old brother Nicolas, who was to die a few months later, spoke the six-line prologue accompanied by three-year-old Gaston. Nicolas had a pike in his hand that he managed ‘en fils de maître’. The two little boys were dressed in breeches, to which they were not accustomed and which rather hindered them. After reciting his lines, Nicolas brandished his pike and gave a hop, which obviously melted the spectators. At not quite two, the youngest child, Henriette-Marie, who as queen of England was to arouse Puritan opposition to her play-acting,²⁴ was considered too young to appear, but her sister Christine, who was five, appeared briefly as Leonor, the daughter of Charlemagne, a character mentioned by Garnier but not included in his cast list. This suggests that the production was not necessarily faithful to Garnier’s text.

The prologue spoken by Nicholas suggests one of the aims of this children’s performance, at a time when, as in 1564, France had a child king.

Charlemagne, Léon, Roger et Bradamante
Sont de gaze et carton à la comediante;
Je suis le vray crayon des illustres Césars,
Des lis j’arboreray les braves étandardes;
Du Gange jusqu’au Rhin et sur les bords d’Afriques
Pour mon petit papa donrai des coups de pique.²⁵

No doubt it was at this point that Nicolas brandished his weapon. Malherbe thought of the boy’s father, assassinated just over a year earlier, but the audience must also have heard the imperial theme once again. This was no actor pretending to be a prince but an actual prince. And while the sight of the little boy may have aroused sentimental responses, there is no mistaking the promise of fealty: I will fight for my king, ‘mon petit papa’, from the Ganges to the Rhine.

Performance on the stage was seen as beneficial for royal children, just as it was for ordinary pupils in the Jesuit schools, for instance. They practised memorizing, and learned deportment and how to act in a role. But this event was also a display of royal power, an opportunity for the regent Marie de’ Medici to show the strength of the royal line. The play also features Charlemagne, enthroned in Paris, where, at the court, ‘douceur, amour, richesses et l’honneur font... séjour’.²⁶

Throughout the seventeenth century, a number of plays based on *Orlando Furioso* were written; some of them were even produced in public theatres. At court I find no record of royal performers in such plays. However, *Orlando Furioso*, as well as Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*, served as a source for court ballets. Margaret McGowan notes that what appealed in this material were stories of men delivered from enchantresses, whether Circé or Alcine or Armide.²⁷ These tales also allowed

²² Malherbe, *Oeuvres*, ed. L. Lalanne, Paris, Hachette (1863), III, 247

²³ Héroard, I, 1940

²⁴ Although much has been written about her performances at the English court, I see nothing that suggests that she ever performed anything based on Ariosto. She seems to have preferred pastorals.

²⁵ Malherbe, *ibid.*

²⁶ Rogert Garnier, *Bradamante*, ed. Marcel Hervier, Paris, Éditions Garnier Frères (n.d.), p. 91.

²⁷ *L’art du ballet du cour en France, 1581-1643*, Paris, Éditions du CNRS (1964). See esp. Chapters IV and VI.

grotesqueries of various kinds and exciting transformation scenes. Thematically, they were meant to be read as allegories of royalty, transformation, and the assumption of power. The *Ballet de Monsieur de Vendosme*, produced at court in 1610, the year before the royal children performed *Bradamante*, included in its action the deliverance of a group of knights who had been transformed into flower pots, owls, and windmills by Alcine, who was unable, however, to maintain the enchantment when faced with the greater power of Henri IV. Henri performed as himself, seated on his throne. His glance was enough to overcome the enchantment of the knights, as his eye fell on each in turn.²⁸

Seven years later, his far less respected son danced in the *Ballet de la deliverance de Renaud*, loosely based on Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. This ballet was designed to express the seventeen-year-old king's independence from his mother and assumption of royal power. Louis XIII appeared first as the *démon de feu*, one of the spirits in the power of Armide charged with guarding Renaud, and then as king Godefroy who, with the help of magic, liberates him from the sorceress. Louis's change from powerless subject to powerful possessor of royal magic expresses the favoured theme of transformation.

When Louis XIV put on *Orlando Furioso* in 1664, he was also recently delivered from tutelage; his mentor/minister Mazarin was dead and Louis had announced his personal rule. He opened *Les plaisirs de l'Île enchantée* as Roger, mounted on a white horse. He was dressed and armed *à la grecque*, wore a silver breastplate blazing with gold and diamonds, and was followed by dukes and peers of France representing the paladins. The actions of Roger define one major thematic strand of *Orlando Furioso*, which in diverse ways imagines a battle between Christians and Moslems at the time of Charlemagne. Unlike most of the other heroic figures, Roger is a 'pagan' knight, an infidel, who has come out of Africa with Agramont, Emperor of the Turks. As late as Canto 38, Roger is named by Agramont to do single combat for the Turkish side. But Roger is then converted to Christianity and united with Bradamante, who has loved him throughout the entire epic. The Alcine episode that informed *Les plaisirs* happens early in Roger's odyssey. She is an enchantress who entices beautiful young men to her magic island, entertains them with every sensual delight, makes endless love to them, effeminizes them, and then – when she tires of them – turns them into trees, rocks, and other features of the landscape. Roger, with the help of Mélisse, a kind of white magician and guardian angel, manages to escape from Alcine. This should be read, according to Sir John Harrington who translated the poem in 1591, as an allegory of 'a man reforming his life and flying from sensuality and pleasure,'²⁹ an interpretation echoed by scholars who have studied *Les plaisirs de l'Île enchantée*. Kristiaan Aercke, for instance, writes: 'It is possible to refer to Alcine's island as an early competitor of Versailles ... which is able to detain Louis for a while... Once free, Roger-Louis will leave the ashes of Alcine's pleasure palace behind to lead his knights to another, more realistic, world.'³⁰

Although it might seem hypocritical that Louis proposed to represent the renunciation of pleasure and idleness at a festival celebrating pleasure, this is no more hypocritical than the claim that the festival was a tribute to the queen mother and the queen, while

²⁸ Ibid, p. 75

²⁹ Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, tr. Sir John Harrington, ed. Robert McNulty, Oxford, At the Clarendon Press (1972), p. 99.

³⁰ *Gods of Play: Baroque festive performances as rhetorical discourse*, Albany: State University of New York Press (1994).

everyone participating knew that the fêtes were intended to honour the king's mistress, Louise de La Vallière.

Both kings used *Orlando Furioso* in the same way, as an allegory of transformation. Just as the young Louis XIII expressed his maturity with *Le délivrance de Renaud*, so does Louis XIV, who appears on Day I of the festival as Roger, enjoying the pleasures of the itinerant knight, but on Day III as himself, enthroned as a spectator watching professional actors and dancers play out the allegory.

The lines written to be delivered by Alcine before the final ballet and the destruction of Alcine's palace by a fireworks display, are usually dismissed as the work of M. le président de Perigny, not a notable writer. However, they are not without interest to someone trying to understand the event. Alcine has dreamed that her reign over her magic kingdom is about to end. Seeing the queen mother seated before her, she wonders if that lady, known for her concern for the public good, might protect a sorceress in need. Within Alcine's speech, couched as a sort of rehearsal so that the performer-spectator barrier is not violated, the queen mother is both praised and dismissed:

Disons qu'au plus haut point de l'absolu pouvoir,
Sans faste et sans orgueil sa grandeur s'est fait voir,
Qu'aux temps les plus fâcheux, sa sagesse constante
Sans crainte a soutenu l'autorité penchante,
Et dans le calme heureux par ses travaux acquis,
Sans regret la remit dans les mains de son fils;
Disons par quels respects, par quelle complaisance,
De ce fils glorieux l'amour la récompense,
Vantons les longs travaux, vantons les justes lois
De ce fils reconnu pour le plus grand des rois.³¹

In 1611 the Dauphin recited 'Je suis le vray crayon des illustres Cesars.' What is different in 1664 is that Roger on Day III is a professional performer and the king is not a 'vray crayon' of the illustrious Caesars, but Caesar himself. This is no longer the Renaissance, with its relatively straightforward use of metaphor and allegory. This is the Baroque its ambiguities and contradictions. The king/Roger observes as in a mirror the actor/Roger who frees himself from the actress/Alcine. Alcine may be defeated but Louise de La Vallière remains Louis's own sorceress of pleasure, and far from converting to a Christian hero – although one might argue he did later on – this king was, at this point, refusing to go to confession or take communion because he had no intention of being faithful to his pious, unattractive wife. In the world of Louis XIV symbol and representation have their own alternative reality.

The relationship between the source text and the enactment is more equivocal in 1664 than it had been in 1564; the source text no longer carries the same charge. In 1564 Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* was a novelty, the neo-feudal themes of which perfectly suited the situation in which the French monarchy found itself. With the country and, more particularly, the high nobility divided into warring religious factions, an enactment of chivalric fidelity to a monarch is perfectly appropriate. By 1664 *Orlando Furioso* was a commonplace, and romance was no longer neo-feudal. The carousel of 1662, Louis XIV's first great spectacle performance, did not replicate neo-feudal images. However, the fête at Versailles was not a public spectacle but a

³¹ Molière, *Les plaisirs de l'Île enchantée*, I, 823

private performance for nobles, some of whom had evinced disloyalty to the regency of Anne of Austria during the Fronde. The opening parade of the paladins, led by Louis, and the reminder in Alcine's tribute to the queen mother that the keys of the kingdom had been passed on, are again appropriate to the political situation in which the monarchy found itself.

One difference is in the degree to which the point is made through spectacle. In 1564, though we have few details, it would appear that performance of the verbal text was the central event and that most of the story was told through narration, rather than through action. The auditor is asked to 'read' the allegory and make the connection between Charlemagne and his knights and Charles IX. In 1611 the dauphin's prologue signals a distinction between the real and the performed, with the real being expressed visually. The child in the prologue is performing not a character but his own supposed future as he threatens the audience with his pike and swears fealty to the slightly older child who is his brother and king. By 1664 little written text is required. The story taken from Ariosto's epic is enacted through dance and pyrotechnics. This king, fully adult, is demonstrating an accomplished fact and not expressing a wish for the future. He, like his little uncle, is painting a picture not enacting a character.

In all three instances, one of the issues is an unpopular foreign queen regent. The two Medici queens, in particular, suffered in France from low status and lack of royal blood. Ariosto wrote *Orlando Furioso* in part as a founding myth for the Este family of Ferrara, supposing them to descend from Roger and Bradamante. The Valois children, although grandchildren of François I, were also the children of Catherine de' Medici, whose daughter-in-law is said to have referred to her as 'cette marchande florentine'. Young Nicolas, who proclaimed himself not a theatricalized Charlemagne but the 'true picture of the Caesars' was, in fact, a child of another 'Florentine merchant'. The display of the royal children as Charlemagne and his paladins was perhaps meant to compensate for that reality. Louis XIV had a slightly different task, that of distancing himself from his mother, Anne of Austria, and her minister Mazarin. He could have appeared as Charlemagne, but to convey the message of his independence, the transformative figure of Roger was more useful.

Frances Yates proposes that the sixteenth century made no precise distinction between literature and art; the humanist programme accepted the visual presentation of images from poetry just as it accepted the duty of poets and artists to devise and propagate those images in support of a royal programme.³² *Orlando Furioso* became the carrier of a set of images defending a Christian and centralized monarchy, supported by a faithful nobility. Ariosto's sometimes ironic posture toward those images and the values they imply may be what appeals to us today, but French royalty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries took the allegories at face value, or at least used them as if it did, with various degrees of naiveté and cunning. They enacted and represented *Orlando Furioso* as a kind of sympathetic magic.

In July 1668 another festival was held at Versailles known as *Le grand divertissement royal*. The *livret* that accompanied Molière's comedy-ballet *George Dandin* begins with this verse:

Du Prince des Français rien ne borne la gloire,
À tout elle s'étend, et chez les nations

³² Yates, p. 129.

Les vérités de son histoire
Vont passer des vieux temps toutes les fictions.³³

The fictions of the past are no longer needed. The paladins have been effaced by Louis, himself. The verse ends:

Et tous ces fameux demi-dieux
Dont fait bruit l'histoire passée,
Ne sont point à notre pensée
Ce que LOUIS est à nos yeux.

The eye has superseded thought, just as Louis has superseded the allegories that he used to create himself. Ariosto's epic becomes a favourite source for professional writers and composers; it gives rise to a host of opera and parodies, but its service to the French monarchy appears to have ended when Louis removed Roger's armour and watched as Alcine's palace was destroyed in a burst of glory.

Virginia Scott

Virginia Scott is on the faculty of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

³³ Molière, II, 452.