

Watteau's *Pilgrimage to Cythera* and the Subversive Utopia of the Opera-Ballet

Georgia Cowart

Antoine Watteau's *Pilgrimage to Cythera* (Fig. 1) served as his reception piece at the Académie Royale de Peinture, to which he had been accepted as a candidate in 1712. On its acceptance in 1717, the records of the Académie Royale show the deletion of its original title, *Le pèlerinage à Cythère*, and the substitution of the words "une feste galante." Within the next two or three years, Watteau completed a second version of the painting, more embellished and brighter in color, which now hangs in the Charlottenburg Palace in Berlin (Fig. 2).¹ Since 1795 the original *Pilgrimage* has hung in the Musée du Louvre, where, as Watteau's quintessential *fête galante*, its reception has reflected changing critical opinion. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, it sparked the outrage of an audience that read it as a reactionary touchstone of aristocratic privilege. So incendiary was its effect that in the early nineteenth century, the curator of the Louvre was forced to place the painting in storage for a time in order to protect it from the defamation of angry protestors.² Later in the nineteenth century, as revolutionary fervor turned to romantic nostalgia, the reception of the *Pilgrimage* took on a wistful longing for a bygone era. This sentiment may be seen in the writings of Gérard de Nerval and Théodore de Banville, who spoke of "sorrowful Cythera" and "Watteau's infinite sadness" and "bitterness of life."³ Even as late as 1951, the painting was described as "a symphony of nostalgia" and, in 1977, a "dance of death."⁴ Although Michael Levey claimed in 1961 to have discovered the "real meaning" of Watteau's Cythera, his iconoclastic theory that the painting represented a departure from, rather than for, Cythera has served to reinforce and perpetuate this older, romantic notion of a lost idyllic past.⁵

More recent investigations of Watteau's cultural and political milieu have begun to reverse a lingering tendency to interpret the *Pilgrimage* as an expression of ancien régime frivolity or romantic melancholy. Mary Vidal and Sarah Cohen, respectively tracing conversation and dance during the reign of Louis XIV, have illuminated the *Pilgrimage* as exemplary of Watteau's turn from the hierarchical structure of earlier academic painting to the egalitarian orientation of a more informal group dynamic.⁶ The political implications inherent in these methodologies inform Julie Anne Plax's most recent and radical view of Watteau as a political subversive.⁷ Plax's study, drawing on Thomas Crow's pioneering work,⁸ connects Watteau's *fêtes galantes* to an upper-class elite seeking to distance itself from the crown through an identification with anti-absolutist forms of leisure, pleasure, and public entertainment. Though Plax produces convincing interpretations for a number of Watteau's paintings, her discussion of the *Pilgrimage*, reverting once again to a romantic notion of decadence and loss, offers little tangible evidence for a new reading.

The findings of this essay support Plax's view of Watteau as a political subversive but point toward a different interpreta-

tion of the *Pilgrimage*.⁹ This interpretation is based on evidence from an unlikely source for subversion: the opera-ballet performed at the Académie Royale de Musique (the Paris Opéra). Like Watteau's *fêtes galantes*, this genre has been linked to the frivolity and degeneracy of an aristocratic elite. Yet a careful study of specific works, along with their parodies at the Comédie-Française and the popular theaters of the *foire*, reveals how the opera-ballet sets up a discourse of subversion successfully engaging a discourse of absolutism found in the entertainments of Louis XIV's early court. Two works in particular, *Le triomphe des arts* of 1700 and *Les amours déguisez* of 1713, give meaning to the sacred island of Venus as a political utopia and as a direct challenge to the absolutism of Louis XIV. It has escaped critical notice that these two opera-ballets represent satirical attacks on eponymous court ballets, the *Ballet des arts* of 1663 and the *Ballet des amours déguisez* of 1664, both closely identified with royal propaganda. In this essay I will survey the genre of the opera-ballet in Watteau's Paris, tracing the subversive utopia of Cythera to its seventeenth-century origins. After examining how this utopia operates in specific works, I will revisit the *Pilgrimage* and its pictorial predecessors, demonstrating how Watteau, following the ideology established in the opera-ballet, substitutes an iconography of a modernist, matriarchal Cythera for traditional modes of patriarchal encomium.

The Ballet in the Early Eighteenth Century

Watteau would have been familiar with the ballet as a genre from the time he worked at the Opéra, probably as a set painter, on his arrival in Paris in 1702.¹⁰ He could have known the recent *Triomphe des arts* through its stage set, or through the inclusion of its libretto in a widely circulating collection published in 1703.¹¹ Later in his career, he would have been kept abreast of developments at the Opéra through personal friends, such as the writer Antoine de la Roche, who had close connections there. He would have known about, and perhaps attended, the premiere of *Les amours déguisez* in 1713, the period during which the *Pilgrimage* was being conceived. Finally, the years of Watteau's Paris career (1702 to 1721) exactly coincide with the reign of the opera-ballet in Paris society. Strikingly different from the traditional opera (*tragédie en musique*) of Jean-Baptiste Lully and Philippe Quinault, this genre was developed by the writer Antoine Houdard de La Motte, the composer André Campra, and the choreographer Guillaume-Louis Pécour and reached a climax of popularity during the first two decades of the century. In the lighthearted and colorful format created by La Motte (who was later to lead the Modern party in the final phase of the famous battle between the Ancients and the Moderns), the ballet came to be seen not only as a contrast to the *tragédie en musique* but also as a theatrical equivalent to the art of Watteau. Writing in 1754, Louis de Cahusac, an early



1 Antoine Watteau, *Pilgrimage to Cythera*, oil on canvas, 1717. Paris, Musée du Louvre (photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource NY)

historian of the ballet, contrasts this newly invented “spectacle” with the older *tragédie en musique*:

The opera conceived by Quinault is a long plot played out over the course of five acts. It is the canvas of a vast composition, such as those of Raphael and Michelangelo. The spectacle invented by La Motte is a composition made of several different acts, each representing a plot mixed with divertissements of song and dance. These are pretty Watteaus, piquant miniatures, which require all possible precision of design, grace of brushstroke, and brilliance of color.¹²

The ballet as it developed at the Paris Opéra around 1700 announced an aesthetic of modernism based on a radical freedom from the rules of classicism and traditional heroic themes, along with a celebration of the human body and its capacity for sensuous and virtuosic movement. As Sarah Cohen has demonstrated, the dances of the opera-ballet introduced a new kind of spatial play, defined by the *galant* interaction of couples and groups rather than by the central performing body of the king.¹³ The new aesthetic is also based on a celebration of, and identity with, the social phenomenon of the *fête galante*. The 1698 ballet *Les fêtes galantes* accurately defined the tone of festive celebration that would characterize the genre. In fact, the ballet and the social fête underwent a continual reciprocal influence. The popularity

of the stage ballet intensified a vogue for social dancing and for the staging of private divertissements in the homes of the nobility and the bourgeoisie.¹⁴ In turn, the ballet took as its most privileged subject matter the social *fête galante*, in the form of serenades, balls, garden parties, boating parties, and other excuses for divertissements combining song and dance in the service of love.

In its external manifestation, the new stage ballet represented a revival of the old court ballet, which had fallen into desuetude when Louis XIV had ceased to dance in 1670. In fact, the term *fête galante* had occasionally been used in reference to his court festivities, which are sometimes described collectively as “fêtes galantes et magnifiques.”¹⁵ In the court ballet as it evolved during Louis’s reign, however, an early emphasis on *galanterie* gradually ceded to more absolutist and imperialist imagery, with Louis’s participation evolving from such roles as *un galand* (1656) and *un gentilhomme* (1659) to the more godlike or heroic roles of Jupiter (1661), Pluto (1662), Alexander (1665), and Apollo (1670).¹⁶ A common thread, however, weaves through the court ballet in the two decades in which it served as Louis’s principal form of entertainment: the presentation of his court as the magnificent home of luxury, abundance, and pleasure and of his rule as a return to the allegorical golden age sung by the ancient poets.

By the last, eighteenth-century phase of his long reign



2 Watteau, *Pilgrimage to Cythera*, oil on canvas, ca. 1718–19. Berlin, Charlottenburg Palace (photo: Scala/Art Resource NY)

(1661–1715), Louis had lost interest in the fêtes that had graced his earlier court. Probably because of old age, illness, and the devout religiosity encouraged in his secret marriage to Mme de Maintenon, he withdrew into a stoic solitude from which he rarely emerged to participate in the entertainments he provided for the courtiers at Versailles. Many of these courtiers, bored with the lackluster atmosphere at court and freed by Louis's lack of interest, moved to fashionable new *hôtels* in Paris, where they joined an increasingly wealthy upper bourgeoisie to form a "shadow court" in the foyers, vestibules, and loges of the Paris Opéra.¹⁷ There, instead of celebrating the king through empty platitudes of flattery, they could celebrate themselves as a new audience for whom spectacular diversion was provided as regular fare. The stage ballet provided the perfect venue for this new audience, for it both entertained and showcased it as a social elite, just as the court ballet had done for the old nobility. Part of the immense appeal of the Opéra was its double status as a venue not only for elaborate theatrical events onstage but also for intimate private parties within the confines of its loges. These parties became veritable *fêtes galantes* from which the larger spectacle could be enjoyed. Thus, the Opéra both depicts the *fête galante* within the ballet taking place on its stage and becomes a *fête galante* in which its audience of nobility and the latter's bourgeois imitators celebrate themselves as a libertine, pleasure-loving society.

Perhaps because of their insouciant *galanterie* and apparent

frivolity, the ballets of La Motte and his collaborators and successors have never been examined as vehicles of social critique or political ideology. Yet a study of their libretti reveals a carefully encoded dialogue of the opera-ballet as a modern *fête galante* embodying the subversive ideals of equality and freedom, with the court ballet as an archaic *fête monarchique* embodying the absolutist ideals of patriarchy and monarchical praise. Their common language is the utopia of fête. The opera-ballet, however, substitutes the public theater, and particularly the stage ballet itself, for the old utopia of Louis's court. This modernist utopia, like the old court ballet, characterized by luxury, voluptuousness, and pleasure, embraces in addition an artistic freedom and social egalitarianism directly confronting the premises on which the court ballet, as well as all official propaganda, were founded. As I will show, the public ballet of the Paris Opéra, under the guise of a social *libertinage de moeurs* that it shared with the court ballet of Louis's early reign, also espoused a political *libertinage d'esprit* foreshadowing the revolutionary thought of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.¹⁸ In Louis XIV's late reign, characterized by an increasing piousness, religious intolerance, and austerity, the open libertinism of the Opéra and other public theaters left them vulnerable both to the attacks of the clerics and moralists and to the official surveillance and censorship of the king and his police. At the same time, the Opéra in particular served as an oasis for an audience, predominantly noble but including other social classes

as well, that tended to oppose not only the monarchy but in addition the severe restrictions it placed on the arts. Thus, it was only natural that as the opera-ballet stamped the tastes of a newly developing public sphere on the last, eighteenth-century phase of Louis XIV's reign, it should announce an ideology of resistance subverting the court ballet's politics of praise. A study of selected ballets and related works reveals the theme of Cythera, along with that of the theater itself as Cythera, as the iconoclastic signifiers of a utopian society based on the principles of peace, equality, and freedom.

Seventeenth-Century Precursors

The origins of Cythera as a subversive utopia may be traced to the Italian poet Giambattista Marino, who addressed his last poem, *Adone* (1623), written in France, to Marie de Médicis and her son Louis XIII. In a preface to his French version of the poem, its translator Jean Chapelain provides an important key to the poem's political meaning. Identifying Cythera as a timeless symbol of transcendental beauty, he explains the death of Adonis, the mortal lover of Venus, as a reflection on the tragic fragility of art in a world of human insensitivity. Chapelain goes on to interpret Marino's *Adone* as an invitation for Marie and Louis to bring to the "barbaric" kingdom of France a renewal of the civilized epicureanism associated with Venus and her island home.¹⁹

At midcentury, during the period of civil wars that threatened Louis XIV's minority, the novelist Madeleine de Scudéry created another island utopia which, although unnamed, elaborates on the subversive imagery of Marino's Cythera. Scudéry, whose ten-volume novel *Artamène, ou Le grand Cyrus* (1649–53) gripped the French imagination from the time of its publication well into the next century, included the "Histoire de Sapho" as part of the last volume of that work. On one level the story refers to the historical Sappho, the ancient poet of feminine passion and historical leader of a cult of Venus. On another, it represents a quasi-autobiographical portrayal of Scudéry herself, who inscribed in her work a discourse not only of passionate expression but also of resistance to patriarchal absolutism. In the "Histoire de Sapho," Scudéry overtly sets Sappho's feminist island utopia, characterized by a continual series of *fêtes galantes* incorporating music, dance, and conversation, against the bellicose policies of the ministers of the crown, thinly disguised as "worshippers of the god Mars." These villainous worshippers of Mars "plant a tall stake [in the ground], where they light a fire, and then when it is consumed, they plant a sword in the middle of the great heap of ashes, before which they sacrifice the prisoners they have taken in war."²⁰ In contrast to this world of death and dry desolation, Scudéry fills her novel with images of life-giving water, reflecting the regenerative force of feminine pleasure, love, and diversion.²¹

A subversive Cytherean imagery was next taken up by the poet and fabulist Jean de La Fontaine, friend to Scudéry and admirer of Marino. Marc Fumaroli's recent study of La Fontaine, the "chronicler of Cythera," places the poet at the center of a widespread anti-absolutist movement in the arts.²² Beginning with *Adonis* (1659), a poem directly modeled on Marino's *Adone*, La Fontaine fashioned a web of Cytherean imagery in his *Songe de Vaux* (a tribute to La Fontaine's patron, Nicolas Fouquet), and especially in his *Les amours de*

Psyché et de Cupidon of 1669, where it stood for a world of art and feminine sensitivity. Implicit in La Fontaine's text is Louis XIV's destruction of such a world, brought about by his ruthless imprisonment of Fouquet, pursuit of a militaristic imperialism, and subordination of the arts to a self-serving royal propaganda. From the literary work of La Fontaine, the imagery of Cythera enters the Paris Opéra. After brief mention in the first work performed there, *Les peines et les plaisirs d'amour* of 1672, however, it disappears from the *tragédie en musique* until after the death of Lully in 1687.

In contrast to several brief and passing allusions to Cythera in operatic works at the end of the century,²³ a fuller treatment emerges in *La naissance de Vénus*, produced at the Paris Opéra in 1696.²⁴ Based on an eponymous court ballet of 1665, this prototype of the new opera-ballet contains a stage direction describing "the Mount of Cythera, at the foot of which can be seen its woods and agreeable meadows."²⁵ The court ballet had featured Louis XIV in the role of Alexander, paying obeisance to the goddess of love; true to the tactics of absolutist propaganda, it had clothed the king's imperialism in the refined garb of modern chivalry. In contrast, the operatic work positions the "amorous empire" of a pacifist Venus against the militaristic, oppressive reign of Jupiter and his cruel wife, Juno. In a dramatic climax, a series of fireworks depict Jupiter's war on Cythera in a vivid display of destructive power. Clearly implicating Louis XIV and Mme de Maintenon as Jupiter and Juno, *La naissance de Vénus* fits into a larger pattern of satire targeting the king and his hated wife after 1685.²⁶

Already in the seventeenth century, then, the island of Venus was established as an anti-absolutist utopia.²⁷ Several attributes make Venus and her island home an ideal symbol for a pacifist, libertine resistance to Louis XIV. In contrast to Pallas Athena/Minerva, goddess of reason and war, she stood for peace and the uniting of opposites. Descended from the Sumerian goddess Inanna, she embodied an overt sexuality and provided a link with ancient matriarchal fertility cults. Moreover, the worship of Aphrodite/Venus had always been synonymous with a reverence for art, especially an art devoted to a feminine ideal independent of male influence. Despite the outrage with which the early Greek Church Fathers railed against the "lustful orgies" of the rites of Aphrodite, the Greeks continued to favor her as an object of worship,²⁸ and a cult of Venus continued in Rome. In the Renaissance, the renewal of interest in Greek and Roman mythology opened the way for political subversion as well as propaganda. Especially with the erosion of public faith in both church and state in the late seventeenth century, the pagan impulse that lay beneath the veneer of official culture aroused the primal urges of a disenchanting people. Nowhere was this truer than at the Paris Opéra, known as the "temple d'amour" or the "temple de la volupté." In this shrine to love and freedom, Venus and her son l'Amour (the adult Cupid) were virtually worshipped, especially in the *fête galante* of the opera-ballet, as the embodiment of a pagan, matriarchal, and libertine ideal.²⁹

Le triomphe des arts and the Dialogue of Theaters in 1700

The most complete expression of the meaning of Cythera is set out in the opera-ballet *Le triomphe des arts* of 1700, a direct

challenge to the ideology of Louis XIV's *Ballet des arts* of 1663. The earlier work, created by the poet Isaac Benserade, the composer Jean-Baptiste Lully, and the choreographer Pierre Beauchamps, depicts the seven liberal arts in their role of celebrating the peace and prosperity brought about by the military victories of Louis XIV.³⁰ The prominent place of the art of war is signified by the final procession of the Virtues led by Pallas Athena, goddess of war, and the verses declaring Athena's superiority to Venus. Created shortly after Louis's victorious Treaty of the Pyrenees with Spain, this court ballet celebrates Athena as creator of a peace brought about by the victories of war. The role of Louis XIV as shepherd (illustrating the art of agriculture) celebrates him as leader of his peaceful flock, but the *vers de personnage*³¹ clearly state that this role only masks Louis's true identity as hero. The shift between shepherd and hero sets up a typical ploy of Louis's image makers, the constant counterbalancing of the royal image to allow it an all-purpose political function. Ultimately, however, the dominant image is one of military heroism, to which others are subordinated.

Le triomphe des arts,³² created by La Motte in collaboration with the choreographer Guillaume-Louis Pécour and the composer Michel de La Barre, overturns this symbolism of the arts as celebrating a peace dependent on military victory to present them instead as leading the way to a new, peaceful society under the direct inspiration of Venus. In the first *entrée*³³ of *Le triomphe des arts*, a prologue entitled "L'architecture," this goddess challenges Apollo by successfully dedicating a rival temple to her son l'Amour. As she does so, the statues decorating the new temple come to life as cupids holding the emblems of the arts. Apollo, true to the utopian spirit of the ballet, graciously awards the temple of l'Amour a status equal to his own. In succeeding *entrées*, Venus serves as patron goddess to a series of artists who use their art to establish the values of love, peace, and beauty in the service of humanity. For example, in "La peinture," Alexander the Conqueror cedes to the artist Apelles, painter of Venus, and in "La musique," the musician Amphion takes the city of Thebes by music rather than by war.

The second *entrée*, "La poësie," dedicated to the poet Sappho and set before a temple of Venus overlooking the ocean, may be seen as a tribute to the other "Sappho," Madeleine de Scudéry. By 1700 Scudéry had come to stand (like her namesake) for a literature of passion which, though scorned by Nicolas Boileau and the classicists, continued to enjoy the fervent approbation of a reading public. In "La poësie," the ancient Sappho is depicted in her historical role of leader of a cult of Venus on a sacred island (unnamed, as in Scudéry's novel). Her surviving hymn to the goddess, arranged by La Motte, serves as the sung text underlying the sacred ritual of the minuet. As they sing and dance, a group of lovers, offering as sacrifices the attributes of the other gods, dedicate a trophy to Venus. A priestess of Venus, transported by a vision of the future, foresees happiness for Sappho and for the world. The suicide of Sappho, betrayed in love, and her subsequent apotheosis as a tenth Muse may be read, along with the coming to life of Cupid's temple, as the transformation of an artistic vision of love and beauty into a living, societal reality.

Yet another transformation may be seen in the final *entrée*,

"La sculpture," a depiction of the Pygmalion story. Here, Venus herself makes an *ex machina* appearance, paralleling that of Pallas Athena in the last *entrée* of the eponymous court ballet. In this version, Venus effects the transformation of Pygmalion's statue by summoning a cupid, who animates the statue by flying before it with his torch. The conclusion to this *entrée*, and to the ballet as a whole, features a chorus representing "La danse" and a soloist representing "La musique" celebrating the victory of Pygmalion, love, and the arts. Two other soloists from the chorus, costumed respectively as a peasant representing agriculture (replacing Louis XIV as shepherd-hero in the *Ballet des arts*) and a sailor representing navigation (replacing a group of pirates in that work), communicate directly to the audience in airs that praise the peaceful pleasures of land and sea. The peasant sings of the beauty of the woods and the pleasures of love, and the sailor invites the audience to embark on the seas of love: "Embark, too timid youth,/Benefit from a happy leisure;/Give yourselves to love, Cupid [l'Amour] is the only guide/Who leads hearts to pleasure."³⁴

In the same way that several of the *entrées* of *Le triomphe des arts* ended in apotheoses of their own, this final chorus represents "La danse" and, in addition, a grand apotheosis of the ballet as a whole, with its component arts of music, dance, painting, architecture, and poetry. Its text confirms that the living sculpture of Pygmalion's statue (like the cupids coming to life on Cupid's temple) can be understood as the dance itself, literally bringing to life the utopian qualities suggested in the ballet. Further, the dialogue of music and dance, complementing the succession of *entrées* that have gone before, points to the larger genre of the ballet as the site where all the arts of peace converge. As a whole, the *entrées* of *Le triomphe des arts* may be read as the successive awakening of this new genre of the ballet itself, and the final scene as a direct appeal to its audience to join in its cult of love and freedom.

Le triomphe des arts may also be read as a defense of the libertinism of the Paris Opéra against the criticism of the *parti des dévôts*. In the 1690s, a pamphlet controversy known as the *querelle des théâtres* had aligned clerics and moralists against the theater, especially the Opéra and its female dancers, whom they chastised as immoral, corrupt, and scandalous. The libertine, utopian future depicted in *Le triomphe des arts* thus depicts not only a future society led by the arts but also the ballet as a model for that society. Any audience assembled there in 1700 would have understood the temples of l'Amour and Venus, depicted in the first and second *entrées*, as the Opéra itself, the "temple d'amour,"³⁵ and the temple of the gracious Apollo as that of a future utopian ruler, perhaps the duc de Bourgogne, to whom the work is dedicated.

All the premises on which *Le triomphe des arts* are based represent an inversion of the traditional modes of absolutist encomium. The ballet as a whole inverts the premise of Louis XIV's *Ballet des arts*, the presentation of the liberal arts as they flourish under the glorious patronage of the king. It also inverts the typical opera prologue, traditionally dedicated to monarchical flattery. Finally, it inverts the idea of *le triomphe*, as it had come to mean the monarch's processional entry into a city or arena of praise. Thus, each "entry" of this ballet represents the triumph not of the monarch, but rather of an

artist in the service of a new society. In contrast to official panegyrics demanding homage to the king, La Motte's "Hymn to Venus" demands only pleasures ("Your pleasures are the only homage that Venus expects from you"³⁶). This encomium of the goddess posits her selfless empire of love, the fruits of which are shared with all her followers, as a direct antithesis to the greedy imperialism of Louis XIV. In that sense these words of the "Hymn to Venus" summarize the message of the ballet: "Rule over the world in a supreme empire,/Make your charming languor be felt everywhere,/An extreme sweetness is enjoyed under your laws,/And you share with these hearts/All the pleasures that you enjoy yourself."³⁷

Le triomphe des arts has never been discussed as a source for Watteau, yet this work affords the most complete explanation of the cult of Cythera as it had emerged in the work of Marino, La Fontaine, and Scudéry and in the opera *La naissance de Vénus*. Beginning with Venus's extraordinary dedication of a temple to her son l'Amour as a "rival" of Apollo, the entire work builds an alternative program to Louis XIV's militaristic imperialism and self-serving propaganda. This program sets out a new society under the matriarchy of the goddess of love and under the temporal rule of a beneficent ruler (signified by the transformed figures of Apollo and Alexander³⁸) who is willing to be led by the arts of love and beauty. La Motte does not mention Cythera by name in *Le triomphe des arts*, but through an embracing metaphor of transformation, he posits the ballet itself as Cythera, epicurean shrine to Venus and l'Amour, and its audience as worshipers embarking on the regenerative seas of art and love. The transformations portrayed within each act of the ballet, beginning with the awakening of the cupids (*les amours*) on the "Temple de l'Amour" and continuing with a series of "triumphal entries" of artists representing a new social order, stand for the triumph of the united arts of the ballet as they depict a new society awakened by love. Thus, following Scudéry (and underlining the importance of his allusion to "Sapho"), La Motte initiates a shift from a tragic lament for the lost art and beauty of Cythera to a victorious celebration of the arts of the ballet, as they revivify the ideals of Venus's island shrine.

The earliest theatrical model for the *Pilgrimage* generally discussed in the Watteau literature is Florent Dancourt's *Les trois cousines*,³⁹ produced at the Comédie-Française later in the same year as *Le triomphe des arts*. What critics have not recognized is that the Cytherean pilgrimage of *Les trois cousines* is actually a burlesque allusion to *Le triomphe des arts*, an importation of Cythera and its prototypes into the bourgeois comedy of manners. As such it represents an emerging dialogue among the theaters of Paris at the turn of the century. Though the mode of parody provides a framework, this dialogue also reflects an increasing fascination with the interplay between high and low styles as they depict the parallel cultures of a new public sphere. In Dancourt's final divertissement, a burlesque version of the opera-ballet, the island of Cythera has become a libertine suburb of Paris, and the worshipers of Venus have become "pilgrims," a euphemism for the village boys and girls who will journey there in search of a mate.⁴⁰ In their freedom to do so, and in the joyous atmosphere of fête provided by the final divertissement, one

senses an emulation of the subversive utopia of the ballet and a depiction of that utopia as it is played out in the libertine suburbs of Paris. Dancourt's addition of the notion of pilgrimage adds a valuable element for the interpretation of Watteau's painting, as does the egalitarianism with which he treats the theme: "Everyone makes a pilgrimage to the temple of the son of Venus; the court, the town, the village are equally received there."⁴¹ Dancourt's play extends the dialogue of theaters to the comedy of manners, which takes up the subversive standard of the opera-ballet against the king.

More than other forms of theater, then, the opera-ballet in the first decade of the eighteenth century began to be identified with a public utopia of fête counterpoised against the backdrop of the courtly fête of Louis XIV. This theme weaves through a group of ballets on the subject of Venetian carnival produced at the Opéra, from *Le carnaval de Venise* of 1699 to *Les fêtes vénitienes* of 1710. La Motte had first introduced the theme of embarkation in his opera *Amadis de Grèce* of 1699, and he used it a second time in *Le triomphe des arts*. In 1705 La Motte and the composer La Barre collaborated again, on a ballet entitled *La Vénitienne*. This work, interweaving the utopia of Cythera (named here for the first time in conjunction with the embarkation theme) with that of Venetian carnival, develops the connection by making Venice and its carnival festivities the point of embarkation for the idyllic island of Cythera. In this and the other works on Venetian carnival, the "maritime" scene, with its male and female sailors, enters the vocabulary of the opera-ballet.⁴² With their message of setting sail upon the seas of love, these ballets reinforce the significance of the public fête as the point of departure for an idyllic world of love and freedom. In the dismal late years of Louis XIV's reign, they join the image of carnival in the free Republic of Venice, city of Venus, with the image of the *fête galante* on Cythera, island of Venus, as sister emblems of an anti-absolutist utopia characterized by the public celebrations of a free society.⁴³

Les amours déguisez and the Dialogue of Theaters in 1713

In the second decade of the century, the *locus amoenus* of Cythera was most thoroughly developed in the ballet *Les amours déguisez* of 1713 (libretto by Louis Fuzelier, music by Thomas Bourgeois).⁴⁴ Like *Le triomphe des arts*, this ballet took its subject from a court ballet, the *Ballet des amours déguisez* of 1664 (libretto by the président de Périgny, music by Lully). Through subtle allusion, the earlier work paid tribute to the "disguised love" of Louis XIV for his mistress Louise de la Vallière.⁴⁵ It represented the subordination of that love, however, to his royal duty as a hero of France. The prologue of this court ballet, a spoken dialogue between Pallas Athena and Venus, sets up the traditional rivalry of these two goddesses, again, as one between virtue and love, war and peace, noble art and idle pleasure. Venus fares better than in most of the court ballets, scoring some victories over Athena by disguising her cupids as they come to the aid of famous lovers of antiquity, but ultimately she is overthrown by the greater power of Athena, who is favored by the king.⁴⁶ To climax the final defeat of Venus, Louis's librettist depicts a mutiny in which the cupids, who are supposed to be helping Helen, Paris, and Venus, defect to the side of Menelaus, Pallas

Athena, and the Greeks, once again demonstrating the potency of patriarchy and the futility of resistance.

Fuzelier's libretto of 1713 overturns this symbolism. The setting of his prologue represents a port, where a fleet manned by cupids is preparing to set sail for the isle of Cythera. Venus, accompanied by her Games and Pleasures disguised as sailors, invites mortals to accompany them, and in fact has her cupids enchain the lovers with garlands of roses. The troops of Athena (now under her Roman name of Minerva) storm the scene and attempt to break these garland chains, whereupon a host of cupids, flying out of the clouds shooting arrows of love, engage and immediately subdue them. Minerva, humiliated, leaves her followers, new members of an "amorous empire," to join with Venus and the lovers in an embarkation for Cythera. The remainder of the ballet is devoted to three *entrées* depicting love disguised as hate, esteem, and friendship. Like *Le triomphe des arts*, the opera-ballet positions young lovers and artists devoted to love, most notably the poet Ovid, against absolutist figures, such as Caesar Augustus. Paeans to pacifism abound, especially in the *entrée* devoted to the prisoners threatened by the cruel henchmen of the Sun, a blatant allusion to the Sun King and his ministers. The work ends with citizens of "many nations" joining together to witness a fête in honor of the god l'Amour, who has triumphed over Mars. The audience includes even the bellicose Scythians, who have turned from the service of Mars to that of l'Amour.

The subversive message and imagery of *Les amours déguisez* pointedly allude to the imagery and ideology of *Le triomphe des arts*. While La Motte had followed Ovid's story of the metamorphosis of Sappho as the tenth Muse, Fuzelier takes Ovid himself, "favored at the court of Cythera," as a symbol of the passionate ideal that lay at the heart of the artistic counter-movement to Louis XIV's absolutism. In these opera-ballets, love may be seen as an ideal in itself as well as a symbol for a wider celebration of political freedom. This symbolism is spelled out in Fuzelier's *Les amours déguisez*, in which the daughter of Caesar Augustus, forsaking her father's throne for the love of the poet Ovid, evokes the Roman Republic, where "liberty, resembling tender love, made equal all mortals who submitted to its dominion."⁴⁷ Like Sappho's ritual *fête galante* in *Le triomphe des arts*, the *fête galante* that ends Fuzelier's *Les amours déguisez* includes people of "all nationalities," here as a theater audience celebrating Venus and l'Amour, and, through them, the egalitarian universality of the fête as an alternative to militaristic imperialism. As Louis XIV's *Ballet des amours déguisez* had masked his love for Louise de la Vallière, Fuzelier's *Les amours déguisez* masks the subversive, even revolutionary force of love under the innocent guise of festivity. In a similar manner, La Motte's libretto for *Le triomphe des arts* had replaced Louis XIV's arts of flattery with Venus's arts of peace and freedom. Like Trojan horses of fête, these public ballets infiltrated the topoi of the court ballet to attack the imagery of absolutism from within its own established boundaries.

The musical scores of *Le triomphe des arts* and *Les amours déguisez* exhibit a *style galant* that, growing out of the dances of the court ballet, foreshadows trends of the later eighteenth century.⁴⁸ Michel de La Barre, the composer of *Le triomphe des arts* and flutist in the orchestra of the Opéra, emphasizes the

sound of flutes and recorders, often in chains of "sweet" thirds and sixths. He also celebrates the minuet, of all dances the one that most clearly captures the blend of pastoral elegance and amorous desire that becomes synonymous with the ballet itself. Thomas Bourgeois, the composer of *Les amours déguisez*, further extends this *galant* style to include the slow harmonic rhythms and delicate timbres of the musette, a pseudorustic dance (accompanied by a delicate bagpipe) that, like the minuet, links the pastoral simplicity and bucolic pleasures of the countryside with the goddess of love. Against this style, Athena's recitative and call to arms, evoking the more dramatic musical style of the *tragédie en musique* as well as the martial fanfares of Louis XIV's military band, highlight the dramatic bellicosity of the goddess of war. Similar distinctions characterize the entire ballet, underscoring an unequivocal web of musical allusion to the contrast between war and peace. In the *entrée* "L'amitié," soprano recorders, engaging in intricate roulades to imitate the song of the nightingale, form a striking musical image of an idealized pastoral existence claimed to have existed "before the ravages of the Trojan War."

Just as Dancourt parodied *Le triomphe des arts* in his libertine Parisian "pilgrimage," Fuzelier created a burlesque version of his own ballet entitled *Les pèlerins de Cythère*. Unlike previous writers for the ballet, Fuzelier was more closely associated with the popular theaters of the *foire* than with the Opéra. Reversing the standard chronology of parody, *Les pèlerins de Cythère* actually preceded the opening of the opera-ballet. Premiered at the Foire St-Laurent in the spring of 1713, it was still playing when *Les amours déguisez* made its operatic debut in August; the future regent was said to have attended both these performances in the same evening.⁴⁹ Unlike Dancourt's pilgrimage on land, *Les pèlerins de Cythère* depicts an actual Parisian maritime scene, a voyage on a pleasure boat rowed by cupids down the Seine to the fashionable libertine suburb of St-Cloud. The piece, amounting to an early form of comic opera, revolves around a series of characters taking various disguises in order to avoid recognition by their spouses. The close proximity in time and subject matter of Fuzelier's two works confirms their connection. Further, Fuzelier's treatment of Cythera-related topics in both a high, operatic style and a low, burlesque style reflects the motivation of addressing, and depicting, audiences of all social classes. Fuzelier's *Les pèlerins de Cythère*, in fact, represents the first of a series of plays, all on the subject of Cythera, inviting their audience to come as "good pilgrims" to the theater. These invitations strongly imply a parallel implication of the theater itself as Cythera, libertine mecca of love and pleasure. Indeed, the theater was one of the few egalitarian venues in the early decades of the eighteenth century, which made it a worthy destination for "pilgrims" in search of a new society. The notion of pilgrimage, moreover, plays directly off the conventional image of Christian pilgrimages, creating an idea of the theater as a rival shrine to the monarchy as well as to the church and to the *parti des dévôts*.

Les pèlerins de Cythère inaugurated a series of comedies on the theme of Cythera at the *foire*. These treatments reinforce the symbolism and meaning of the ballets at the Paris Opéra. Robert Tomlinson has explored the erotic imagery of the pilgrims' staff and Venus's shell in the explicit sexual allu-

sions of these plays.⁵⁰ Commentators, however, have failed to note the transfer, in Fuzelier's self-parody and in the plethora of works (largely under his authorship) following in its wake,⁵¹ of some themes associated with Cythera from the ballet to the *foire*. One is the equation of love and freedom, of a *libertinage de moeurs* with a *libertinage d'esprit*. Another is the equation of the theater itself, a libertine haven of love and pleasure, with Cythera—a motif that is picked up in a number of later plays.⁵² Of Parisian audiences, those of the *foire* represented the clearest cross section of all classes of society. In celebrating the "pilgrimage to Cythera," the public audiences of the ballet and the *foire* reach across the cultural boundaries of high and low art to celebrate their own identity as a new public and a new society.

In this period, in which it was considered inappropriate to depict contemporary life in France on the stage of the Opéra, the low-culture entertainments of the *foire* subtly reveal the ballets of the Opéra as subversive masks for a libertine underground resistance. Beyond that, however, this dialogue of theaters positions the public theater itself, in its various manifestations the symbol of all classes of society, against the king. The ballet, as a *galant* form of theater, represents a meeting ground between the high style of tragedy and the low style of the *foire*.⁵³ Moreover, in its combination of many art forms, it becomes a representation of art itself, the point of embarkation for the utopia of Cythera. With Venus and l'Amour as its patron deities, it combines several qualities that make it the ideal symbol for utopian protest. First, it reflects a world of art and beauty unconstricted by the necessity of monarchical flattery; second, it provides a haven for the masking of subversion under the guise of fête; and third, it embraces in its audience a microcosm of the social diversity that would characterize the new utopia. The expansion of this protest to other forms of theater serves to intensify its symbolism, widening its scope to represent all the arts and all classes of society in opposition to a regime that was becoming increasingly unpopular at the end of the long reign of Louis XIV. There is evidence that in the early eighteenth century, factions arose around the duc de Bourgogne, who died in 1712, and the duc d'Orléans, who became regent in 1715.⁵⁴ In the final years, the artistic community placed its hopes in the duc d'Orléans, a supporter of the arts and an artist and musician in his own right. These hopes faded, however, as he proved to be more of a *libertin de moeurs* than a *libertin d'esprit*. Watteau's *Pilgrimage*, then, based on the subversive arts emerging under Louis XIV, might represent a plea to the duc d'Orléans—like Marino's *Adone* to Louis XIII in 1623 and La Motte's *Le triomphe des arts* to the duc de Bourgogne in 1700—to restore the art and beauty of Cythera to a barbaric France.

Watteau's Cythera

After his death, Watteau was described by his friend the art dealer Edme Gersaint, as "libertin d'esprit, mais sage de moeurs."⁵⁵ Another friend, the comte de Caylus, described his manners as simple and pure, but also spoke of "his freethinking libertinism."⁵⁶ Though these terms merit closer study, they lend credence to a hypothesis that links Watteau with the subversive, proto-Enlightenment ideology of the opera-ballet. Other recent findings support this connection. In his study of Watteau's war paintings, Hal Opperman makes

a convincing case for the presence of an antiwar spirit.⁵⁷ Watteau grew up in Valenciennes, a town in Hainaut, ruthlessly conquered by Louis XIV in 1677. Subsequently treated by Louis as an occupied territory, it was used as a staging point for his maneuvers on the northern front during the War of the Spanish Succession. Traveling to Valenciennes in 1709, the artist would have seen firsthand the horrors of war during the worst winter ever recorded, when famine was rampant and the armies were demoralized and disillusioned. His close friend Antoine de La Roque lost a leg at Malplaquet, one of the war's worst battles. Opperman, challenging critics who have appreciated only the *pittoresque* in Watteau's war paintings, interprets the broken lines and chaotic representations of his military subjects as a negative commentary on Louis XIV's militarism.⁵⁸

It would logically follow, then, that Watteau employed the unbroken lines and harmonious patterns of the *Pilgrimage* to portray a peaceful utopia as depicted in the opera-ballet. It is true that after 1713, comic treatments of the theme began to proliferate in the *théâtre de la foire*, undoubtedly under the inspiration of Fuzelier's *Les pèlerins de Cythère*. Though these treatments are related to Watteau's, a study of the conception and imagery of the *Pilgrimage* reveals its origins in the opera-ballet, most significantly in La Motte's *Le triomphe des arts* and its ideological echo, Fuzelier's *Les amours déguisez*. Like those ballets, it embodies an unmistakable form of utopian protest, at once transforming the absolutist ideology of the old court ballet into a celebration of the arts and artists of a new public sphere, as they portray the qualities of love and peace embodied by Venus and her son l'Amour. In summary, this conception of Cythera may be seen as a fresh and radical synthesis of the fashionable *fête galante* with the ancient mythology of Venus and her matriarchal predecessors and, simultaneously, a condemnation of the dried-up, outworn arts of patriarchal political aggrandizement.

Moving in modernist circles, Watteau almost certainly would have encountered La Motte, the ubiquitous leader of the Moderns. He probably also knew Fuzelier, the author of *Les amours déguisez* and *Les pèlerins de Cythère*, through their mutual friend La Roque.⁵⁹ It is possible that the fashionable performances of Fuzelier's dual treatments in 1713, just after Watteau's entry into the Royal Academy in 1712, might have stimulated Watteau's interest in the subject and brought him back to earlier theatrical treatments and pictorial predecessors. It is also possible that Watteau was led to the subject directly through visual models. Whatever the path of influence, the subversive mythology of Cythera seems to have been established in the theater, particularly the Opéra, about 1700 and to have entered the world of the visual arts shortly thereafter. Although a thoroughgoing study of artistic predecessors to the *Pilgrimage* falls outside the scope of the present study, it will be useful to determine how Watteau's Cythera fits into the context of early eighteenth-century pictorial treatments of the theme, especially as they interact with theatrical ones.

The myth of Cythera entered the visual arts about the turn of the century, at precisely the moment when a subversive tone first emerged at the Paris Opéra. Of the visual representations predating Watteau's *Pilgrimage*, four depict groups of amorous couples and a boat, directly foreshadowing the *Pil-*

3 Claude Gillot, *L'embarquement pour l'île de Cythère*, ink, wash, and chalk, recto: 8 3/16 × 12 1/2 in., verso: 6 1/4 × 8 1/8 in., ca. 1700–1702. Portland, Me., Portland Museum of Art; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, gift of an anonymous donor in honor of Agnes Mongan, 5.1992



grimage.⁶⁰ Of the four, two are designated as actual embarkations. These include a sketch by Claude Gillot entitled *L'embarquement pour l'île de Cythère* (Fig. 3) and an anonymous painting entitled *L'embarquement pour Cythère*.⁶¹ The other two are both entitled *L'isle de Cythère*. Of these, the first is an engraving by Claude Duflos and Jean Bérain (also signed, probably in a later version, by Bernard Picart; Fig. 4);⁶² the second is Watteau's own earlier treatment of the theme (Fig. 5). Except for the Watteau, which has been dated about 1709–10 or 1712–13, most of these precursors to the *Pilgrimage* have been dated about 1700, partially on internal evidence⁶³ but also based on the premiere of Dancourt's *Les trois cousines*, almost universally considered an influence. The content of Dancourt's play, however, provides no basis for the theme of embarkation, nor for the actual island of Cythera except as a passing metaphor. I believe that a more important source for these pictorial precursors of the *Pilgrimage*, as well as for the *Pilgrimage* itself, is the city cousin of Dancourt's country play, La Motte's ballet *Le triomphe des arts*. As discussed above, that work more than any other sets out a subversive mythology of Venus and l'Amour, including a ritual of praise to Venus before her temple (featured in the background of the anonymous *Embarquement* and Duflos/Bérain), as well as one of the earliest references to embarkation. La Motte's celebration of the arts as guides to a utopia of peace and pleasure may also be found in most of these visual portrayals.

Watteau studied with Gillot from about 1703 to 1708, and Gillot's *Embarquement pour l'île de Cythère* (Fig. 3) has been seen as a direct model for the *Pilgrimage*.⁶⁴ Though Gillot's treatment contains references to Dancourt's play, it may also be seen as an elaboration on the subversive theme of embarkation as adumbrated by La Motte.⁶⁵ Judging from its angle of view, Gillot's *Embarquement* appears to have been sketched from the perspective of an actual theater box. A "village" treatment of the theme, it harks back to the peasant village of *Les trois cousines*, but unlike Dancourt's journey, it also includes a boat, a shoreline, and a clear presentation of a

nautical embarkation. More important, Gillot's drawing clearly points up the connection between Cythera, the theater, and the arts, as it includes several groups of musicians and dancers, a bareback rider, and what looks like an acrobatic or juggling show on a makeshift stage. As in the opera-ballet *Le triomphe des arts*, these elements convey an unmistakable sense of a theatrical utopia, based on a celebration of the arts of music, dance, and drama. If Gillot, following the ballet, meant the work as a "triumph of the arts," the arch at the right of the painting might be compared with those created for the triumphal entries of Louis XIV, from whose heights musicians often played fanfares and festive music. Yet, though Gillot's arch supports such a festive symphony, on one side, it depicts a humble village and on the other, the festive arts of a public sphere, with the implicit suggestion that it is these, rather than the king, that are being celebrated. In depicting village festivities similar in tone to those of Dancourt's *Les trois cousines*, along with an embarkation and a celebration of the arts reminiscent of *Le triomphe des arts*, Gillot's sketch draws together the interconnected imagery of those two related works. Like them, it transforms the tragic tone associated with previous representations of Cythera into a triumphant celebration of an artistic utopia.⁶⁶ Just as the perspective of Gillot's *Embarquement* embraces the viewer as a member of its audience, his boat, transgressing the lower boundary of the drawing, pulls this audience into the embarkation, denoting the spectacle itself as the point of intersection between its audience and the transformative experience of art.

Gillot's treatment is not the only one to posit Cythera as a meeting place between art and audience. In the anonymous *Embarquement pour Cythère*, several figures, portrayed *en point*, are clearly dancing, thus linking the theme of Cythera even more closely with the opera-ballet. Duflos's engraving (Fig. 4), the only work unquestionably set on the island of Cythera, depicts a group of elegant couples with, in the background, a temple of Venus, as in *Le triomphe des arts*. Behind the couples, a cupid brings new arrivals, while under the trees at right,



4 Claude Duflos, Jean Bérain, and Bernard Picart, *L'isle de Cythère*, engraving. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes



5 Watteau, *L'isle de Cythère*, oil on canvas. Frankfurt, Städtische Galerie am Städelschen Kunstinstitut (photo: Urusla Edelmann, Frankfurt)

other couples sing to the accompaniment of a recorder or oboe. Of all the early representations of Cythera, this engraving most closely matches the island setting depicted in the *entrée* "La poésie" from La Motte's *Le triomphe des arts*. Moreover, the fact that the original version of the work bears the name of Jean Bérain, stage designer for the Opéra at the time of *Le triomphe des arts*, provides a direct link between a pictorial and an operatic Cythera.⁶⁷

Watteau's *Isle de Cythère* (Fig. 5) conflates the island-of-

Cythera motif with an embarkation, thus setting up the ambiguity, also present in Gillot and the later *Pilgrimage*, as to whether the action takes place on Cythera or is an embarkation for the island. In its stagelike figures and backdrop, Watteau's painting seems to bear witness to a theatrical presentation. It is usually dated about 1709–10 and has been linked, more directly than the later *Pilgrimage*, with Dancourt's *Les trois cousines*, which was revived in 1709.⁶⁸ As a number of commentators have noted, however, the work also



6 Detail of Fig. 2

incorporates a literal quotation of the balustrade of St-Cloud, the libertine pleasure garden specifically mentioned in relation to Cythera in Fuzelier's *Les pèlerins de Cythère* of 1713.⁶⁹ It also includes the image of cupids-as-oarsmen contained in the prologue of that work. This evidence would support the alternate dating of 1712–13,⁷⁰ indicating that Watteau may have treated the theme for the first time *after* his nomination to the Royal Academy in 1712. In either case, this painting—while setting up the general theme and a number of details found in the *Pilgrimage*—seems to respond more to the tongue-in-cheek allusions of the Comédie-Française and the *foire* than to the lofty utopianism of the later work.

The *Pilgrimage to Cythera* shares visual elements with almost all its forerunners, both pictorial and theatrical. The Louvre painting (Fig. 1) includes a Venus term, on the right, festooned with roses and a quiver of arrows. It is connected by amorous couples winding down a hill to a ship rowed by two oarsmen and crowned by a flock of cupids. In the Berlin version (Fig. 2), Watteau has omitted the oarsmen, multiplied the cupids fourfold, enlarged and defined the ship (Fig. 6), and substituted for the Venus term a statue (the same as

in his *Plaisirs d'amour*) of Venus confiscating Cupid's arrows (Fig. 7). Beneath the statue lies a coat of armor, in front of which there is a shield, and the hilt of a sword that has been struck into the ground. Beside the armor, half hidden in the shadows, lie a wineskin, a lyre, books, and a mask. A pair of rosy cupids seems to have emerged from the gray stone of the statue. One of them pulls up, to the feet of Venus, a laurel wreath from a coat of armor, hung over a club, that lies beneath the statue. In both paintings, the costumes of the lovers display various styles of aristocratic, bourgeois, and peasant dress.⁷¹ A number of these costumes present stylized versions of the capes and staffs (and in the Louvre version, the water gourds) used by pilgrims traveling to the various shrines of Europe and the Near East.⁷² In the Berlin version, garlands of roses bedeck the dress of the central female figure and entwine the lovers at the lower right of the painting. On the prow of the boat in the Louvre *Pilgrimage* appears a golden winged victory with a shell as a headdress, and on the stern in the Berlin version, a golden figure of a woman resembling a sphinx, supported by a decorative shell.

Many of these elements belong either to a generic Venus



7 Detail of Fig. 2

mythology (the rose and shell as attributes of Venus, the arrows, quiver, and torch as attributes of her son l'Amour⁷³) or to overlapping and often indistinguishable layers of iconographic motifs present in the various pictorial and theatrical models (embarkation, pilgrims, cupids, different social classes). At the same time, however, the aristocratic, utopian tone of the *Pilgrimage* as well as specific iconographic information (especially in the Berlin version⁷⁴) link the painting directly with the general ideology as well as specific visual images of the opera-ballet. Several details are reminiscent of Fuzelier's *Les amours déguisez*, including the "fleet of cupids" and the lovers enchained with garlands of roses. Of even more significance, however, is a web of signification connecting the painting to La Motte's *Le triomphe des arts*.⁷⁵

As discussed above, *Le triomphe des arts* celebrates the arts (and the ballet as the modern synthesis of the arts) of political and societal regeneration. It consists of a succession of *entrées* celebrating the individual arts of the ballet (poetry, music, painting, and the dance) as they contribute to a new genre dedicated to Venus. In the painting, the awakening

statue alludes to the living sculpture of the dance, as set out in the first and last *entrées* of *Le triomphe des arts*. A lyre, books, and mask—attributes of music, poetry, and theater, the other arts of the ballet—have been placed at the foot of the statue, indicating the dedication of the arts to Venus. In the ritual of love beside the sea in the second *entrée* of the ballet, "La poésie," the lovers dedicate to Venus a trophy fashioned of attributes of other gods. This scene may explain the wineskin, attribute of Bacchus, traditional rival of l'Amour,⁷⁶ and the coat of armor, attribute of Minerva, traditional rival of Venus, also lying beneath the statue. The sword struck into the ground in front of the armor might refer to the practice described by Scudéry in which "followers of the god Mars" plant a sword in a heap of ashes. If so, it, too, represents another offering to the goddess of peace. In the same vein, one of the enlivened cupids of the statue pulls a laurel wreath up from the armor of Minerva to the feet of Venus, symbolizing the victory of the goddess of love over the goddess of war. Significantly, another cupid, still encased in the gray stone of a less enlightened era, reaches for the weapons that

Venus holds out of his reach. Emphasizing the theme of transformation, several strategic cupids (namely, the figure with the laurel wreath, the figures at the bottom of the hill, and the figure holding aloft a torch over the ship) bear butterfly wings rather than those of traditional putti.

The movement of the lovers in the direction of the boat may represent their response to the invitation to embark, extended in the closing chorus of *Le triomphe des arts*. The peasant personifying agriculture in this chorus (counterpart to Louis XIV *qua* shepherd-hero in the *Ballet des arts*) is represented in the groupings of peasants at the bottom of the hill and in the boat. Unlike the king as pseudoshepherd, these peasants fit easily into an egalitarian social configuration; in the Louvre version, one even wears a laurel wreath, a symbol of victory often associated with the monarch.⁷⁷ The singer of the opera-ballet costumed as a sailor and personifying navigation is represented by the oarsmen of the Louvre version. The sailor-cupids guiding the boat in the Berlin version evoke the text that accompanies this character's "navigation" air, which exhorts the world to love and culminates in the line, "Cupid [l'Amour] is the only guide who leads hearts to pleasure."⁷⁸

Since at least the Renaissance, nautical images had been associated with France and with a politicized ship of state.⁷⁹ In that sense, the ship of the *Pilgrimage* may be seen as a new state, one guided by love. On the ship of both the Louvre and Berlin versions of the *Pilgrimage*, golden figures of a woman (a winged victory and sphinx figure, respectively) merge into a golden shell, recalling the regeneration of love signified by Venus's birth from the sea. Perhaps related to the resurrection of Sappho, poet of Venus, from the sea as the tenth Muse, these golden figures announce both the victory of the arts in the service of Venus and the riddle of the puzzle in which that message is cast. Finally, in *Le triomphe des arts*, from the animation of the cupids in the beginning to Cupid's animation of Pygmalion's statue at the end, love serves as the instrument of transfiguration. This spirit also animates Watteau's painting, with cupids guiding (and occasionally, as in the case of a reluctant lover on the hill, urging) the lovers toward the embarkation.⁸⁰

In summary, Watteau's *Pilgrimage*, while reflecting an eighteenth-century myth of Cythera that by the second decade of the century was clearly "in the air," may also be traced to specific catalysts that more fully explain the painting as well as the myth itself. The most important of these, and the only source providing a full explanation of the ideology represented by Cythera, is La Motte's ballet *Le triomphe des arts* of 1700. This explanation comprises three components: a central ritual of praise on Venus's sacred island; a series of scenes providing a panorama of a Cytherean utopia of the arts directly opposing Louis XIV's absolutism; and an invitation to a symbolic embarkation, extended to the audience of a new artistic order represented by the ballet. Returning to the question of whether the painting depicts an arrival or departure, these findings do not support Levey's theory of an embarkation *from* Cythera, with its attendant "air of transience and sadness."⁸¹ They answer instead to his comment that the title may be translated as a pilgrimage either "to" or "on" Cythera, and point to an interpretation of Cythera as a

broader symbol for the transformative experience of art and beauty, inspired by love. If the utopia of Cythera is linked with the ballet and the Opéra itself, then the ritual may also be seen as one of dedication of the new arts of the public sphere, as represented by the opera-ballet, to the goddess of love, with her son the patron deity of the Paris Opéra. Likewise, the invitation to embark may be understood as an invitation extended to the audience of the ballet, the denizens of a Cytherean utopia of theater, to set sail on regenerative seas of desire and fulfillment. By extension, the new arts dedicated to Venus, whether the ballet, the spoken theater, or painting on canvas, represent the point of embarkation for a voyage of transformation, at once personal, political, and societal, that both leads to and *is* Cythera.

The *Pilgrimage*, the Academy, and the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns

Both the new genre of the opera-ballet at the Académie Royale de Musique and the new genre of the *fête galante* at the Académie Royale de Peinture represent a dramatic rupture with the traditional styles of music and art associated respectively with those institutions. In fact, Watteau's situation vis-à-vis the academy may be compared to that of the creators of the opera-ballet, who, working within a bastion of officialdom, were obliged to devise creative subterfuges in order to escape the unwanted attention of official censorship. At the same time, the authority of those institutions had been considerably weakened by the deaths of Jean-Baptiste Colbert in 1683, of Lully in 1687, and of Charles Le Brun in 1690, as no strong leaders emerged in their wake, and by the lack of state support due to both restricted resources and a lack of interest (and possibly antagonism) on the part of Louis XIV at the end of his reign.

These circumstances prompt a consideration of why the original title of Watteau's painting, *Le pèlerinage à Cythère*, was struck out and replaced by the words "une feste galante." By 1717, the subversive associations with Cythera seem to have touched all the arts, to the point of having become a symbol of the arts, artists, and audiences of the public sphere as they championed freedom against oppression, peace against militarism, and love against tyranny. It is therefore plausible that the academy, wanting to diffuse the political charge of the painting, changed its title to the more generic, and innocent, "feste galante." Yet this term, too, was loaded in its own way, standing for a type of modernism that challenged many of the premises of academic history painting. Its use as a title, and even as a genre, gave academic status to a new style, which, though drawing on the images of ancient mythology, employed those images in an iconoclastic manner, as symbols of a new social and aesthetic order. In fact, practically from the beginning the cult of *galanterie* had been associated with artistic modernism, challenging the Homeric tradition in its role as one of the foundations of absolutist image making. This *galant* ideal was championed by such writers as Charles Perrault, whose *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes* (1692–97) had inaugurated the debate between the Ancients and the Moderns in the Académie Française. In his praise of *galant* poetry for its finesse, ingenuity, delicacy, freedom, agreeableness, and lightness of effect, Perrault accurately described the

qualities that would characterize the *fête galante* of the ballet, and of Watteau's canvases as well.⁸² In this sense, the *style galant* and the *fête galante* began to represent an artistic and social freedom that, by extension, suggested a subversive political rebellion as well.

Traditional academic painting, drawing on the heroic themes of ancient history, Greek mythology, and the Homeric epic, was associated with monarchical propaganda and with its regulation by the academies. During the second decade of the eighteenth century—the period of the creation of both *Pilgrimages*—all of these academic, absolutist values were being called into question. In the Académie Française, the final phase of the debate between the Ancients and the Moderns came to a climax with La Motte's critique of Homer's *Iliad* in 1713, the same year of Fuzelier's *Les amours déguisez*. La Motte's cause, hailed as the "liberation of the human spirit,"⁸³ had an immediate effect on public opinion, and it was not long before polite society had joined the literary Moderns in denouncing, even ridiculing Homer. In this light, the triumph of Venus over Pallas Athena in Fuzelier's *Les amours déguisez* may be seen as a triumph of the "modern" goddess of peace and love over the "ancient" goddess of war and patriarchy. Indeed, Venus's triumph in *Les amours déguisez* represents a literal reversal of both the *Iliad* and Louis XIV's *Ballet des amours déguisez*, both of which had depicted the defeat of Venus and her favored Trojans. (It also recalls how, in Greek and Roman mythology, Aphrodite/Venus had often subverted the patriarchal absolutism of Zeus/Jupiter.⁸⁴)

The world of art criticism had its own corollary to the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, in its series of debates over line and color dating back to the seventeenth century. The champions of line, the Poussinistes, adhered to the ancient standards of draftsmanship and narrative form, while the champions of color, the Rubenistes, favored the modern liberation of the painterly signifier from the academic rules of imitation, as codified by Le Brun. Watteau moved among circles of the Rubenistes, and his acceptance reflects an era of increased tolerance for painting outside the limits established by the academy at the height of its power in the 1670s and 1680s. This tolerance has been associated with a heightened institutional vulnerability in the face of diminished state support, along with an increasing apathy toward the genre of history painting on the part of a commercial public. It has also been associated with a natural evolution in taste, as in the works of Antoine Coypel, that reconciled or transcended the conflicting claims of Rubenistes and Poussinistes.⁸⁵ The findings of this essay raise the additional possibility that—given the antagonism between Louis XIV and the artistic community in his late years, the widespread nature of Cytherean protest, and the freer political atmosphere of the Regency—it may also be associated with a movement from within the academy, a collusion of its artists with the Cytherean forces of a new art against an old absolutism.

When faced with a choice of a reception piece in the period following his acceptance as a candidate in 1712, Watteau chose a topic, drawn from the ballet, that used the mythological trappings of royal propaganda to deliver a message actually subverting that propaganda. Only in his final

version of the painting, produced for a private collector (perhaps Jean de Jullienne) in the years following his academic reception, did Watteau translate in detail the subversive imagery of the ballet to canvas. Perhaps he felt more comfortable revealing the details of this imagery in the privacy of a work undertaken for a personal friend and first conceived in the safer political climate following the death of Louis XIV. In any case, the *Pilgrimage to Cythera*, like the genre of the opera-ballet, brings together a number of modernist elements, foremost among them freedom from the accepted academic topoi and rules and an unapologetic appeal to the physical senses. While an assessment of the political implications of the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns is still needed, it seems clear that the call for freedom from the rules, the liberation of art from the outworn signified of royal propaganda, and the iconoclastic glorification of the artistic signifier in the service of Venus indicate a clear partnership between a modernist aesthetic and an anti-absolutist ideology in the first two decades of the eighteenth century.

The *Pilgrimage* as Counterpanegyric

Though extending to other forms of art, Watteau's conception originates in, and perfectly captures the tone of the opera-ballet. This interpretation is strengthened by Sarah Cohen's persuasive theory that the gestures of the figures in the *Pilgrimage* represent those of the minuet, one of the most amorous dances of the ballet. According to Cohen, their line of movement also imitates the minuet's floor pattern of an S or a Z, while the gestures of Watteau's central couple, one turning out and the other in, with right shoulders contiguous, exactly reproduces the passing of two dancers through the central axis of this pattern. The energy of their movement radiates out to the harmonious pattern of the ensemble, whose members seem to participate in the alternate bending and rising steps of the minuet in a generalized manner even when seated or engaged in other activity.⁸⁶

Cohen does not discuss the minuet in light of the ballet, but her theory confirms the connection suggested here between the *Pilgrimage* and the ballet. Though the minuet permeates all the ballets under discussion, as the central sacred ritual of praise to Venus, it holds an especially privileged place in *Le triomphe des arts*. Another facet of the minuet not mentioned by Cohen is the obligatory inclusion, before the performance of dances at court balls, of the *reverence*, or bow and curtsy to the king and queen who sit on a dais at the end of the oblong room in which the dance is performed. The repeated arrivals and departures before the royal couple create an S pattern extending the length of the room. Thus, the Venus term and statue of Venus and Cupid on their pedestals might be seen as a substitution for the king and queen on their dais, and the figures at the right of the painting, several of whom kneel in various positions, as courtiers of Venus making the *reverence* to each other, before the image of Venus and her son l'Amour.

The *Pilgrimage*, then, can be seen to parallel *Le triomphe des arts* as an encomium to the free arts of Venus as represented by the ballet and to a community of artists serving a free society rather than the *imperium* of the arts of flattery. Just as La Motte's praise of Venus reverses the monarchical encomium of the prologue of the official opera or *tragédie en*

musique,⁸⁷ the *Pilgrimage* draws on a system of praise reversing the iconography accompanying the official panegyric. The panegyric, derived from the ancient oration of praise, contributed to a language of royal iconography. In the late seventeenth century, regular contests were held to award the best panegyric on Louis XIV in French, while others were composed by the Jesuits in Latin.⁸⁸ Watteau's painting may be instructively compared to a work from 1684 illustrating a typical example of a panegyric in honor of Louis XIV. This example, an oration delivered in a Jesuit school, was later printed with a frontispiece representing its visual equivalent (Fig. 8). Dedicated to "the most munificent Louis the Great, father and patron of the liberal arts," the illustration depicts a bust of Louis XIV looking down from a pedestal, while Muses and putti hover about, creating a monument incorporating the attributes of all the arts. In the upper left-hand corner, a personification of Fame holds a trumpet from which falls a banner heralding Louis's motto, "Nec pluribus impar," and with the other hand crowns Louis with a laurel wreath. In the background, a statue of a warrior, signifying Louis's military achievements, stands high atop an orb adorned with fleurs-de-lis, echoing the fleurs-de-lis crowning the dedication. In the lower half of the frontispiece, the Muses adorn the monument with attributes of their respective arts. The panegyric is directed toward the image of Louis, as signified by the bust, the statue, the fleurs-de-lis, and the words of the dedication, with which one of the Muses illustrates a central banner.

The two versions of the *Pilgrimage* present the Venus term and the statue of Venus, respectively, as objects of praise analogous to that of the official panegyric, with the rose of Venus substituted for the royal fleur-de-lis. Rather than a central focus, however, they represent an outward boundary of the *Pilgrimage*. As if allowing the image of Venus to "share" the space of praise with the denizens of a new landscape, they illustrate the lines from La Motte's "Hymn to Venus": "And you share with these hearts/All the pleasures that you enjoy yourself." At the other end of the lovers' graceful serpentine line, the ship sails under the sign of Venus's sacred shell. The lovers, in their costumes representing different social classes, move through the minuet of their *fête galante* to embark on a new society. If, as Opperman has claimed, Watteau uses the "dissonance" of the broken line to symbolize the discord of war, the spatial pattern of the *Pilgrimage* represents not only the S shape of the minuet but beyond that—as contemporary theorists of the dance consistently maintained—the ballet itself as a symbol of universal harmony.⁸⁹ Indeed, according to the libretti of the ballets, the myth of Cythera stands not for a one-time journey but for a continual process. If the ship represents the embarkation of a new society under the sign of Venus, Cythera the destination, and love the means, the voyage occurs whenever an audience—or by extension a society—is transported across the sea of desire to a utopia of love, pleasure, peace, and freedom.

Like La Motte's *Triomphe des arts* and Gillo's *Embarquement*, Watteau's *Pilgrimage* invites its own audience into the transformative experience of art. Entering on the lower right of the painting, the viewer is swept into the S pattern that rises in a flourish to a triumphal arch of cupids framing the embarkation. Finally, then, the *Pilgrimage* literally celebrates a



8 Frontispiece to La Beaune, *Panegyricus*, Paris, 1684. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France

triumphal entry of a new public audience into an art of societal regeneration. Just as, in "La poésie," La Motte had inscribed the poet in the iconoclastic libretto of *Le triomphe des arts*, and La Barre the musician ("La musique"), Watteau must surely have been aware of inscribing himself as artist in the *Pilgrimage*—like Apelles, creating an image of Venus to be revered by future generations ("La peinture"), and like Pygmalion, bringing into the world a lifelike vision of love and beauty ("La sculpture"). Indeed, what theme could have been more appropriate than that of *Le triomphe des arts*—the triumphal entry of a new public art proclaiming love, peace, and freedom—for Watteau's own entry into the Royal Academy?

The literary history of Cythera after Watteau has a direct bearing on the reception history of the *Pilgrimage*. In the early eighteenth century, subversive novelists and pamphleteers began to use Cythera as a bogus publication site; in fact, the

term actually became synonymous with a French underground press.⁹⁰ Ironically, the subversive political meaning of Cythera as well as the utopian message of Watteau's painting were lost to later generations. Sometime before the Revolution Cythera began to be viewed as the libertine symbol of a degenerate upper class, and Cytherean debauchery as a symbol of elite political corruption. Watteau's modern-day reception has continued to be accompanied by a nagging, negative perception of his association with Regency frivolity. The restoration of the ideological and artistic contexts of the *Pilgrimage* offer the opportunity to revise that perception, associating an iconography of cupids, lovers, water imagery, shells, and *fêtes galantes* with currents flowing from deep reservoirs of seventeenth-century political resistance into the mainstream of eighteenth-century French culture. Through the lens of that revision may be seen a "triumph" not only for Watteau, but also for the arts, artists, and audiences of a new public sphere.

Georgia Cowart is associate professor of music at Case Western Reserve University. She is the author of two books on French music and culture and numerous articles on music, the arts, and society in the period of Louis XIV [Department of Music, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio 44106-7105].

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Notes

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1. This version is sometimes known as the *Embarkation for Cythera*, a title given to an engraving of the work made in 1733, which has also been used, by extension, to refer to the original. Because most scholars see this version, though not a copy, as an embellished "repetition," I prefer to follow the usage of American scholars who generally refer to both paintings as the *Pilgrimage to Cythera* and distinguish between the two by reference to their locations.
2. Grasselli and Rosenberg, 396–98.
3. Gérard de Nerval and Théodore de Banville, quoted in Donald Posner, *Antoine Watteau* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 182.
4. R. Huyghe, "Vers une psychologie de l'art," *Revue des Arts* 1 (1951): 232;

and J. K. Ostrowski, "Pellegrinaggio a Citera, 'Fête Galante' o 'Danse Macabre,'" *Paragone* 331 (1977): 9–22, both quoted in Posner (as in n. 3), 184.

5. Michael Levey, "The Real Theme of Watteau's *Embarkation for Cythera*," *Burlington Magazine* 103 (1961): 180–85.

6. Mary Vidal, *Watteau's Painted Conversations: Art, Literature, and Talk in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); and Cohen.

7. Julie Anne Plax, *Watteau and the Cultural Politics of Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

8. Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 45–74.

9. My methodology and findings also draw on a series of works, mostly written in the 1980s, exploring Watteau's connections with the theater. Beginning with Tomlinson, these also include two important collections: Grasselli and Rosenberg; and Grasselli and Moureau. In the first, see particularly Moureau, "The Roads to Cythera," 493–501; in the second, Giovanni Macchia, "Le mythe théâtral de Watteau," 187–96; André Blanc, "Watteau et le théâtre français," 197–202; and Philippe Hourcade, "Watteau et l'opéra de son temps: Problématique d'un parallèle," 213–18. On the broader literary background, see Ennis.

10. Jérôme de la Gorce, "Watteau à l'Opéra (1702)?" in Grasselli and Rosenberg, 11–16. Three contemporaries specifically mention Watteau at the Opéra in 1702. He was said to have been brought to Paris by an unidentified artist working at the Opéra at that time.

11. Available in facsimile in RGO, vols. 1–2.

12. Louis de Cahusac, *La danse ancienne et moderne, ou Traité historique de la danse* (The Hague, 1754), vol. 2, 169–80: "L'Opéra imaginé par Quinault est une grande action suivie pendant le cours de cinq Actes. C'est un tableau d'une composition vaste, tels que ceux de Raphaël & de Michel-Ange. Le spectacle trouvé par La Motte est un composé de plusieurs Actes différens qui représentent chacun une action mêlée de divertissemens, de chant & de danse. Ce sont des jolis Vateau, des mignatures piquantes, qui exigent toute la précision du dessein, les graces du pinceau, & tout le brillant du coloris."

13. See Cohen, "Watteau's Performers," 166–208, and on the opera-ballet more particularly, 191–92, 223, 247–48. On the body and politics, see Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg, eds., *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

14. Wendy Hilton, *Dance of Court and Theater: The French Noble Style, 1690–1715* (Princeton: Princeton Book Publishers, 1981), 17.

15. For example, see the title page to *Les plaisirs de l'île enchantée* of 1664, in which the components of the festivities were described as "course de bague, collations ornée de machines, comédie mêlée de danse et musique, Ballet du Palais d'Alcine, Feu d'artifice, et autres fêtes galantes et magnifiques."

16. Philippe Beaussant makes a strong case for a progression from the *ballet de cour* to the *ballet royal*. See his *Lully, ou le musicien du soleil* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 175–80, and for a list of Louis's dancing roles, 112–15.

17. On audiences at the Paris Opéra, see James Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Arienne Ducrot, "Les représentations de l'Académie de Musique au temps de Louis XIV," *Recherches sur la Musique Française Classique* 10 (1970): 19–55; Jérôme de la Gorce, "Opéra et son public au temps de Louis XIV," in *The Garland Library of the History of Western Music* (New York: Garland, 1986), vol. 11, 27–46; John Lough, *Paris Theater Audiences in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957); Paul Lacroix, *The Eighteenth Century: Its Institutions, Customs, and Costumes* (New York: Ungar, 1963); and Pierre Méliès, *Le théâtre et le public à Paris sous Louis XIV, 1659–1715* (Paris, 1934; reprint, Geneva: Slatkine, 1976). On Louis XIV's courtiers in Paris, see Jacques Levron, "Louis XIV's Courtiers," in *Louis XIV and Absolutism*, ed. Ragnhild Hatton (London: Macmillan, 1976), 130–53.

18. In general, the term *libertinage* refers to a rebellion against societal norms either through personal manners or through philosophical and political free thought. The second meaning, widespread in the 18th century, was beginning to come into use in the 17th. Though by no means all *libertins de moeurs* (libertines in the sense used mainly today) were also *libertins d'esprit* (freethinkers in a political sense), the two types were often connected. In fact, a libertinism in personal and social mores seems to have served as a front for a more dangerous political freethinking, especially with the rise of *dévoûtisme*, a fashionable religious austerity, in Louis XIV's late reign. On various aspects of libertinism in the 17th and 18th centuries, see Joan DeJean, *Libertine Strategies: Freedom and the Novel in Seventeenth-Century France* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1981); François Moureau and Alain-Marc Rieu, eds., *Eros philosophe: Discours libertins des lumières* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1984); René Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1983); and Antoine Adam, *Les libertins au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1964).

19. Marc Fumaroli, *Le poète et le roi: Jean de La Fontaine en son siècle* (Paris: Fallois, 1997), 210–11.

20. Madeleine de Scudéry, "L'histoire de Sapho," in *Artamène, ou Le grand Cyrus* (1649–53; reprint, Geneva: Slatkine, 1972), vol. 10, 567.

21. Another island utopia is contributed to the utopian literature by an actual revolutionary, Anne Louise d'Orléans, duchesse de Montpensier (the "grande Mademoiselle"), who led French forces in the civil wars of the Fronde. Her *Relation de l'isle imaginaire* (1658) highlights music, dance, and

divertissement (especially the low-culture arts "of the people") as an integral feature of an anti-absolutist, feminist culture.

22. Fumaroli (as in n. 19) and *passim*. Fumaroli situates La Fontaine at the center of a group of poets and artists ("Le Parnasse") directly opposed to the monarchy ("L'Olympe").

23. These include the *tragédies en musique* *Achille et Polixène* (1688), *Enée et Lavinie* (1691), and *Amadis de Grèce* (1699) and the ballet *Le carnaval de Venise* (1699); all of these except the last have been noted by Ennis, 236.

24. RGO, vol. 1, 567–82. Though cast in the mold of the *tragédie en musique*, the work foreshadows the newer genre of the ballet in its emphasis on dance, spectacle, and utopian imagery. It inaugurates a series of ballets reversing the imagery and ideology of eponymous court ballets.

25. *Ibid.*, 572: "le Mont de Cythere, au pied duquel on voit des Boccages & des Prairies agréables."

26. This satire was fueled by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Protestants escaping to England, Holland, and Germany used the free presses of those countries to launch attacks on Louis XIV. These circulated as a clandestine, underground literature within France. On satires of Louis XIV, see Nicole Ferrier-Caverivière, *L'image de Louis XIV dans la littérature française de 1660 à 1715* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981); Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); and Kathryn Hoffmann, *Society of Pleasures: Interdisciplinary Readings in Pleasure and Power during the Reign of Louis XIV* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

27. Since Thomas More's *Utopia*, the concept of ideal societies had often veiled subversive critiques of existing ones. The period of Louis XIV witnessed an extraordinary blossoming of the utopian novel, often with clearly subversive overtones; see Robert C. Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Lise Leibacher-Ouvrard, *Libertinage et utopies sous le règne de Louis XIV* (Geneva: Droz, 1989); and Myriam Yardeni, *Utopie et révolte sous Louis XIV* (Paris: Nizet, 1980). Also noteworthy in this regard is the *tragédie en musique* *Vénus et Adonis* of 1697, which, though without mention of Cythera, recalls the utopian symbolism of Marino's *Adone* and La Fontaine's *Adonis*.

28. Geoffrey Grigson, *The Goddess of Love: The Birth, Triumph, Death and Return of Aphrodite* (London: Constable, 1976), 27–139.

29. On the intersection of libertinism and paganism in 17th-century France, see René Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1983), 53–54, 57–58, 186–87, 285–86, 508–10, 520–22.

30. Marie-Claude Canova-Green, *Benserade: Ballets pour Louis XIV*, 2 vols. (Toulouse: Société de Littératures Classiques, 1997), vol. 2, 601–25.

31. *Ibid.*, 605. The *vers*, usually written by Isaac Benserade, were *galant* poems associating the dancers' roles with their personal lives. The *vers* were not performed as part of the ballet but distributed to the audience as clever commentaries on court life, serving as an ideal vehicle for royal propaganda as well as court gossip.

32. Text in RGO, vol. 2, 7–19.

33. This term was used to denote sections of the ballet roughly equivalent to acts. It derived from the court ballet, known as the *ballet à entrées*, in which the performers would literally make an "entrance" designed to display themselves as luminaries of the court, and often only secondarily as dancers. The term was retained for the opera-ballet, through its *entrées* were—like the acts of opera or the spoken theater—longer and fewer.

34. RGO, vol. 2, 19.

35. See Georgia Cowart, "Of Women, Sex and Folly: Opera under the Old Regime," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 6 (1994): 205–20. Certain plays of the *théâtre de la foire* mention l'Amour (Cupid) as the "patron" of the "filles de l'Opéra."

36. RGO, vol. 2, 12.

37. *Ibid.*

38. There is probably a connection here, also, with Louis XIV's *Ballet de la naissance de Vénus*, in which Louis XIV as Alexander paid obeisance to a statue of Venus representing her temple. La Motte's work may be considered a call for a return to this obeisance, lost in the late reign of Louis XIV.

39. In Florent Dancourt, *Oeuvres de théâtre* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), vol. 2, 310–42. Dancourt's play has been mentioned in almost all serious treatments of the Cythera theme since Louis de Fourcaud's "Scènes et figures théâtrales," *Revue de l'Art Ancien et Moderne* (1904): 305–13.

40. Dancourt was not the first to depict this theme; the court of Henri IV had earlier seen a performance of *Le ballet des pèlerins d'amour* (Bibliothèque Nationale de France ms. 24356, fol. 262r); see Tomlinson, 110–11.

41. Dancourt (as in n. 39), 341: "Au temple du fils de Vénus/Chacun fait son Pèlerinage;/La cour, la ville, le village,/Y sont également reçus./Ceux qui viennent dans le bel âge/Y sont toujours les mieux venus."

42. These elements, like many others, drew on the imagery of the old court entertainments, which had featured water fêtes and magic islands ruled by sorceresses, as in the *Plaisirs de l'isle enchantée*. As always, however, the Cytheran imagery reverses the ideology of the monarchical fête, substituting a positive image of the sacred island for the evil sorcery of the court mythology.

43. The most famous of the ballets on Venetian carnival was *Les fêtes vénitienes* (1710), by André Campra and Antoine Danchet. Possible threads linking the work with Watteau's eponymous painting, though tenuous, have been explored by Elizabeth Schmierer, "Campras und Watteaus *Fêtes vénitienes*: Zur Problematik eines Bezugs," in *Töne, Farben, Formen: Über Musik und die bildenden Künste* (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 1995). Cohen, working from the likelihood that the collector Jean de Julienne entitled Watteau's painting in

1732, briefly discusses the more general connections it holds with the ballet (247–48). See also Georgia Cowart, "Carnival in Venice or Protest in Paris? Commedia dell'arte, the Paris Opéra, and the Prerogative of Pleasure in the Late Reign of Louis XIV," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, forthcoming.

44. Libretto in RGO, vol. 2, 510–22.

45. Victor Fournel, *Les contemporains de Molière: Recueil de comédies, rares ou peu connues jouées de 1650 à 1680* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1866), 195.

46. In another *entrée* the king danced the role of Renaud, the warrior persuaded by his knights to abandon the famous sorceress Armide and her magic island. This victory of Tasso's hero over Armide would be used by Louis's artists on a number of occasions (most notably in Lully's opera *Armide* of 1686) to represent the eventual victory of royal duty over passion.

47. RGO, vol. 2, 520.

48. The scores were published in Paris by Ballard, 1700 and 1713 respectively. In music, the lighthearted *style galant* is seen as a rough equivalent to the Rococo movement in art.

49. Tomlinson, 114.

50. *Ibid.*, 122.

51. The theme of Cythera was inaugurated by this piece at the Foire St-Laurent and continued in *Les pèlerins de Cythère* of Letellier in 1714; *Les aventures de Cythère* of Charpentier in 1715; *L'école des amants* of Alain René Lesage and Fuzelier in 1716; *Les arrêtes de l'Amour* of Lesage and d'Orneval in 1716; *Le remouleur d'amour* of Lesage, Fuzelier, and d'Orneval of 1722; *La folle raisonnable* of Dominique in 1725; *Les pèlerins de Mecque* of Lesage, Fuzelier, and d'Orneval in 1726; *La Pénélope moderne* of Lesage, Fuzelier, and d'Orneval in 1728; and *L'amour marin* of Lesage, Fuzelier, and d'Orneval in 1730. Tomlinson (174–75) includes a listing of plays treating Cythera at the Opéra, the foire, and the Comédie-Italienne but fails to note a play actually entitled *Les amours déguisez* performed at the foire in 1722. Whereas Fuzelier's *Pèlerins* parodied the prologue to the ballet *Les amours déguisez*, the eponymous play, in which a series of comic characters discover love masquerading as other qualities, parodied the following three acts.

52. For example, Alain René Lesage and d'Orneval, *Le théâtre de la foire ou l'opéra comique, contenant les meilleures pièces qui ont été représentées aux foires de S. Germain et de S. Laurent* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), vol. 2, 66, 173.

53. On the *galant* as a middle style, see Georgia Cowart, "Lully enjoué: Galanterie in Seventeenth-Century France," in *Actes de Baton Rouge*, ed. Selma A. Zebouni, in *Biblio 17: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature* 25 (1986): 35–51.

54. Monique Cottret, *La vie politique en France aux XVIe, XVIIe, et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Ophrys, 1991), 23–50.

55. Edme Gersaint, quoted by François Moureau, "Watteau libertin?" in Grasselli and Moureau, 17: "a freethinking libertine, but upright in moral character."

56. Comte de Caylus, quoted in *ibid.*: "le libertinage de son esprit."

57. Hal Opperman, "The Theme of Peace in Watteau," in Grasselli and Moureau, 23–28. See also, in the same collection, Félicien Machelart, "Valenciennes au temps de Watteau," 3–5.

58. Opperman (as in n. 57), 24.

59. La Roque and Fuzelier later took over the joint ownership and directorship of the newspaper *Le Mercure de France*. See Spire Pitou, *The Paris Opéra: An Encyclopedia of Operas, Ballets, Composers, and Performers* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), vol. 1, 253.

60. Two 17th-century works, Peter Paul Rubens's *Garden of Love* and Jacob Jordaens's *The Boating Party*, have been seen as forerunners to Watteau's Cythera paintings; neither, however, contains explicit reference to Cythera. Two other pictorial treatments, one by Bernard Picart (dated 1708) and the other by an anonymous artist, are entitled *Les pèlerins de Cythère*. Depictions of single couples rather than groups of lovers, these exhibit a different tone, quite in line with the comic portrayal in the play of the same name by Fuzelier. At least one of these portrayals antedates that play, however, opening the possibility that the "pilgrim of Cythera" had already become established as a trope by 1708. Both depict cartoonlike pilgrim couples. In Picart's work, the male pilgrim pours water into the female pilgrim's shell, a sexual innuendo that would reappear at the *théâtre de la foire*, in Charpentier's *Les amours de Cythère* of 1715 (Tomlinson, 122).

61. Discussed and reproduced in Michael Faré, "L'embarquement pour Cythère," in *Pèlerinage à Watteau* (Paris: L'Hôtel de la Monnaie, 1977), 257–58. Faré speculates, on the basis of stylistic evidence, that this work may have been painted by Métayer, an early teacher of Watteau in Paris. An enlarged reproduction of the work may be found in Ennis, 267.

62. Émile Dacier, "Autour de Watteau: L'île de Cythère avant l'embarquement," *Revue de l'Art Ancien et Moderne* 71 (1937): 248. The work was also attributed by an early 18th-century writer to the painter Claude Simpol.

63. The Gillot and the anonymous *Embarquement* have been dated ca. 1700–1702 on the basis of stylistic evidence and costumes. The version of the engraving bearing the names of Duflos and Bérain has been dated between 1694 and 1714 on the basis of hairstyles, and the one bearing the name of Picart, after 1714.

64. Discussed by Dewey F. Mosley, "Claude Gillot's *Embarkation for the Isle of Cythera* and Its Relationship to Watteau," *Master Drawings* 12 (spring 1974): 49–56; and earlier by Mussia Eisenstadt, *Watteaus Fêtes galantes und ihre Ur-*

springen (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1930), 61–68; and Dacier (as in n. 62), 247–50.

65. A later connection exists between Gillot and La Motte; in 1709, the artist would illustrate the writer's *Fables*.

66. Again, there is some ambiguity, in that the boat looks as if it could as easily be arriving as departing. Interestingly, the boat contains a coach drawn by horses, implying a dual journey, by both land and sea. The fact that the horses, coach, and people in the boat face the shoreline conveys a sense of Cythera not as some distant destination but as the arts of the public sphere themselves.

67. Bérain served as chief of scenic design at the Opéra until his death in 1711. In 1700, at the time of *Le triomphe des arts*, he was at the pinnacle of his career. There is further evidence that the temple in his *Isle of Cythera* is an operatic one, for it bears a striking resemblance to the temple used for the operatic production immediately preceding *Le triomphe des arts*; see the frontispiece for *Marthesie, première reine des amazones*, in RGO, vol. 1, 701.

68. Although earlier attempts, following Fourcaud, to read the painting as a literal reproduction of Dancourt's play are open to debate, there may be an actual quotation of the play in the figure of Charlotte Desmares, who had played one of its *pèlerines*. In a separate sketch, engraved by Desplaces after Watteau, the figure is entitled "Mlle. Desmarests jouant le rôle de Pelerine."

69. Margret Stuffmann, *Jean-Antoine Watteau: Emschiffung nach Cythera, L'île de Cythère* (Frankfurt: Städtisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, 1982), 75. See also Émile Magne, *Le Château de Saint-Cloud* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1932), 170; Tomlinson, 117; and Ennis, 125.

70. Grasselli and Rosenberg, 261.

71. Peasant status is indicated by the more disheveled, simpler costumes of the men and the peasant blouses with pushed-up sleeves of the women, along with less elaborate hairstyles, straw hats, and a peasant weskit. These costumes characterize several of the figures at the foot of the hill and in the boat. The other costumes are reflective of aristocratic dress, though by 1717, noble and bourgeois dress codes were often indistinguishable.

72. Watteau's drawing of a pilgrim with the tattered cape, staff, and cockleshells typical of pilgrims bound for Compostela in Spain is reproduced in Grasselli and Rosenberg, 142.

73. A.-P. de Mirimonde, "Statues et emblèmes dans l'oeuvre d'Antoine Watteau," *La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France* 1 (1962): 11–20. Mirimonde calls the two versions of the *Pilgrimage* "glorifications of the rose."

74. My comments refer to this version unless otherwise noted.

75. In this regard, the *Pilgrimage* may be compared with a visual source that has gone unrecognized in the scholarly literature, the frontispieces to *Le triomphe des arts*, by F. Ertinger (RGO, vol. 2, 7), and *Les amours déguisez*, by J. B. Scotin (RGO, vol. 2, 510). The former depicts the moment when Pygmalion's statue awakens. Venus watches from a cloud, restraining a cupid with his bow. At the foot of the statue are symbols of the art of sculpture: the measuring stick, compass, chisel, and mallet. Critics have declared that no models exist for the golden, fairytale ship of the *Pilgrimage*, yet the frontispiece to *Les amours déguisez* contains a cartoonlike version of just such an image.

76. A common trope in opera, since *Les fêtes de l'Amour et de Bacchus* in 1674.

77. The imagery of the laurel wreath, signifying victory, was frequently associated with monarchical encomium. According to Peter Burke (as in n. 26), 145, critics reversed this imagery as a form of satire. Burke cites a poem in which Victory hesitates in crowning the king, while a satirical medal depicts Victory actually removing the laurel from Louis XIV's head.

78. RGO, vol. 2, 1.

79. The ship as a symbol of France is discussed in Frances Yates, *Astraea: The*

Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975). It was part of the usual language of royal propaganda; Rubens's painting of Marie de Médicis as regent at the helm of a ship, for example, draws on this language to signify her guidance of the ship of state. In the frontispiece to *Les amours déguisez*, a cupid is holding the tiller.

80. Though a familiar trope, the torch-bearing cupid over the ship in the *Pilgrimage* recalls a similar figure in *Le triomphe des arts*, which had served as the instrument of transformation in the *entrée* of the ballet devoted to Pygmalion.

81. Levey (as in n. 5), 185.

82. Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui concerne les arts et les sciences* (Paris, 1692–97; reprint, Geneva: Slatkine, 1979), vol. 3, 286. These qualities were largely derived from the new feminine influence, exemplified in the conversation of the salons, as Mary Vidal (as in n. 6) has convincingly argued. For a discussion of salon conversation and a new *galant* style in music, see Barbara Russano Hanning, "The Iconography of a Salon Concert: A Reappraisal," in *French Musical Thought, 1600–1800*, ed. Georgia Cowart (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1989; reprint, Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1994), 129–48.

83. Hippolyte Rigault, *Histoire de la querelle des anciens et des modernes* (Paris, 1859; reprint, n.p., Burt Franklin, n.d.), 455.

84. Later in his career, Fuzelier wrote two parodies of Homer for the *foire*: *Arlequin défenseur d'Homère* of 1715 and (with Lesage and d'Orneval) *La Pénélope moderne* of 1728. The second of these, in which a final divertissement of pilgrims once again invites the public as a "pilgrim" to the *théâtre de la foire*, brings together the pilgrimage to Cythera, Homeric satire, and the audience of modern theater entertainment.

85. Paul Duro, *The Academy and the Limits of Painting in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 228–33.

86. Cohen, 226–41. Cohen compares this group movement with the *geranos*, "a line dance thought to have been performed at night around a garlanded statue of Venus." She also links the Venus imagery of the *Pilgrimage* to Rubens's *The Feast of Venus*, ca. 1636, and brings the dimension of a Venus ritual to the already familiar link between the *Pilgrimage* and Rubens's *Garden of Love*, ca. 1630–32.

87. This is probably why La Motte chose to make "L'architecture," similar to a prologue in most respects, the first *entrée* of the work instead. Operatic prologues were associated with the praise of the king. The overshadowing of Apollo by Venus, in that *entrée* as well as throughout the work, might have seemed even more suspect in a prologue. To judge from La Motte's defense of *Le triomphe des arts* against the attack of a "Monsieur le Noble," it seems that this aspect of the work, along with others, came under rather heated attack. See La Motte, "Réponse à la critique du Ballet des Arts," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1970), vol. 2, 182–91. Note also that in this response La Motte calls the opera-ballet by the name of Louis XIV's court ballet that it parodies.

88. Burke (as in n. 26), 22–23.

89. The Neoplatonic theory underlying the ballet is discussed in Robert Isherwood, *Music in the Service of the King* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), 104; and, following the père Menestrier, by Jean-Pierre Néraudau, *L'Olympe du roi-soleil* (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1986), 126.

90. Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 34; and Ennis, 148, 234. For a fuller account of Cythera as an underground press, see Ennis, "False Imprints and Forbidden Books: The Case of Cythera," in *The Darnton Debate: A Postscript*, Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century (forthcoming).