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BLURRING THE LINES: THE INTERMINGLING OF GARDEN AND THEATER  
IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY FRANCE

By

Abbie Elizabeth Smith Rufener

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature

Brigham Young University

December 2008

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Abbie Elizabeth Smith Rufener

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Abbie E. Rufener in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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## ABSTRACT

### BLURRING THE LINES: THE INTERMINGLING OF GARDEN AND THEATER IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY FRANCE

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Department of Humanities, Classics and Comparative Literature

Master of Arts

Seventeenth century French society was a time in which the arts flourished and were used to create an eminence of power and absolutism. The gardens of Vaux-le-Vicomte were commissioned by Nicolas Fouquet and designed by André Le Nôtre. The gardens created a political and social space through the characteristics of design and standards of order which together conveyed power and absolutism. Louis XIV, newly crowned king, recognized at Vaux the perfect vehicle for the portrayal of power.

French theater at the same time was gaining popularity and establishing itself as a great art form. Similar to the gardens at Vaux which illustrated beauty and power through order and careful design, the theater also was subject to specific guidelines of order and design. Powerful men such as Cardinal Richelieu helped to establish the early acceptance and development of theater at this time. Principles set forth for the theater were followed in order to create the perfect

theatrical illusion onstage. Standards such as those set forth by Scudéry, d'Aubignac and the Academy were closely followed while plays such as Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid* were criticized for their lack of adherence to the rules.

Trends and elements of formal gardens aligned with similar trends in French theater to reflect the power of the king. This power was doubly manifested through the garden setting and the theatrical performances which took place within them. The festivities of *The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle* presented numerous plays by Molière such as *Les Fâcheux* and *Tartuffe*. These works demonstrated the power of the king while the week-long festivities created a space in which real and the desire for reality combined.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The seventeenth century marks the French Classical age—a time that began in uncertainty but which later gave way to a prosperity which allowed for a flourishing of the arts. Paintings and sculptures were commonly commissioned for the wealthy elite as a way of touting privilege and authority. But true power was displayed through the manipulation of both real and imaginary spaces as the art of formal gardens and theater testified to the ultimate majesty of the king. As the wealthy and noble constructed palaces, residences and formal gardens, they left a literal mark of their power over nature. As the trends and elements of formal gardens aligned with similar trends in French theater, the power of the king was doubly manifested in the theatrical setting and garden venue of commissioned performances.

Formal gardens were not original inventions of the French but were the culmination of years of garden design and theory from throughout Europe. The French formal garden of Vaux-le-Vicomte put the wealth of Nicolas Fouquet on display. His garden architect, André Le Nôtre, created a garden designed in a manner never before seen. His combination of perspective techniques, elevation gradients, layout and symmetry not only created the illusion of an expansive and never ending garden but did so in a manner that made it intimate and personal. The characteristics that helped create the beauty and power of the garden placed the designer in a position of control. He was

the organizer, the creator. Yet the power that emanated from designing such an influential social and political environment elevated the owner more than anyone else to a higher level.

Coinciding with the development of garden design was the expansion of French theater. Yet another art form that gained popularity during the seventeenth century, theater's history and growth are well documented and follow similar trends and contain similar elements that were found in garden design: experiments with optical illusions, power in presentation, and levels of hierarchy, which became prevalent in the performance of plays and development of French theater. Stage designs began to incorporate garden scenes, particularly in painted backdrops which were designed using the garden perspective.

In the theater, not only were there similar elements but the line between the reality of life and the illusion of the play became blurred. Gardens would often be used as outdoor theaters, their perspective creating the perfect backdrop. Theaters were also permanently built into the garden in order to make use of the garden's perspective designs on a regular basis. As the theater moved into the garden, the blurring of the two arts was furthered by hierarchal elements—in particular the nobility and royalty taking part in the theatrical spectacle as well as the privileged viewpoint. Elements of illusion seen through the use of symmetry and perspective in the garden soon found their way into theater plays. In addition the mockery of daily character types (hypocrites and devout religious leaders) helped to further distort what was real, what was a mockery and what was a combination of the two.

Research on the French formal gardens of the seventeenth century tends to focus on two ideas. The first idea centers on the garden's design and how the design emanated the owner's power. The gardens of Vaux-le-Vicomte were constructed to display the wealth and power of Nicolas Fouquet. His attempts at creating a residence and garden of such grandeur were so successful that the king's jealousy could not be contained. This jealousy eventually led to Fouquet's imprisonment and the creation of the gardens at Versailles which were designed to display the king's absolutism. For the first time in France's history the king had the power to dominate and strictly control the government based on his own terms. Elaborate visual elements such as the château, the gardens, flowers and fountains all combined to create the outward appearance of an inner power. The second way in which French formal gardens have been researched involves a mathematical approach, in other words, a technical aspect of the design plan. The planning and drafting of garden plans—particularly those at Vaux—involved careful mathematical ratios and strict attention to proportions to help create a specific appearance within the garden.

Taking the ways in which the garden has already been looked at, my approach is to present the ways in which French theater and formal gardens of the seventeenth century developed along similar paths and ultimately show how their similarities were used to manifest social and political power in seventeenth century France. Much of the power behind the absolute ruler of the time, Louis XIV, came from important visual materials. Artworks he commissioned, gardens he had designed, and performances which he hosted all had the same purpose: to glorify and present the king as the most powerful ruler.

When addressed separately research certainly shows the ways in which absolutism was attained by Louis XIV. But when studied together, discovering the ways in which the two art forms follow parallel paths and converge at certain moments, one can witness the strength of a comparative approach. The combined elements found in the garden and theater emanated the power Louis wanted. The king wanted to be viewed and perceived as the absolute ruler of France. Gardens, theater, and particularly garden in the theater created that image for him.

## CHAPTER II THE GARDEN

French society during the seventeenth century produced numerous changes and developments in the arts. During the second half of the century, garden design became a key staging ground for the display and interplay of society and art. During this time garden architects took more control over the design, creating gardens that reflected strict, formal layouts and reflected the hand of man in their construction. Their control over the observer's visual and physical experience was manifest through controlled viewpoints, symmetrical walkways and the revealing of hidden features.

The gardens of Vaux-le-Vicomte by André Le Nôtre were perhaps the epitome of French formal garden design and their layout manifested the control the architect had over the viewer's physical and visual experience (Fig. 1). The gardens were designed in a manner that gave the appearance of closeness, yet their true design concealed great spatial depth as well as gradual decreases in elevation, often times unnoticed at first glance. The creation of the gardens at Vaux was a method of displaying wealth and a way in which the owner attempted to portray a sense of power in a time of instability. Though many other formal gardens were constructed after its time, Vaux was the first to create a garden space where power and social hierarchies could play themselves out. Such a design would never again be replicated in such a unique manner. The illusion and beauty created at Vaux not only worked to manipulate, shape and control the perceptions of the viewer but also combined to display power and idealize the formality of the garden.

## I. Early European Gardens

The radically new design of Vaux can only be appreciated and understood against the background of historical French and European garden design. Early modern European gardens traced their heritage back to the gardens of Classical Rome. Before the fall of Rome, Romans had created formal gardens such as those of Lucullus, Nero and Hadrian. Today, these ancient garden sites form parts of the gardens of the Villa d'Este, Villa Aldobrandini and Villa Barberini.<sup>1</sup> With the end of the Roman Empire in 476 AD much of the art of gardening was lost. Thankfully the formal structure of gardening was able to survive during the Middle Ages partly due to monks and nuns who created small gardens in their abbeys and monasteries. It is assumed by garden scholars that this practical tradition was brought to France by Romans and thereafter preserved by these various clergy in church living quarters.

With the emphasis upon ancient design and principles in the Renaissance, architects of formal gardens turned their studies to the days of Ancient Rome. Italian Renaissance gardens were able to manifest the rediscovery and development of linear perspective with the use of geometric space and design.<sup>2</sup> Typical Italian Renaissance gardens such as those of the Villa Medici and Villa d'Este were usually constructed on a sloping terrain with the villa located at the summit in order to provide the best view over the gardens as well as the countryside and cityscape beyond (Fig. 2). The gardens themselves were created on terraces and carved into hillsides—a design often required

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen Churchill Semple, "Ancient Mediterranean Pleasure Gardens," *Geographical Review* 19, No. 3 (July, 1929): 438-39.

<sup>2</sup>Allen S. Weiss, *Mirrors of Infinity: The French Formal Garden and 17<sup>th</sup> Century Metaphysics*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), 13.



because of the Italian landscape. These gardens were not “enclosed microcosms” as they had been in the monasteries and abbeys, instead, they provided a “god’s-eye view” upon the estate.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike medieval designs, the design of the Italian Renaissance garden was not made to stand alone; instead it was created as an extension of the architecture of the villa. Divided into compartments, the classic Renaissance garden was able to achieve its function regardless of its design being large or small.<sup>4</sup> Early gardens were characteristically small, private places for meditation. The Italian Renaissance gardens demonstrated man’s control over nature by its enclosure and strict geometrical outlines. Most Italian Renaissance gardens were based upon the unit of a square with the garden divided into equal parts by paths which crossed in the middle of the square. This pattern was often extended to create rectangles formed out of double or triple squares and could be extended as much as the designer desired. This resulted in grid patterns of squares separated by paths. The Italians called these individual squares *compartimenti*, the French would call them *compartiments*, and the English, compartments. Each compartment was usually surrounded by a waist-high hedge or lattice fence separating the area from the outside and making it reclusive. By the sixteenth century, Italy’s formal gardens were the dominant style in Europe, though many variations existed.

With enclosures similar to the Italian model, English gardens of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were designed with a square frame within which were various aromatic plants and culinary herbs. Pathways were laid out with fine gravel. This

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Christopher McIntosh, *Gardens of the Gods: Myth, Magic and Meaning in Horticulture*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 76.

design later evolved to contain hedges made from boxwood and, when clipped within a foot or two of the ground, were more correctly known as *parterres*.

Dutch gardens in the late sixteenth century were similar to those found throughout Europe: small and symmetrical in nature, designed on a rectangular pattern and separated into small square or rectangular areas. *Parterres de broderie*<sup>5</sup> comprised many gardens along with fountains, mazes and ornamental decorations. By the 1630's, just twenty years before the creation of Vaux, the Dutch garden started using classical proportions and order in its design. Though the overall area of the garden increased, it remained enclosed by canals, trees and small box hedges.<sup>6</sup>

Just as the Renaissance tradition developed from references and influences of the classical past, so too did garden fashion develop due to the influence of gardens and garden architecture from the classical age.<sup>7</sup> Garden design at this time was an object of fashionable display but did not become popular in Italy until the fifteenth century when the conscious use of gardens as a means of displaying rank became favored.<sup>8</sup> Mukerji discusses how, unlike hair accessories, dresses and jewelry, a garden was not portable and was a symbol of greater status because it required others to come to it.<sup>9</sup> Formal gardens came to evoke the same idea as a formal occasion, one in which marks of social status were apparent. The evident labor and resources required to maintain the *parterres*,

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<sup>5</sup>A parterre with elaborate embroidery-like design.

<sup>6</sup>Carla S. Oldenburger-Ebbers, "Gids voor de Nederlandse Tuin- en Landschapsarchitectuur," *The New Royal Horticultural Society dictionary of gardening* (London : Macmillan, 1992. Vol.3), 316.

<sup>7</sup>Chandra Mukerji, "Reading and Writing with Nature: Social Claims and the French Formal Garden," *Theory and Society* 19, No. 6 (Dec. 1990): 656.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 677.

long canals, sculptures and fountains were ways in which the owner could demonstrate his power and status.<sup>10</sup>

## **II. Development of the French Formal Garden**

France's invasion of Italy by Charles VIII in 1495 introduced the French not only to a world of humanistic traditions but also to principles of gardening France had never before seen. Impressed by the Neapolitan gardens of the exiled King Alfonso II, Charles VIII was greatly influenced by the orderly masterpieces that artists and craftsmen were able to create with plants, flowers, and water. Upon leaving Naples in July of 1495, the French army carried with them large quantities of Italian art which had a 'reverse invasion' effect upon France. The influence of the Italian tapestries, paintings and sculptures used to decorate French châteaux and abbeys was to have an impact on landscape art through the introduction of their different ideas and designs.<sup>11</sup>

One of King Alfonso's teachers, Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, who greeted Charles VIII upon his entry, had written about the ideal "princely garden." Gardens, he claimed, held different purposes for the prince than they did for the common man. For the prince, a garden served as an area for walking as well as for banquets and other princely demands. Most importantly, the garden, "allowed the prince to shine not only in the city but in the country, lest when he abandons the cares of the former he should seem to pass from light into shadow."<sup>12</sup> Pontano also claimed that the garden of a prince should be large, with grounds specifically set aside for pleasure. Arbors, summer houses, and fish

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<sup>10</sup>Kenneth Woodbridge, *Princely Gardens : The Origins and Development of the French Formal Style*. (London: Thames and Hudson, c1986), 97.

<sup>11</sup>William Howard Adams, *The French Garden, 1500-1800*. (New York : Braziller, 1979), 10.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 11.

ponds were to decorate the park, while streams and fountains as well as woods filled with a variety of birds and animals should grace the property. A beautiful vista from the palace should look over the grounds, he wrote, and allow visitors to enjoy its splendor from afar.<sup>13</sup>

When Charles VIII returned to France, he began constructing palaces and gardens. Upon his death, his successor, Louis XII, continued the fervor, improving his royal château at Blois and extending the gardens beyond the limitations of the castle walls. This extension demonstrated the psychological freedom from physical restraints of the past and the beginning of a slightly more expansive garden.<sup>14</sup> This new freedom, however, still had significant limitations; though outside the castle walls, the garden area was still constrained by a protective barrier wall (Fig. 3).

Even with the influence of Italian gardens, those in France during the sixteenth century remained conservative. Many grounds were constructed on larger scales and were decorated with Italian embellishments such as fountains and sculptures, but despite these embellishments and the occasional extension beyond castle walls, most gardens remained enclosed and static. Gardens constructed in Italy normally extended far from the palace into the countryside while French gardens in places such as Amboise and Blois were still limited by walls and secluded space which limited the view and aesthetic impact of the garden.<sup>15</sup>

The influence the Italian style had on gardens in France is apparent, but the French soon began to add their own techniques. The differences between Italian and

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>15</sup>Adams, 13.

French social conditions and topography meant that the Italian garden needed to be adapted and altered in its new setting. The most obvious difference was that French gardens were more flat and expansive allowing the viewer to see the entire garden while Italian gardens were built amidst hills preventing it from being seen as a whole. In addition, French gardens tended to strongly emphasize symmetry and order. These specific layouts and strict geometrical outlines caused many contemporaries to claim that the French style tyrannized or forced nature.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the differences, Italian influence was manifested through numerous Italian artists and humanists brought to the court of Francis I at Fontainebleau to aid in the creation of art. In addition, new books on garden design and engravings of gardens were circulating throughout Europe, further exposing French engineers and architects to Italian styles. As the focus on visual aspects continued, groups of artists, architects, sculptors, musicians and painters were commissioned to create extravagant spectacles at the residences of nobility. The 1610 musical drama *Alcine*, which featured a young Louis XIII, had the stage adorned with grottos and jetting fountains specifically for the occasion.<sup>17</sup>

Before Le Nôtre and Vaux-le-Vicomte, royal gardens were created under the watchful eyes of the gardeners of the Mollet family, particularly Jacques (father), Claude (son) and André (grandson). Jacques was royal gardener at the Château d'Anet which was designed in the Italian formal style. It was here that Claude received his apprenticeship in gardening which would influence his writings in his treatise entitled

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<sup>16</sup>Weiss, 15.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 64

*Théâtre des plans et jardinage*. This treatise changed the garden world with its reflections of ancient traditions and skills as well as the personal gardening experiences of Claude himself.<sup>18</sup> In it he included entire garden plans which demonstrated the ideas of proportion within the formal garden. Claude's son André was royal gardener to Queen Christina of Sweden and to three French kings, and also wrote his own illustrated folio on gardening. His death came at about the time that André Le Nôtre was becoming well known.

Writings by the Mollet family as well as other known garden architects such as Charles Estienne, Oliver de Serres and Jacques Boyceau often addressed ideas behind the practice of gardening and included various designs and styles of gardening. The geometry of the garden was a central focus to most of these authors. The garden's beauty rested in symmetrical balance and proportion, the way in which flower beds worked in harmony with pathways and waterworks. It was through such a delicate balance that the beauty of nature could be fully expressed.<sup>19</sup>

French gardeners at the time leading up to the creation of Vaux were looking for a way in which they could improve upon the ideas of the ancients. Their desire was to maintain the classical style through order and symmetry and build upon it in a way that would express the economic successes of France while also displaying the cultural and political desires of the court.<sup>20</sup> Links to the classical past made certain that the design was acceptable while a twist of modernity created something unique.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 661.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, 657.

The popular Baroque architectural style of the time—seen most often in Italy—was characterized by curvilinear lines and unconventional architectural designs. The French Classical style, however, tended to highlight the Classical manner of the ancients mixed with an ever subtle transitioning from the medieval technique. Formal architectural elements of this Classical style included strict symmetry and applied orders such as classical capitals and giant pilasters, seen in the structural design of the Vaux château. These constituents of order and symmetry expanded to the gardens where the owner of a château could further the use of these elements, fashioning an even more expansive portrayal of wealth and power.

### **III. Nicolas Fouquet and Louis XIV**

It was between the birth of André Le Nôtre in 1613 and his death in 1700 that France's characteristic gardens came into full development and prestige. Yet the vibrant forms they took under Le Nôtre's guidance and later through the patronage of King Louis XIV developed from a long tradition. It was the result of a constantly evolving form receiving contributions from gardeners, artists and architects alike. The new gardens created during this time period required large sums of money which a monarchy and lifestyle such as France's ruler, Louis XIV, could provide.

Before Louis's years of absolutism began, he was outshined by Nicolas Fouquet's construction of the château and gardens at Vaux-le-Vicomte. Schooled among the Jesuits, Fouquet became an *avocat* at the Parlement of Paris and held various public administrative positions. Buying his way into various ranks, he eventually became superintendent of finances to Cardinal Mazarin, chief minister of France. His wealth increased both with his new position as well as his marriage in 1651 to Marie de Castille.

Racking up ‘fraudulent operations’ Mazarin paid little attention to his deficits and upon his deathbed, left all financial problems in the hands of his successor, Jean-Baptiste Colbert. With Mazarin dead, Fouquet expected to be made head of the government but Louis XIV assumed control and made certain that Fouquet was simply chief minister, under the watch of Colbert. It was Fouquet’s construction of a grand château outside of Paris that caught the attention of the king, who maintained a close watch.

With the completion of the château and gardens in 1661, by Fouquet, Louis XIV had heard and was aware of their magnificence. Certain that Fouquet had embezzled the money the king was intent upon his destruction. Fouquet, unaware of the king’s anger and wanting to display his commissioned home and garden, hosted a party to which the King was invited. Hoping to impress the king with the château and garden’s beauty (in anticipation of maintaining a higher position amongst the king’s advisors) Fouquet made certain that no expense was spared the evening of the party. On August 17, 1661 it is fair to say that with the château and garden as his backdrop, Fouquet displayed himself as the most powerful man in France. Weeks later, however, he was no one. The extravagance of the event made the king jealous. The gardens displayed an order and power that ought to have been reflective of the king, not his financial minister. Three weeks following the event, Fouquet was arrested and charged with embezzlement.

#### **IV. Vaux-le-Vicomte**

The gardens at Vaux were the estate’s crowning glory: a combination of order, symmetry, optical illusion and power. The magnificence of the gardens has been attributed to the variety of perspectives created through the adherence to certain characteristics. At Vaux, Le Nôtre created a garden whose characteristics followed the



guidelines of classical order, all while integrating the innovative ideas regarding *perspective ralentie* and implementing optical theories to create a sense of flattened perspective.

Viewed from the château the gardens appear small and intimate, yet when explored, the viewer realizes their true immensity and experiences the power of the size and design. Power is evoked through the visual illusion—hidden elements, gradual elevation shifts unnoticed at first glance and much more—as well as their ability to present privileged viewpoints. The varying lines of the gravel walkways help create grandeur, strict symmetry and order in the gardens. Water, another physical element, adds prestige and a sense of expansiveness with its ability to reflect its surroundings. Other smaller and more subtle design elements such as sculptures help round out the larger elements, resulting in feelings of prestige and power, illusion and beauty. The garden's organization of space, perspectives of far and near, as well as its symmetrical layout are elements which help demonstrate man's control over nature, his power to choose what is the privileged viewpoint and his ability to govern and decide upon the laws of beauty.

Part of the grandeur of the gardens at Vaux is their ability to control nature: to take what was once wild and free and place it within the bonds of a planned design—to alter the landscape in such a way as to create the illusion of far and near and to evoke beauty through controlled design. Natural elements are found throughout the gardens: water, flowers, trees and rocks. Add to these natural elements a human touch: groves that are sculpted, canals which flow through a major portion and sculptures which are cut from stone; the ensemble combines the natural and manmade. The way in which these

elements are placed, the designs they form and the viewpoints they create demonstrate humanity's attempts to decipher beauty in nature by giving it formal structure.

The gardens' elements were harmoniously placed throughout the garden to complement one another. One area was secured for groves, which were seen as more personal and intimate than grand perspectives—an area for quiet contemplation. The flower gardens consisted of numerous kinds of plants, herbs, flowers, and bushes arranged into sections throughout the parterres and rose in arches and cabinets according to the ideas of the master of the château.<sup>21</sup> Man's preference for beauty took precedence over practicality and no expense was spared.

Water in a contained state, such as a pool or pond, could act as a mirror, both reflecting and distorting the images surrounding it.<sup>22</sup> The presence of water elements was also the ultimate expression of Le Nôtre's display of humanity's ability to control nature. By forcing water to go where it did not naturally belong, Le Nôtre was able to take a liquid that is notoriously difficult to manipulate and shape it in the manner necessary to fulfill the garden's design plan.<sup>23</sup>

In areas that had an absence of various flowering shrubs, effects with water were particularly important and every effort was expended to make them as varied and unusual as possible. Climaxes in the garden's design were brought about through the culmination of many smaller elements. At Vaux, one of the climaxes was a series of cascades located on the bank which supported the last terrace facing the canal (Fig. 4). The waters tumbled from masks and shells, set in a long wall built of colored stones, into a pool separated

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<sup>21</sup> Mariage Thierry, *The World of André Le Nôtre*, trans. Graham Larkin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 49.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 56.

from the canal by a broad, graveled terrace. Since the bank was not visible from the house, the cascades could not be seen until one reached them, yet their tumbling and splashing resounded throughout the gardens, constituting a gradual crescendo as one approached. Another smaller element contributing to a larger climax was a small round area of the canal affectionately called *La Poêle*. The canal itself was actually the river Anqueuil, straightened out (by man) and made to flow between banks of marble for half a mile inside the park. *La Poêle* (meaning the frying pan) was a small circular area where the river entered the canal area (Fig. 5). Instead of simply allowing the water to enter directly from the river, this small rounded *poêle* acted as a collecting area to the canal.

Sculptures were placed throughout the garden; the largest and most impressive were rough-surfaced and placed at the far of the garden in the grotto. Here were sculpted gods of mythology—figures known to royalty and nobility. Other sculptures found throughout the garden were those of Pan, Faunus, Hercules, Pomona, Minerva, Bacchus, Ceres, and Flora. All of these figures were associated with gardens, horticulture or fertility in Classical times yet beyond their mythological representation, their presence in the garden was usually one of symbolic power, meant to contribute to the evocation of man's wealth and control.

The visual creation of Vaux's great depth was established by the adherence to strict rules of geometry and mathematics. Power was exemplified in its elements only by the exact following of rules. Gardens had previously been a place of quiet retreat—places of meditation. Their beautiful and simple plans had kept them restrained within the walls of châteaux and villas; the seventeenth century French garden, however, transformed the

garden into a public exhibition of status and power regulated by a close adherence to standards and guidelines.

## V. The Garden Illusion: Organization of Space

The gardens at Vaux were constructed somewhere between 1653 and 1656. Surrounding towns were demolished, hills were leveled, streams and rivers were re-routed, and trees were planted. With nearly 18,000 workers constructing the gardens and château, the creation of Vaux was an enormous task and nothing was spared.<sup>24</sup> Today's viewer seeing the manicured design of Vaux might find it difficult to imagine the area's original forested state.

Beginning at the terrace at the south end of the château, a strong vertical axis is presented down the center of the garden (Fig. 6). Divided into three sections, and working from the inside out, the first section consists of long horizontal parterres on either side of the main axis followed by another walking path. Originally two circular fountains were located at the northern head of the parterres but these were not included in the restoration. East of the central parterres is the area known as the Parterre of the *Couronne* which contains two small grassy parterres each with a small circular fountain (Fig. 7). Directly east of these grassy *parterres* is a larger oval shaped fountain. Further to the east is what is known as the *grille d'eau* or small cascade (Fig. 8 & 9). The original design of the small cascade had eleven jet fountains coming out of a narrow rectangular fountain at the top of the steps. Unfortunately the cascade was damaged and has deteriorated due to years of neglect and no longer has the fountain feature. To the west of the central parterres is a flower parterre which at different times contains a variety of

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<sup>24</sup>F. Hamilton Hazlehurst, *Gardens of Illusion: The Genius of André Le Nostre* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1980), 17.

flowers while at other times is simply grass (Fig. 10 & 11). The end of the first section is completed with a medium-sized circular pond with fountain.

The second section continues the strong vertical walkway which acts as a divider between the two main areas. Both sides are identical and are presently flanked by two long but narrow grass strips with large stone flower pots evenly interspersed throughout. Le Nôtre's original design had an *allée d'eau* in place of the narrow lawn beds. At regular intervals the *allée* would expand into small square areas with a fountain jet in the middle (Fig. 12). Directly on either side of what was once the *allée* are long, rectangular grass areas with large oval shaped fountains. The end of the first section is completed with a large rectangular pond.

The third and final section of the formal garden is the canal area. What was once an impressive and spectacular water cascade located just south and below the rectangular pond is today much smaller and very simple. The grand cascade originally contained twenty individual cascades, separated by pillars, with grotesque masks from which water spilled into shell shaped basins and twenty-nine jets of water (Figs. 4 & 13).<sup>25</sup> Today the fountain only retains two of the original basins and twenty-one small fountains on the terrace level. Directly across from the cascade is a grotto containing seven niches each separated by a term—a small column upon which is perched a god-like figure from the torso up. Two river gods depicted in stone are situated within a small cave which flanks the sides of the grotto (Fig. 14). The grotto and canal are separated by a large canal which runs horizontal to the garden's vertical plan. One kilometer in length, the canal is hidden from view, not apparent until one is only a few hundred feet from it. The original plan

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<sup>25</sup>Michael Brix, *The Baroque Landscape: Andre Le Notre & Vaux le Vicomte*, trans. Steven Lindbreg (New York: Rizzoli, 2004), 180.

had the garden extending much deeper into the forest. Where the Hercules statue stands today (a modern addition) the garden was to continue southward, nearly the same distance it had already covered from the château. At Vaux, Le Nôtre was able to create a garden which incorporated optical illusion, symmetry, and order, all done through its use of design elements. Though the garden was in nature and consisted of natural elements, its structure implied man's control over nature.

## **VI. The Illusion of Depth and Privileged Viewpoints**

Le Nôtre's design is one in which elements of the garden are engaged in a "continuous alternation of hiding and revealing."<sup>26</sup> The view one has of the garden is dominated by its planar composition, a central and key element which helps in the creation of the garden's spatial illusions. Despite its length (more than half a mile long), Le Nôtre was able to conceive of a plan which would allow the viewer to view the entire garden from the single vantage point of the terrace. To do so he employed different gardening techniques creating an illusionistic view.

Using a technique known as *perspective ralentie* Le Nôtre's design for Vaux took a perspective familiar to painting and incorporated it into garden design in a striking and influential manner.<sup>27</sup> Though the idea of *perspective ralentie* was developed by André Mollet in his treatise *Le Jardin de Plaisir*, it was André Le Nôtre who turned it into a popular and fashionable style. This new style of perspective (*perspective ralentie*) is marked by an increase in the size of garden elements the further away they are located from the château. The further away an object was from the terrace or privileged

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 86-7.

viewpoint, the larger it was in an attempt to alter traditional perspective and make the garden appear smaller than it was in reality. The process was used in France beginning in the 1630s but was fully realized by Le Nôtre's designs at Vaux, further establishing the ideas of beauty necessary for a formal garden and deepening man's rule over nature.

The altered perspective Le Nôtre designed applied techniques familiar amongst painters to garden architecture. In doing this, Le Nôtre's design seemed to bring all things closer to the viewer, which created a feeling of intimacy. Yet a deeper discovery of the garden revealed the opposite. Instead of a small garden laid out directly in front of the viewer, there was a large, elevated garden, which revealed elements not seen at first glance. This design, which gave the appearance of one thing but revealed another, gave power and control to the creator and also reflected similarly upon the owner.

An example of *perspective relantie* is seen through the design of the lawn parterre situated along the south terrace near the canal. Its design is three times as large as the embroidery parterres located directly in front of the château yet from the building's terrace they appear to be comparable in size (Fig. 15). A similar design is manifest in the garden's four pools on the lawn parterre. When viewed from the château the grouping of the pools demonstrates a common proportion in parts and measurement between all four. The illusion that makes it appear as if the pools are similar in size was created by "calculating exactly the differences among the pools' sizes when designing them so that the effect of perspective would be decelerated—indeed, eliminated completely."<sup>28</sup> In addition, the surface of the square pool at the end is eight times the size of the round pool that is closest to the château while the terms at the grotto are three times as large as the

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 86.

sculptures closest to the château.<sup>29</sup> This way of designing almost completely eliminates perspective and a feeling of distance, rendering the garden much smaller visually than it is in reality.

In addition to the various perspectives, the château is a constant sight throughout the garden, a symbol representing power and presence. Beginning at the entrance of the grounds the château commands attention. A balustrade bridge reveals a hidden moat while a large courtyard greets the visitor and presents the château (Fig. 16). The appearance of the château can be seen dually throughout the gardens—the château itself viewed directly and the château viewed as a reflection (Fig. 7). From the large pool located on the lawn parterre, the château's reflection is seen in the water even though it is more than a quarter of a mile away. This is an example of one of the first *miroirs d'eau* in the history of gardening and one of Le Nôtre's major inventions and contributions to the art of gardening. The illusion was created by following the law of optics: "...for the viewer, the object's angle of incidence has to correspond to the angle of reflection of the mirror image."<sup>30</sup>

Le Nôtre's application of angles of incidence is once more applied to the grotto and square pool on the southern end of the garden. It would appear that the grotto lies directly behind the pool (Figs. 17 & 18). Yet interestingly enough, its reflection is not shown in the waters. In reality the grotto is hundreds of feet away from the reflecting pool and does not correspond with the angle of reflection as it is of a lower elevation (Fig. 19). From the château, and even when the viewer is at the end of the second section,

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 96.



the grotto appears to be directly behind the rectangular pool (Fig. 20), yet hundreds of feet, a cascade and a large canal separate the two, yet another example of Le Nôtre's power to control the visual experience of the viewer.

At other times, Le Nôtre uses perspective to hide notable features of the gardens. The most well known surprise element at Vaux is the Grand Canal which can only be seen once the viewer actually arrives at the feature. The canal runs perpendicular to the palace at the end furthest from the château. From the terrace the canal remains unseen because of the rule of optics which has it set below the viewing plane. Since the viewing plane is situated around 50 meters above sea level, the sight line follows a diagonal drop of 15 meters down to the grotto. The terracing of the garden prevents the canal, which is 25 meters below the viewing plane, from being seen. Not until the viewer is a few hundred feet from the canal does it come into view (Fig. 19).

Vaux-le-Vicomte exemplified the French formal garden's principle that the garden should be seen as an entire unit. The Italian gardens only a century before—spread out over hilltops and valleys—did not allow for a holistic view. The French garden needed to be viewed as a whole in order to appreciate its beauty and recognize the power which governed its design. The emphasis on perspective at Vaux was perhaps best demonstrated by the existence of a privileged viewpoint.

The privileged viewpoint at Vaux was from the south terrace of the château in which the parterres, featuring sculptural display and dominated by elaborate fountains, cascades and grottos could be viewed in their entirety.<sup>31</sup> It is from this terrace that

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<sup>31</sup>George B. Tobey Jr., *A History of Landscape Architecture: The Relationship of People to Environment*, (New York: American Elsevier Publishing Company, Inc. 1973), 113.

historians have argued the formal gardens of Vaux were meant to be seen.<sup>32</sup> The château served as a figural representation from which all intended proportions and positions were carefully calculated, creating a powerful central position from which everything was visible, and which in turn was visible from all parts of the garden, omnipresent and all-seeing.

The idea of a privileged viewpoint need not take away from the splendor and magnificence of the grounds seen from various vantage points within the garden itself though. From the many acres of designed landscape the garden can be seen from a variety of viewpoints, each unique in its own right. The perspective is clearly defined by the eye of the viewer but can also be influenced by the architect's design. The visitor to Vaux would be encouraged to experience the gardens from a wide variety of perspectives. If the viewer were to privilege one particular view exclusively, the garden aesthetic would be hindered. Exploring the numerous viewpoints uncovered the complexity of the gardens and was another way in which Le Nôtre's careful illusions were revealed. As Wiess has stated, "To privilege any single visual presentation of an object or scene would equally be to limit one's grasp of the world."<sup>33</sup>

## **VII. Lines of Symmetry and Order**

It is key to acknowledge the significance of perspective, particularly in the layout and design of Vaux. Later designs of Le Nôtre did not contain, as strictly, this same adherence to perspective, and thus the flattened perspective created at Vaux was never again replicated in full. The gardens of Vaux-le-Vicomte are inclined to impose a

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<sup>32</sup>Mukerji, 659-60.

<sup>33</sup>Weiss, 34.

particular promenade upon those who enjoy it. Its straight lines guide the viewer throughout its numerous routes. In addition, the vanishing point disappears at the horizon, giving the impression that the gardens continue on for infinity. This view of ‘infinity’ creates an environment which has control upon its subjects because of its ability to govern what the viewer saw.

In his design of the garden, Le Nôtre kept in mind that the building structure was to be the main actor on the garden stage. Constructed in its yellow limestone, the château is raised upon a base and symmetrically placed in its surroundings so that it lies uncluttered among the pathways, trees, canals and parterres. Yet its unity within the garden is easy to see and feel. No matter where one visits throughout the gardens, the château is nearly always visible, reflected in pools or peering through a grove of trees (Figs. 21 & 22). It is never lost amongst the trees, bushes, flowers, sculptures or fountains; its power and influence are always visible.<sup>34</sup> The radiating single axes that are vertical, horizontal and diagonal all direct the eye back towards the château.

Adhering to the Classical design, the gardens are laid out in clearly ordered axes. The main axis begins at a tree-encircled round point and continues through the ground’s entrance and château, continuing across the gardens, and eventually concluding at a wooded area a great distance from the building.<sup>35</sup> Off of this main axis are a variety of axes, each different widths and lengths, running in parallel, perpendicular and diagonal directions from the main axis. The various directions of the axes might seem to cause chaos and confusion but do quite the opposite. Their strict diagonal, vertical and

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>35</sup>Hazlehurst, 19.

horizontal lines add order and clarity by their straight form and strategic placement. Their various directions create intrigue by providing a wide variety of areas to be covered and explored. The numerous axes that lead off the main axis create an area that is meant to be explored, thus creating a garden that appears smaller than it truly is.

Vaux's impressive nature rests upon its design, undergirded by rules that help to create and regulate the view that appears before the eyes. Another scholar notes that a spectator viewing the work of Le Nôtre at Vaux would "feel at once that he ha[d] a complete grasp of the design; he experience[d] an overwhelming sense of order, of balance, of apparent symmetry, and above all, of perfect homogeneity."<sup>36</sup> So orderly were his layouts that nearly every viewer would feel impressed by its features of structure and balance, unaware of the principles that governed the creation.

The organization of the garden was the ideal example of man's creative power as it demonstrated man's ability to control nature. Regarding the idea of controlled nature, Madeleine de Scudéry—a friend of Fouquet and attendee of the fateful party— noted that at Vaux "the imagination cannot conceive anything so grand, so agreeable, so magnificent; Nature, as omnipotent as she is, cannot produce anything so beautiful; and art, which often prides itself on imitating her, of surpassing her sometimes, and embellishing her always, could never create anything this marvelous. Thus one can say that what one sees here is a masterpiece of Art and Nature joined together."<sup>37</sup>

The constituents of order and symmetry also created an expansive depiction of wealth and prestige, two elements which royalty and nobility of the time were attempting

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>37</sup>Brix, 60.

to portray. The complete composition, with its central viewpoint, formed a design intended for show, display, and delight for all visitors.<sup>38</sup> The symmetry and order created strict promenades at Vaux to be adhered to by visitors. These structured promenades served as ways to make nobility known to others visiting the grounds and were also a way to show off beautifully adorned robes and gowns. Similar to the hierarchal society of France at the time, the garden too had its own hierarchy; its terraces were concealed in such a way that the differences in elevation seemed small and gradual (Fig. 23). Most of the steps are very low while others are hidden with clipped hedges. The various levels of the garden are highly complex yet are presented in a manner which demonstrates ease and beauty.

As Mukerji argues, gardens formed part of the material culture of France and were used to ascribe affluence and power to the patron. Most importantly, gardens were designed so that each aspect was carefully planned and carried out in order to attribute the overall display of wealth and prosperity to the owner. Gardens were “models of the exercise of power over nature... and of integrating divergent elements within an organized whole.”<sup>39</sup>

Le Nôtre’s ability to plan and create a garden that displayed great human control yet manifested such beauty illustrates his control in creating an artificial artistic space in which social and political power was symbolically represented. His choice of privileged viewpoint from the terrace of the château found political and social similarities in the privileged viewpoint of the king. What Louis saw that fateful night at Vaux represented

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<sup>38</sup>Tobey, 113.

<sup>39</sup>Mukerji, 653.

such high forms of power and idealism that, because it did not glorify him, it was unacceptable. Everything that made the garden what it was—beautiful, spectacular, and grand—challenged the king’s authority.

In the gardens of Vaux, Louis recognized the perfect vehicle of power and absolutism yet, it did not belong to him. That night the king realized that the eminence of power which the gardens manifested needed to reflect his supremacy. What he decided was right for France would need to become law and all would look to him as *the* ruler of France, *the* governing body, *the* head of state. What he felt was beautiful would become such, and his preferences in fashion and taste would become the fashion and taste of all of France. Just as the garden’s design principles helped to create its beauty, so too did Louis establish standards by which all of France could distinguish that which was beautiful and acceptable, while at the same time establishing his reign of absolutism.

### CHAPTER III THE THEATER

The structure and elements that helped to create Vaux were also reflected in the establishment of French theater. Similar to the garden's regulated design and creation of social and political space, French seventeenth century theater was characterized by strict rules, wealthy patrons, and optical effects which mirrored the aesthetics of French formal gardens. The increased interest in theater required need for regulation in order for man to maintain control over its growth and splendor.

Elements of the theater followed similar developmental lines of the formal garden. The transitioning of performances in *jeux de paume* (tennis courts) to actual theater buildings brought with it privileged viewpoints—a central location suited for only the wealthiest and noblest of spectators, a focus on perspective and allowed for the incorporation of new elements such as lighting and stage design. Combined, these new aspects took the acceptance of the theater to a level that produced plays which made powerful social and political statements and which also helped create an environment in which audience members could become convinced that what they were witnessing was not a performance but reality: a theatrical illusion so spectacular and convincingly realistic that the viewer did not question the elements that made it such. The creation of rules and regulations focused on the ideas of *vraisemblance* and *bienséance*, ideas which emphasized presenting realistic plays which were both fitting and morally appropriate.

## **I. Early Theater Beginnings: A History**

French theater's early beginnings are found in the medieval morality plays—an attempt of the Catholic Church to teach through the medium of acting. But by the beginning of the seventeenth century theater was no longer the exclusive domain of morality plays: theater by that time was already largely secularized. The theater underwent sweeping developments and changes which occurred over a relatively short amount of time, ultimately making theater a viable and prestigious art form. What started as the tradition of performing medieval morality plays became the central focus of society and helped to establish great playwrights and performances throughout Paris.

Throughout the seventeenth century, as theater transitioned from its religious form to its more liberal and secular form it underwent several significant changes. Increased popularity of the theater demanded the creation of more performance spaces, evident in the construction of new Parisian theaters. With an increase in the number of plays being performed an establishment grew which desired to regulate theater and form standardized rules regarding the writing of plays—a measurement more or less by which a play could be judged.

The Humanist revival of ancient Greek and Roman works made tragedies and comedies the most prestigious theatrical genres. However, in such a religious environment as seventeenth century France, the purpose of theater needed to be defined. Ultimately the conclusion was that theater's purpose was to teach good morals, not just religion. Good lessons and morals were to be introduced by the theater so that the audience would find it pleasing and furthermore, accept the teachings. The French



Academy acknowledged the extensive influence of morals taught by the theater by stating:

Bad examples are contagious, even on stage; fictional representations create only too many actual crimes and there is great danger in entertaining the public with pleasure that could produce one day public suffering.<sup>40</sup>

According to seventeenth-century theorists, a perfect theatrical illusion needed to be created on the stage so that the audience would be captivated by what they were seeing, therefore making the play believable and more fully able to teach moral principles. The reality of the performance—making the audience believe that what they were witnessing onstage was capable of happening in real life—corresponded to its ability to be *vraisemblable*. Important to understanding *vraisemblance* was recognizing that the action on stage needed to be presented in a manner that was acceptable and believable, even if it were not necessarily true: the “possible” alone did not make good theater. In addition, the idea of *bienséance*—that a play should present what is fitting or morally appropriate—was of importance in creating a believable theatrical illusion.

The ideas of *vraisemblance* and *bienséance* were furthered within the theater due in part to people like Cardinal Richelieu, chief minister of France under Louis XIII. The perpetuation of rules and standards within theater was a top priority for this influential member of the clergy and government official. For the cardinal, theater became a way of portraying power. Within the theater he recognized a powerful cultural vehicle that, by the conditions of its performance, could literally shape people’s views. Through Richelieu’s years of commissioning plays and building personal theaters, theater came to convey the power of France and the power of the patron.

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<sup>40</sup>Jean Chapelain, *The Opinion of the French Academy Regarding the Tragicomedy Le Cid* (1638), trans. Michael J. Call, 2007.

## II. Richelieu

Throughout his tenure as minister Cardinal Richelieu aimed to consolidate the power of the king and reduce the influence of foreign parties. Focusing his efforts on creating a stronger France, he passionately supported the artists of France by commissioning great paintings, sculptures and buildings, as well as supporting the performance of ballets and theaters. The years between 1630 and 1640 were years in which Richelieu used his high ranking position to influence the arts, and theater in particular. Perkins writes that Richelieu's interest in theater was founded upon the "pleasure in the pompous representations and ballets that were produced at [his Palace] the Palais Cardinal."<sup>41</sup> A small theater had been established within his townhome in 1634 and later, space within the Palais Cardinal was set aside for a much larger hall where grand performances could be held while simultaneously displaying the Cardinal's wealth and power.<sup>42</sup>

Most critics in the seventeenth century and even today give credit to Cardinal Richelieu for the newfound prestige which the theater enjoyed. Pierre Corneille stated, "... at present the theatre is at such a high point of perfection that everyone idolizes it," and in another statement gave credit to Richelieu stating, "if I have any reputation today I owe it all to you."<sup>43</sup> A decree from King Louis XIII addressed concerns of the public regarding actors who presented indecent action on stage and used 'double entendres.' His

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<sup>41</sup>James Breck Perkins, *Richelieu and the Growth of French Power*, (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1900), 303.

<sup>42</sup>W. L. Wiley, *The Early Public Theatre in France*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1960), 266.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 277.

decree forbade the presentation of the kind of lowbrow, lewd acts which gave acting the reputation of a sinful vocation. Louis's attempt to rid theater of its negative image and present it as a respectable profession helped purify the profession of acting. Thus, within the time period of Richelieu's life, acting became an acceptable profession and theater a suitable form of entertainment.<sup>44</sup>

Increasing infirmities before his death kept Richelieu within the walls of the palace with little outdoor exercise, allowing for his thoughts to turn towards entertainment. His interest in theater grew to the point that he thought to bring together five authors to write plays, hoping that their collaborations would improve the quality of French theater. These five authors became known as the Committee of Five. The committee, consisting of Pierre Corneille, Jean de Rotrou, François le Métel de Boisrobert, Claude de l'Estoile and Guillaume Colletet, was given the task of each writing one act of a play whose theme or main idea Richelieu had proposed and would then examine.<sup>45</sup> This method initially seemed efficient to Richelieu since within one month an entire comedy could be finished. Yet disagreements among the authors and the desire to produce independently, as well as their different styles of writings, led to the eventual dissolution of the Committee.

An engraving of the 1641 play *Mirame* –performed in Richelieu's theater—by Jean de Saint-Igny (Fig. 24) depicts King Louis XIII seated center stage and flanked on either side by the Cardinal and Anne of Austria. He is surrounded on three sides by the audience—a perfect visual depiction of the king in his privileged seat and which would serve as a powerful piece of cultural propaganda throughout the seventeenth century.

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 279.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 265

Sitting directly in the center allowed audience members to see him and his reaction of approval or disapproval. Audience members were thus concerned not only with the performance but were constantly aware of and concerned with the opinion of the privileged spectator. His opinion of the play, manifested through his reactions would both influence and govern the opinion of the viewer. A great amount of power rested in the hands (and in the position) of the privileged viewer.

Diplomatic duties which the cardinal was responsible for often extended to commissioning great works of art. In particular, he was known to buy Italian sceneries and theatrical machineries for his plays. The Cardinal enjoyed the visual illusions the theater could create and spared no expense at creating some of the greatest creations of the time period. His plays featured gardens, ornamented fountains, statues and grottos along with painted backdrops depicting the ocean.<sup>46</sup>

Scholars applaud the actions Richelieu undertook to help advance the theater. Richelieu's France was a time for great intellectual activity which helped stimulate the creations of such great artworks. As noted theater scholar, Perkins, has stated, "Whatever were the Cardinal's errors, there was an element of lofty ambition, of unwearied energy and dauntless courage, which impressed the world. Great wars were waged, great schemes were unfolded, great ambitions were cherished; it was an era of unrest and high resolve, in which an active and an artistic mind could find inspiration."<sup>47</sup>

Up until the 1630s the theater presented works which incorporated farces and double entendres—elements which negatively impacted the way theater and actors were

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<sup>46</sup>Perkins, 307.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 314.

viewed. It was under the influence of Cardinal Richelieu that the theater shed these elements and gained a greater degree of prestige than it had known before. His interest in a group of young, fresh authors and his interest in the classical past helped bring about great change and later acceptance of the theater. Though it was most often the signature of Louis XIII which signed edicts concerning actors, acting companies and theatrical halls, the king did not have nearly the interest in plays which Richelieu had, nor did he particularly care about the visual production.<sup>48</sup> In this sense Richelieu helped shape theater by creating regulations for it to follow.

In order to create more appeal and present the play in a visually effective manner, ornate theaters were built within his lodgings. With theater's recent acceptance by the Church and the public, Richelieu already had his preferred group of actors: those of the Théâtre du Marais, choosing their company over their rivals in the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

### **III. Physical Space in the Theater**

In addition to the changes in social acceptance during the seventeenth century, plays in Paris saw great changes both in the physical makeup of the theater as well as in the subscribed rules that were enforced by theater critics. The development of the structure shows the importance placed upon the creation of the interior space, while the rules of theater helped provide a realistic and believable creation. During this time three major theaters became the main structures where plays were put on weekly.

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<sup>48</sup>Wiley, 263.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Hôtel de Bourgogne was the only building in all of Europe constructed specifically for theater.<sup>49</sup> Built in 1548, on the grounds of a mansion by the same name, it was occupied for nearly eighty years by a variety of acting companies. It was originally built for the performance of religious plays but a ban on religious drama shortly after the completion of the building rendered it suitable only for renting to touring companies.<sup>50</sup> Initially the actors were associated with trade groups who regularly put on mystery plays, but such plays were later forbidden by the Parisian Parlement who held a tight monopoly over theatrical performances in the city. Before the start of the seventeenth century the tradesmen began renting out the Hôtel to more professional acting companies that would come from abroad, places such as Italy and England. In renting out the Hôtel to other companies, the tradesmen, in collaboration with the Parisian Parlement, attempted to maintain a monopoly over theatrical performances by taking legal action against those who performed in improvised theaters. Not until 1629 was the royal troupe granted permission to routinely perform within its walls.

The year 1634 brought about the second established theater company in Paris, located along Rue Vieille du Temple in a *jeu de paume* which had been converted into a theater for permanent use. The troupe was known as the Théâtre du Marais and the building in which they performed was long and narrow (120 feet by 39 feet).<sup>51</sup> A fire in

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<sup>49</sup>Alvin Goldfarb and Edwin Wilson, *Anthology of Living Theater*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (McGraw Hill: New York, 2008), 185.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>John Lough, *Seventeenth Century French Drama: The Background*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 59.

1644 brought about the need for the theater to be rebuilt. Though originally a tennis court, the new plans created an updated stage and auditorium for the city of Paris.

Towards the middle of the seventeenth century the Théâtre du Marais became well known for *pièces à machines*—plays which focused on pleasing the audience through “a large spectacular element.”<sup>52</sup> The theater was eventually abandoned in 1673 when, after the death of Molière, the Marais Company and Company of Molière, were combined to create just one troupe.

Paris’ third theater, the Illustre Théâtre, opened its doors in 1643 with a young Molière as one of the founding members. Competition was difficult and the theater had a hard time gaining ground against the Hôtel de Bourgogne and Théâtre du Marais. In financial ruin, the Illustre Théâtre was eventually dissolved. Molière and a few members of his troupe wandered the provinces with another company performing plays until their return to Paris in 1658, after Molière had gained leadership of the troupe. Having gained popularity with Louis XIV, the company was allowed to establish itself at the Hôtel de Petit-Bourbon along with a troupe of Italian actors. They were there for only two years when the Hôtel had to be torn down. Without a theater to perform in, all seemed lost. Yet the demise of the Hôtel de Petit-Bourbon brought about the opportunity for the company to take over the theater within the Palais Royal. The Palais had been built by Richelieu for himself and was called the Palais Cardinal, but upon its bequeathal to Louis XIII became known as the Palais Royal. The acting company made the Palais their official home and most of Molière’s plays from 1661 until his death in 1673 were performed here.

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 9.

From the 1620s on, Paris was the theatrical center of Europe. The desire of every actor was to secure a job with an acting troupe in Paris. Rivalry between the theaters was strong and often the idea for a play would be ‘stolen’ by another company in hopes of performing the piece before another.

The theater building to which the play-goer would arrive was unlike the buildings with which we are familiar today. Not until 1689, when the Comédie Française began its performances in the Palais Royal, did Paris secure its first ellipse-shaped theater. Until this time, theaters were converted *jeux de paume* which were long and rectangular in shape, creating difficulties in hearing what was being said and seeing what was occurring on stage for the audience members.

Seating within the theater was often based upon the concept of privilege. The pit, also known as the parterre, was an area where audience members were only allowed to stand. This area, making up over half of the spectators, was reserved for men only and often the area was rowdy and full of drunks. Capable of holding up to one thousand people, the people in the parterre often interrupted the play by talking, yelling, dueling and whistling.<sup>53</sup> Around the three sides of the auditorium were boxes known as loges. Lastly, behind the pit and below the boxes were rows of seats referred to as the amphitheater. Tickets for sitting in the boxes were more expensive than those in the pit and the amphitheater often hosted well-to-do members of society. These seats had more privileged viewpoints as the height and central location allowed for some of the best views in the house.

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<sup>53</sup>Wiley, 212.



Though performances were regularly attended by men, the reforms of Cardinal Richelieu in the theater permitted the attendance of virtuous women, as beforehand they were not allowed to be present.<sup>54</sup> Despite the changes in theater, the large presence of men and the constant presence of swords, daggers and other weapons still made it an often dangerous place for women and children until around 1625 when theater became attended by noble members of society. The commotion caused in the pit, and the lack of seating in the loges and galleries often made for poor conditions, but what was most distracting was the presence of spectators on the stage. As theater became more acceptable and more performances were put on, sitting on the stage accordingly took on an elite and privileged association. Sitting onstage allowed the person to be seen by every theater-goer, bringing status and reputation to that person. At first audience members were only allowed on the stages of the most popular plays but this soon changed and spectators were given permanent place on stage.<sup>55</sup>

Other elements of the theater, including lighting and the stage curtain, were noticeable aspects that affected the way in which the performance was perceived. Lighting within the theater was limited to candles and lamps. Such a basic form of lighting made it difficult and nearly impossible to create the strong lighting effects and illusions found in modern theater. Though normally considered part of every theater, stage curtains were not consistently used until the 1640s. There is evidence that stage curtains were in use early in the century for ballet performance in court. Yet the stage curtain was used for different purposes than those with which we are familiar today. Up

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>55</sup>Lough, 59.

until the eighteenth century it was not used to separate time between acts or scenes but was simply raised at the beginning and lowered at the end of a performance. As well stated by John Lough, “there is no question but that in the course of the century a considerable change took place in the stage setting offered to the audiences of the period.”<sup>56</sup>

Along with the advancement and changes of the physical elements of the theater, developments took place in society’s preferences regarding theater. The court and private entertainments of the theater helped in its establishment and its progression. Professional actors and companies were on occasion invited to châteaux and palaces to perform in small private performances. This helped give companies and actors more experience and great advertising. For the nobility, private performances were more suitable in one’s home, free from the chaos, confusion and often dirty conditions of the public theaters.<sup>57</sup>

French theater saw its greatest success at court during the time between Louis XIV’s rise to power in 1661 and his later estrangement from theater during his pious years. At its highest points, court performances were held in Paris and at Versailles. The king and his court saw both older, previously performed plays as well as plays performed for the first time. The audience members at court were undoubtedly more aristocratic than those in the public theaters, much better behaved, and provided a different environment in which actors could thrive.

The government’s acceptance and support of theater allowed freedom both in the viewing of as well as in the writing of plays. Playwrights began to create more works to be performed in the Parisian theaters of the time. Before his days of great fame, Pierre

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>57</sup>Wiley, 239.

Corneille was one playwright who benefited from the newfound acceptance of theater. His play *The Theatrical Illusion* (1636) is of particular significance, as it shows the era's fascination with theater and the theater's newfound respectability.

#### **IV. The Theatrical Illusion**

Corneille's play demonstrates the era's fascination with theater by focusing on the theme of illusion which is seen on four levels. First, most of the framing of the story takes place within a mirror-like frame onstage. This mirror reflects the past of one of the main characters and is a visual illusion of what actually happened. The difficulty at the time of portraying what had previously happened was solved by the mirror—a dreamlike way for the audience to be privy to the past. Second, the actors within the mirror who are acting out the past are only ghosts of the past; they are not the real characters themselves, only portrayals of them and of the happenings which occurred and are in a certain way a fantastical illusion. Third, the behavior of the characters themselves creates a pretentious illusion because of their deceit and lies, secrets and falsifications. Lastly, the illusory qualities of *The Theatrical Illusion* are brought about by the metatheatrics of the play. Its play within a play within a play provides an onstage microcosm which draws attention to the power of theater itself.

The action of the performance involves the characters who in their turn are playing roles and hiding their true character. The success and failure of these deceptions encompasses the entire plot and determines whether the audience ultimately grasps the theme of the play. Opening with the story of a father who has lost contact with his son, the play introduces a magician who has the ability to render the life of the son onto a mirrored screen. The father, magician and audience follow what they believe to be the

life of the prodigal. It is not until the end that everyone discovers that part of the manifestation was simply play-acting. The two settings prevent the audience from being able to firmly establish themselves in the play, constantly lost in the different illusions created on stage.

In the *Theatrical Illusion* Pridamant is the father of Clindor and his concern for his lost son is apparent: “I cannot hide the causes of my grief; ...I’ll feel he’s back if I have news of him; To go and find him, love will give me wings. Where is he hiding? Whither should I go? Even at the world’s end, I’d fly to him.”<sup>58</sup> A magician by the name of Alcandre enters the scene revealing his power to show Pridamant events of the past involving his son. Together, Pridamant and Alcandre draw the audience into events taking place within a mirror set on the stage—a mirror which portrays the life of Clindor. The actors embodying Clindor and other characters within the mirror are portrayed as grayish ghosts in order to inform the audience that they are not actually portraying Clindor and other characters in real time, but are acting out what has already come to pass.

As Pridamant is shown the life of his son on stage, the audience accompanies him on the journey and becomes informed of the life that Clindor is living: that of a go-between for his swashbuckler master, Matamore, a man in love with a woman by the name of Isabelle. His job as go-between has introduced him to two women for whom he has affections: Isabelle and her maidservant Lyse. His confessions of love to both women are done secretly, reflecting a desire to keep hidden his feelings from each one. In return, Isabelle herself plays her own sort of tricks upon a number of men who have feelings

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<sup>58</sup>Pierre Corneille, *The Theatrical Illusion*, trans. John Cairncross (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1975) lines 110,117-120, p. 207.

towards her, feigning acceptance of their feelings but truly having affection towards Clindor.

Matamore plays the part of heroic swashbuckler and debonair. Matamore's ridiculous behavior is apparent from the beginning when he mentions the way in which his thoughts and actions are influenced by his beloved. He further continues, "At will, I terrify; at will, I charm. According to my humour, I inspire men with affright and women with desire."<sup>59</sup> Not only is there a tone of humor through his supposedly prideful self-image—which is entirely unconvincing—but the contrast between "terrify" and "charm," "affright" and "desire" creates a strong distinction of sentiments and a subconscious draw into the trickery that will be played out among the characters. Though not deceiving in a harmful way, Clindor firmly supports his master in his delusional persona when he states, "There is no woman, how austere she be, Who could hold out against you constantly," thereby reinforcing Matamore's confidence in his feelings for Isabelle.<sup>60</sup> Through these examples and others, Matamore's true character becomes convincingly clear.

Clindor comes across as a character who plays to two different sides. In addition to being a go-between for Matamore, he has his own secret emotions and feelings. Soon though, it is revealed that his romantic feelings are not focused on just one individual. While he loves Isabelle, the audience soon becomes aware of his additional feelings towards the maid Lyse. It is amongst these lovers, Matamore, Lyse and Isabelle, that Clindor shows his true tendencies.

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 2.2.257-60

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 2.2.255-6

As go-between for Matamore, Clindor is allowed to be present during conversations involving Matamore and Isabelle, for as Isabelle so clearly yet falsely states to Matamore, “our discreet affections’ interchange, Needs only him [pointing to Clindor] to bear these messages.”<sup>61</sup> Neither one has any inhibitions regarding the presence of Clindor during such private times. Completely unaware of Isabelle’s misleading actions, Matamore leaves the room. Shortly thereafter Clindor says to Isabelle, in regards of the departure of Matamore, “This favourable hint emboldens me to make good use of such a chance to speak.”<sup>62</sup> Unbeknownst to Matadore, Clindor makes romantic advances towards Isabelle each time his friend is gone. Yet upon his return, the two young lovers act as though there are no relations between them and fool Matamore into thinking that he is the one true love of Isabelle.

But soon after his first encounter with Isabelle, Clindor finds himself alone in a room with Lyse. It takes little time for him to confess his love for her, telling her of his true affection and feelings,

There are not many faces such as yours.  
If you make conquests, there’s good reason why;  
I never knew a more attractive girl,  
Witty, nimble, adroit, a sense of fun,  
A splendid figure (not too plump, too thin),  
A good complexion, features delicate,  
Entrancing eyes, who would not fall for you?<sup>63</sup>

Surprised and taken aback by his affectionate words Lyse reminds him that she is “not Isabelle.”<sup>64</sup> To this Clindor reveals the different nature of his love for each, “The two of

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 2.5.431-2

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 2.6.483-4

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 3.5.774-80

you share all my store of love. I worship both *your* beauty and *her* wealth.”<sup>65</sup> Lyse is aghast as he reveals his true purpose in acting the way he does as he asks, “Whatever my desire to marry her, Think you I really love her more than you?... to succeed, I seek another’s hand. But, if I look at you, I feel a twinge, And a deep sigh despite me rends my heart...”<sup>66</sup>

Not only do such forward words astound Lyse, they also anger her as she realizes that his love for Isabelle is not as true as she had once thought. Her monologue displays her frustration and understanding regarding the situation that has just passed,

The ingrate. Finally he looks at me;  
He feigns to love me to amuse himself.  
After ignoring me, he pays me court,  
But in a mood of sheer flirtatiousness,  
And, openly admitting he’s untrue,  
Swears he adores, but will have none of me.  
Woo right and left, villain, and share your heart.  
Choose whom you want to marry or to court,  
And let your interest govern your desires,  
But don’t think either of us is deceived.<sup>67</sup>

Her choice of words, using “feign,” “untrue,” and “deceived,” allow the audience to understand that she is not fooled by his trickery but knows his true intentions.

When Clindor later runs one of Isabelle’s suitors through, he is imprisoned. The prison guard in charge of watching Clindor is also in love with Lyse. Following the theme of trickery and incredulity, Lyse lends her new suitor a more willing ear in order to make Isabelle happy by having Clindor released, “and, panders to his hopes with eyes

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 3.5.782

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 3.5.783-4

<sup>66</sup>Ibid. 3.5.787-8, 795-7

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 3.6.823-32

and lips, pretends to respond to him.”<sup>68</sup> Thinking his passion is returned the guard promises anything to Lyse. Playing the role of scorned lover, she feigns feelings for her ‘new-found’ love until he agrees to help in the escape of Clindor.

Amongst the confusion of feelings, Isabelle at times seems to be the most conniving of them all. Her sway of emotions between Matamore and Clindor is well played out to both characters but her true love for Clindor—shown only in scenes where the two are alone—is no illusion. Adding to the complexity of the situation, there is a third lover, Adraste. Isabelle’s pretended emotion for Matamore, scorn towards Adraste and true love for Clindor, reflect the artificial words and actions the characters use in an attempt to catch one another in improper situations, a way to discover what is really true and what is simply a trick.

Isabelle is sly and careful to not divulge her true feelings until the end. Feeling the pressure from her father to marry Adraste, she feigns emotion for Matamore telling him at times to not “be long. The speed of your return Will show the measure of your love for me.”<sup>69</sup> But once he has left she immediately turns to Clindor and revealing her true feelings says, “The madman gone, we two are left alone...in a word, I’m yours.”<sup>70</sup> Her father’s objection to all suitors except Adraste and the imprisonment of Clindor seem to thwart the young lovers. But eventually, with the help of the prison guard, Isabelle and Clindor are reunited and Lyse and her prison guard fiancé flee into the countryside.

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 4.2.1072-4

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 2.6.475-6

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 2.6.482, 490



Happily content the four leave behind the deception that had once been the focus of their lives. However the play does not end here, nor does the illusion. Returning once more to Alcandre and Pridamant, Pridamant is told that the company, including his son, rises to great fame; yet, in the words of Alcandre, “For you, All you need see is how they saved themselves, And, without boring you with lengthy tales, I’ll show them at the height of fortune.”<sup>71</sup> Pridamant’s inability to see the path that leads to the scene he will soon see is the playwright’s way of not divulging the entire information. The portions left out are like missing pieces of a puzzle that make it difficult to understand the whole.

With that understanding the scene cuts to Isabelle and Lyse, both dressed in elegant robes but a solemn feeling is felt in the air. Isabelle discloses to Lyse that Clindor, now her husband, has been cheating, “Another has his heart, I but the name.”<sup>72</sup> Clindor soon enters and the two recite long monologues and come to the conclusion that Clindor must give up his affairs in order to save his marriage. The decision however is too late and he is killed by his spurned lover’s guards.

Believing that what he has witnessed is real, Pridamant, though upset, is comforted to know that his son did not die in poverty but was killed because of his prosperity. Alcandre, aware that Pridamant has believed what he witnessed on-stage, divulges the truth and a curtain is raised showing the four characters seated around a table. “These are members of an actors’ troop, Who share their takings based upon their parts... Your son and followers managed to flee... But, straitened circumstances

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 4.10.1323-6

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 5.2.1358

compelling them, Decided on the stage as a career.<sup>73</sup> More upset by the news that his son is an actor than he was by his son's death, Pridamant disdainfully cries,

I thought his death was real; it was but feigned;  
Yet I find everywhere grounds for lament.  
Is this the glory, this the honoured rank,  
To which good fortune was to help him rise?<sup>74</sup>

Pridamant's reaction is understood on the grounds of the past. As has been noted, the career of an actor, until the time of Richelieu was one which was sinful and did not allow for salvation. Alcandre's reassuring response reflects the newfound acceptance the theater was receiving at this point and could even be the words of Richelieu himself:

Cease to lament at it. The theater  
Is at so high a point, all worship it;  
And what your age regarded with contempt  
Is now the darling of all men of taste,  
The talk of Paris, and the province's  
Desire, the sweet diversion of our kings,  
The people's joy, the pleasure of the great...  
The rarest minds to this devote their nights,  
And all of those on whom Apollo smiles  
Devote to it some of their learned works.<sup>75</sup>

The way in which *The Theatrical Illusion* journeys through various aspects of theatrical entertainment demonstrates the era's new fascination with theater. Its incorporation of theater on so many different levels helps to incorporate the idea that theater could be a powerful form of entertainment and that the job of an actor could be viewed as respectable. The exploration of the various levels of theater kept the audience

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 5.5.1617-8, 1625-8

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 5.5.1641-4

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 5.5.1645-51, 1662-4

captivated, while the acceptable and appropriate nature helped French theater move from its unacceptable beginnings to its full acceptance.

## **V. Rules of the Theater**

*The Theatrical Illusion* is one example of the blurred line between reality and fiction that is the hallmark of theater. It did so, however, in a way that demanded a hefty suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience, using the figure of a magician to comment on the “magic” of the play. Shortly after the play’s production, however, playwrights and critics would elaborate a set of rules to ensure that good plays would include nothing to provoke an audience’s disbelief regarding the action on the stage. At the time of the production of *The Theatrical Illusion* the rules were not aptly enforced, yet the argument in favor of strict classical rules was beginning to make headway. Just as the physical aspect of the theater developed during the seventeenth century, so too were compositional rules developed which specified how a play was to be presented. An interpretation of the three classical unities of Aristotle’s *Poetics* became the model to follow and carried great weight amongst critics.

These rules—incorporated into the French theater—focused on unities of time, place and action. The play should not attempt to cover more than twenty-four hours while the place needed to represent one single place of ground. Unity of action involved making sure that every action supported the main action and helped the plot to progress. The importance of *vraisemblance* and *bienséance* was also to be strictly adhered to. The Academy also importantly emphasized that the stage needed to create a perfect theatrical illusion, meaning that nothing onstage should shock the viewer into thinking that what they were viewing was not, in fact, reality. In order to absorb the play’s moral instruction

(dictated by *bienséance*), the audience needed to be completely captivated, forgetting as much as possible that what they were witnessing was fictional.

The clash amongst critics and playwrights that precipitated the regulation of theater is referred to today as the “Quarrel of the Cid,” the name taken from another play by Pierre Corneille, *Le Cid* (1637), which was the biggest success French theater had seen. The play contained great poetry, characters and an intriguing plot, but despite its popularity with the public, critics and contemporaries of Corneille disapproved. Critics claimed that Corneille’s tactics in creating the play went against principles of decency and that his rejection of the three rules of the Ancients discredited his writings.

The problems with the play were manifold. One well known critic, Georges de Scudéry, claimed the text was nearly a direct translation from Spanish. The principal action, he continued, must remain unified and in *Le Cid* it did not. Instead the play’s action oscillated between Castille and a port down the river. In addition, the play’s events would have been impossible to fit within a twenty-four hour time period, while the king was disobeyed in a manner in which no king in real life would be disobeyed. Corneille’s decision to stray from the ancient past and what some saw as his disrespect for the camaraderie that existed between writers of his time further heightened the disagreement amongst Corneille and his critics.

Perhaps the most obvious issue with the play was its blatant disregard of *vraisemblance* and *bienséance*. In *Le Cid* two of the main characters, Ximena and Don Rodrigo, are in love and desire to marry. Yet the marriage is jeopardized when Don Rodrigo kills Ximena’s father. Eventually Don Rodrigo ‘redeems’ himself of killing Ximena’s father by fighting the Moors and is allowed to marry Ximena. Applying the

earlier standards, it is true (*vrai*), according to historical record, that this happened. Yet it is not exactly believable (*vraisemblable*) that Ximena would want to marry Don Rodrigo nor is it fitting or morally appropriate that Don Rodrigo be so quickly forgiven and allowed to marry the daughter of the man he murdered.

The Quarrel grew to such heights that Cardinal Richelieu became involved and practically forced the newly-created French Academy, of which he was the patron, to take sides and solve the dilemma. Though Jean Chapelain and the Academy did not want to become involved, they had little choice. The Academy's response overlooked popularity and public opinion stating:

...a play is good when it produces a reasonable enjoyment. But as in music or in painting we do not consider that concerts or paintings are good, even if they please the commoners, if the precepts of these arts have not been well observed and if the experts who are the true judges do not confirm by their approbation that of the multitude. Even so, we will not say, based on the word of the public, that a work of poetry is good because it has pleased, if the scholars are not also satisfied with it.<sup>76</sup>

Popularity of the spectacle was not enough for critics. The opinion and decision of the Academy put the issues of the quarrel to an end by its condemnation of *Le Cid* and the Academy ultimately lent its support to the rules and standards which later plays would follow.

An influential later advocate of the rules was François Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac. Having given up the study of law to further his career in the Church, he was assigned to be a tutor to Richelieu's nephew. It was through this connection that the two met and eventually the Cardinal commissioned him to write about the theater. Though only published in 1657, *La Pratique du théâtre* (*The Whole Art of the Stage*) was composed

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<sup>76</sup>Chapelain

during the era of Cardinal Richelieu and discussed the relevance of the three classical rules according to how they related to French theater.

According to d'Aubignac, theater was the least understood of the arts and in order to correct this view, great thought needed to be put into proper representation. The overarching goal of French theater was to “restore [it] to the Splendour of that of the Ancients.”<sup>77</sup> To do this, the illusion created by the theater needed to be both believable and agreeable. More than just creating a popular work, playwrights needed to understand the reasoning behind what made a play such:

We shall feel so much the more admiration and joy in the Representation of Theatral Diversions, if by the knowledge of the Rules of Art we are able to penetrate all the Beauties of them, and to consider what Meditations, Pains, and Study they have cost to be brought to that Perfection.<sup>78</sup>

D'Aubignac's analysis of unity of action specified that a play should have one main action that it followed, with no or few subplots. Condemned were those who attempted to make a play out of an entire story or the entire life of a hero instead of choosing one primary part. Choosing one adventure of a hero or a specific time period of a princess's life to then represent in a play was looked upon most favorably. Like a painter who is confronted with numerous aspects of a story from which he could create a painting, the playwright must pick one small part and make it into a larger whole.<sup>79</sup> To do this, the action of the play must be continuous. D'Aubignac claimed that one of the greatest insults a playwright could receive would be to have an audience member ask if

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<sup>77</sup>Francois-Hedelin, abbe d'Aubignac, *The Whole Art of the Stage*. (New York: B. Blom, 1968), 13.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>79</sup>D'Aubignac, 81.

the play were over when it was only the middle of the play.<sup>80</sup> The action thus must always remain fluid, one scene easily transitioning to another.

The idea behind unity of place is that a play should comprise one single physical space and should not try to cover many areas at once, nor should the stage attempt to represent more than one place. Since most plays written from 1640 on sought to follow this rule, only one stage setting was required for most plays, eliminating the need for changes. Plays that were written after the standardization of the rules, such as Molière's *The Misanthrope* and *Tartuffe*, carefully adhered to having the location of the play remain the same, but plays written before the enforcement of such standards, in particular Corneille's *Le Cid* and *The Theatrical Illusion*, did not.

Key to the unity of action, *vraisemblance* was an important issue that d'Aubignac undertook to explain. *Vraisemblance* is the knowledge that the action on stage needed to be presented in a manner that was acceptable and believable, even if it were not necessarily true. This does not imply purposeful deceit but recognition that certain aspects of a story need not be performed onstage if it helped contribute to *vraisemblance*. For d'Aubignac as well as Aristotle, it was the playwright's or dramatic poet's responsibility to render things pleasingly in a state of decency and probability. And it was the historian's job to describe events according to the manner in which they actually occurred: a factual representation. The poet was to stick to the truth, but if he did not, then he must "yield" in a pleasing manner to the rules of the art which he had. With this understanding of *vraisemblance*, d'Aubignac focused on encouraging playwrights to create their works so that all actions within the ultimate performance would be probable. Probability and decency needed to be observed at all times.

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 90.

In order to recognize the importance of unity of place in theater, d'Aubignac notes that it is important to understand that during the seventeenth century the stage was a representation of "things; and yet we are not to imagine, that there is any 'thing' of what we really see, but we must think the things themselves are there...before us."<sup>81</sup> Thus, an image that was to remain the same onstage could not represent two different things: a backdrop of a castle room could not later be used as a garden scene, even with the inclusion of plants or flowers to make it appear different. D'Aubignac argued that the very ground that the play is supposed to represent should not change. The same idea also applied to the place in which the theatrical action occurred: the location at the beginning of the play needed to be the same place of action at the end of the play in an effort to prevent confusion. Of this, d'Aubignac stated,

[Unity of place], well understood, makes us to know that the place cannot change in the rest of the Play, since it cannot change in the Representation, for one and the same Image remaining in the same state, cannot represent two different things; now it is highly improbable, that the same space, and the same floor, which receive no change at all, should represent two different places.<sup>82</sup>

Unity of place also applied to where a character could or could not be. For example, a nun who was not able to leave her place of residence unless under extreme emergency should never be placed by the playwright in a residence or other location in which she did not belong. Following the rules that applied to unity of place made it *vraisemblable* and allowed the audience to be drawn into the performance.

In accordance with unity of place, the rules regarding unity of time needed also to be adhered to as closely as possible. This rule stated that the action of a play should take

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 99-100.



place over no more than twenty-four hours. In accordance with this rule, D'Aubignac divided theater into two types of time. The first was real time and covers the time from when the play begins to when it ends (i.e. non-diagetic time). The second was the time which the action represented (diagetic time). Difficulties arose when diagetic time and non-diagetic time did not correlate with one another. If a play's performance required two hours of real time, how would a longer period of action be presented in a play? D'Aubignac's solution to this problem was to allow the playwright to mark the passage of time with music between the acts. In addition, d'Aubignac encouraged Aristotle's beliefs that the playwright should not allow the time of the action represented to be longer than twelve hours.

The playwright needed to follow three simple rules regarding the unity of time in order to make the theatrical illusion believable. First, he must be careful in the days which he chooses to represent in his play. Second, the play's action should begin as close to the catastrophe as possible, thereby diminishing the time that would need to "pass" between scenes. Third, the playwright must use, at his discretion, his ability to tinker with time and bring together the incidents so that they occur in the same day. Certain actions that perhaps occurred before the opening of the play would need to be portrayed as happening that day. Such rules were not haphazardly applied. Their relevance ensured that the audience forgot completely that what they were watching was fiction. Instead, the stage action needed to be taken for reality. Strict adherence to the rule and careful planning with the spectator's interpretation at the forefront would produce an aesthetic reaction and create a magical space for performance.

The combination of a great patron, ample production of plays, construction of theaters, an emphasis on illusion, and focus on theatrical rules created an art form which was exact in its requirements and solid in its ability to help audiences lose themselves in the performance. From its very beginnings, rules and regulation governed the increased popularity and acceptability of the theater. Once enforced, rules helped theater become more believable, allowing playwrights to then interject subtleties of everyday society within the confines of lines and speeches. Unbeknownst to members of the audience, it was the laws and rules which helped create the theater that allowed them to become so enthralled in what they were viewing. As it became more acceptable and gained popularity French theater quickly began reflecting social hierarchy through the privileged viewpoints. Theater was an art form enjoyed by all and its ability to eventually overcome elements which prohibited it appearing *vraisemblable* allowed it to be a mirror of society.

## CHAPTER IV

### BLURRING THE LINE BETWEEN GARDEN AND THEATER

With France becoming the most powerful nation in Europe during the 1600s it is fair to argue that both the garden and the theater, as reflections of France, were symbols of the social and political power in the French seventeenth century world. The theater and the garden during the seventeenth century were stages for social performance and political statements. Nicholas Fouquet perhaps made his statement too strongly and his gardens were confiscated and political and social careers ended. The king in his own right took advantage of the power the two art forms elicited, using them to project the image of an absolute ruler. Whether it was his contribution to a play, a statement within the play reflecting his absolute power and ability to make everything right, or the inclusion of members of the court in performance, elements of the theater and garden combined to create a space so believable that the image the king desired to portray became real.

The design of the French formal garden was one that reflected order and power. Its elements allowed for a natural theatrical application and it also became a theater, staging political, artistic and social events. In one scenario at Versailles, those who were guests were also actors who took part in a theatrical performance in the garden—blurring the lines between what was fictive and what was real.<sup>83</sup> Two plays written by Molière and

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<sup>83</sup>Claire Goldstein. *Vaux and Versailles: The Appropriations, Erasures, and Accidents That Made Modern France*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 27.

performed at the week-long *fête* in the spring of 1664 exhibit the similar elements between theater and the garden. With the performances of plays in gardens, the rules that governed their creations intermingled and furthered the outward expressions of power by reducing the distance between reality and illusion.

The way in which the theater and the garden penetrated one another was marked through social performances which began taking place within the garden. The idea of theater performance was not limited to an indoor stage. The garden's elements of power and its display of perspective created a natural backdrop against which plays could be performed. Similarly, acting was not limited to acting companies. Members of the nobility and even the king himself performed in theatrical events, acting onstage and off. The laws governing the design of the garden created an environment in which its elements and the elements of theater could be combined to create a symbolic reality. This appearance of power and wealth helped progress the manifestation of a new and powerful reality the king wanted to perpetuate.

In 1661 after the death of Cardinal Jules Mazarin, Louis XIV proclaimed, "*La face du théâtre change.*" Change it did as Louis began his personal rule, free from the bonds of ministers who had governed for him in the past. Not coincidentally, the same year brought the fall of Nicolas Fouquet, finance minister and owner of Vaux-le-Vicomte, which allowed the king to establish his reign of absolute power by being able to control the nation's finances and marked the formation of a new theater at Versailles.<sup>84</sup> Louis's reign established France as the center for art patronage in Europe. Painting,

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<sup>84</sup>Weiss, 55

sculpture, theater and garden design flourished and gained unprecedented attention during the years of his sovereignty.

## **I. The Garden as Theater**

Theaters and gardens were shaped by common traditions, particularly in their manner of transforming elements of the real world into works of art.<sup>85</sup> Both gained popularity during the Renaissance and increased in esteem during the Baroque age. As discussed in the previous two chapters, their backgrounds were shaped by religion and incorporated religious beliefs as well as influences of classical mythology and allegorical stories. Even more importantly, both were impacted by the development of linear perspective.

Linear perspective, revolutionized during Renaissance times, had a profound effect upon the creation of the garden.<sup>86</sup> Renaissance gardens were orderly and precise in their design. They appealed to the *divina proportione* of Renaissance scholars and artists. The *divina proportione*, also known as the golden ratio, was based upon the belief that particular ratios were more aesthetically pleasing than others. The proportions had similar effects upon the design of the theater. The first perspective theater scene was developed in Italy, creating the illusion of space, a reality that did not truly exist. Italians naturally experimented with the ideas of technique and space, their interest stemming from *divina proportione* and their search for newer and more complex forms of perspective.<sup>87</sup> This branched over into garden design where the designers were able to create illusionistic

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<sup>85</sup>Adams, 63

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

views due to the freedom of creation granted them. Treatises such as those by Serlio and Boyceau discussed the studies of architecture, geometry, and perspective. These treatises were widely published throughout Europe and were especially popular with designers in France.

Though other inventions and techniques were used to add visual splendor to the theatrical performances, it was more often the garden's perspective which received the most attention.<sup>88</sup> The art of perspective, particularly when used in painting and the theater, was most clearly portrayed through two principles, the first involving fixed point perspective and the second concerning the unification of perspective.

The first principle involved finding a fixed point where the perspective lines would converge on a single point. For a painting, this principle was not largely difficult. With a flat canvas, the artist would be able to decide upon a fixed point and have the lines converge on it. For the theater designer, it was much more difficult as the stage was seen from a number of different positions without one particular fixed point. In the garden, this principle was further compounded with the immensity of space which the garden architect had to work with in order to create order and balance.<sup>89</sup> Until the seventeenth century most gardens were contained within a small courtyard square, with the focal point being at the center. When gardens began expanding outside the walls of these confines, landscape architects experimented with new techniques.

The second principle of perspective necessitated that the space of the picture be united by one picture plane and one frame. Instead of painting's illusion of three

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

dimensions on a two-dimensional plane, theater and gardens attempted to approach a three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional manner.<sup>90</sup> The creation of the proscenium arch in the theater helped to enclose the space in a manner related to the principle. Yet with the garden, this principle remained obscured by the immensity of the garden and the difficulty to enclose it. Le Nôtre's work at Vaux, however, was one of the great gardens which in ways were able to contain the view the visitor saw. Having been highly influenced by the Italian landscape designers and his friend, the painter Charles Le Brun, Le Nôtre was able to use the method of perspective to create a unified composition of the gardens from a privileged vantage point of the terrace at Vaux, as discussed in Chapter One.

The use of perspective in the garden also found its way to the theater. The 1641 production of *Mirame* was the first production in France to use a scenic backdrop painted in perspective within a theater, creating the illusion of space within the boundaries of the stage itself.<sup>91</sup> The backdrop mirrored the design of famous gardens created only years earlier and of those being built around the same time, thus further illustrating the common interest in perspective shared by theater and garden design. At other times, gardens themselves served as a backdrop for court ballets, performances and pageants with stages set up within the gardens or a permanent area specifically designed for performances. With the dearth of theater buildings, the garden acted as a temporary locale for spectacles.

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

French gardens and theater shared more than an awareness of perspective—they also had a similar position regarding compositional rules. Classical comedy and tragedy were intrinsically shaped by the strict and precise rules which governed their performance. These rules insisted upon the unity of time, place and action. All plays were expected to conform to these standards. Much like the rigidity and exactness that existed in the theater, the art of gardening followed along similar lines. Geometric theories of Boyceau and Mollet were en vogue and thus the only designs upon which an architect could establish his designs.<sup>92</sup> Le Nôtre's plans reflect the rigidity of the geometric symmetry which architects were entreated to use, yet he also established his own form of discipline, creating an expression of unity of place at Vaux.<sup>93</sup>

In contrast to Italian gardens, French gardens and Vaux in particular, were landscaped on an area of land that stretched long and far, uninterrupted by hills or mountainsides. This simple stretch of land upon which it was common to build gardens was the method that helped to further the popularity of landscape gardens. The length of the garden not only encouraged walking, exploring, and participation in the design, it also allowed the architect to create a viewpoint that conveyed order, power, unity and control—qualities that made it so popular throughout all of Europe and Louis XIV. Le Nôtre's designs were configured so that the garden could be seen and appreciated in one glimpse. To be seen in its full splendor the privileged and single viewpoint was from the vantage point of the château and took in nearly the entire garden. The theatrical backdrop, with its

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<sup>92</sup>Hazlehurst, 19.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.



single-point perspective, also worked best from certain viewpoints—the privileged viewpoint in particular.

## II. Theater in the Garden

The theater first made its way into the gardens during the Italian Renaissance. The Medici Palace in Rome, known as Piazza Navona, was designed by Giuliano da Sangallo and featured a theater as one of the defining garden elements. The garden theme continued at this time to influence theater and by the early seventeenth century—before unity of place became a strict rule—it was conventional in French and Italian theater to have a garden scene in all dramas.<sup>94</sup>

The incorporation of the garden's fountains and grottos soon found their way into the theater's design and vocabulary. For example, in the garden, the *parterre* was an ornamental arrangement of flowerbeds while in the theater it was the main floor of the performance hall. Eventually the theater used the garden's natural beauty and perspective as backdrop for actual plays. 1610 saw a young King Louis XIII performing in *Alcine*, a musical theater production complete with grotto and jetting fountains.<sup>95</sup> Later in 1661, Nicholas Fouquet commissioned Molière's comedy-ballet *Les Fâcheux* to be performed at the grille d'eau in the gardens of Vaux-le-Vicomte amidst a splendid backdrop of fireworks, fountains, grottos and lit walkways. In 1664 a week long event hosted numerous plays within the gardens of Versailles.

Permanent garden theaters, constructed specifically in the garden, did not come into existence in France until later in the seventeenth century when André Le Nôtre

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<sup>94</sup>Adams, 67.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 64.

institutionalized this idea into his plans for the design of the Tuileries Gardens. Though gardens had always been a popular area to perform pageants and plays, spectacles and balls, now it was done on a much grander scale. The perfectly created promenade pathways at Vaux-le-Vicomte and Versailles acted as the ideal backdrop—if not on an even more magnificent scale—for performances of the king and his court. In engravings of *Les Plaisirs de l'Île Enchantée* the garden's avenues were depicted as the theatrical stage for the plays that were performed during the seven day celebration—their actual receding lines replacing the painted perspective of the theater (Fig. 25). The garden readily became part of the theatrical experience through the designs of Le Nôtre and the “natural and artificial perspectives that exploited the almost limitless possibilities of the surrounding space.”<sup>96</sup>

### III. Vaux-le-Vicomte and *Les Fâcheux*

The château of Vaux, with its emphasis on visual elements, is the ideal metaphorical example of the outdoor garden theater. All its elements combine to create a display that draws the spectators in. Like the theater's proscenium arch, the tree-lined walkways and distant hill guide the eye towards the view which the architect dictates.<sup>97</sup> In addition, the visitor becomes an actor on the garden stage, his every move and action adding to the performance. The lined walkways, symmetrically planned promenades, fountains, flowers, canals and statues, all add to the theatricality of the garden. The garden and theater are created spaces in which each scene is new and different and where each performance is different from the last. Both environments are created artificially,

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<sup>96</sup>Woodbridge., 69.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 82.

developed by man. The garden's manmade perfection draws the viewer in through its designed perspective, flowing water and colorful flowers while the theater's man-made creation also draws the viewer in, to have him lose himself in the illusion acted out onstage.

### *Les Fâcheux*

The blurring of the lines between garden and theater was manifest at Vaux during a large spectacle in August of 1661 with the evening performance of a new Molière play, *Les Fâcheux* (*The Bores*). The novelty of *Les Fâcheux* was in its ability to be both a reflection and a mockery of court culture. The presentation is a commentary on the serious stakes of a superficial event, written to mock and even warn of stylish excess, exaggerating the court's faults and weaknesses. The audience's ability to recognize certain of their own imperfections in the bores would presumably help them avoid such modish, absurd and displeasing behaviors that were frowned upon.<sup>98</sup> Molière affirms in his preface that bores were easily found throughout the city and the court but also stated that the little time he was given to write prohibited him from studying carefully his choice of characters. He thus confined himself to a small number of bores—those particularly familiar to the court.<sup>99</sup>

Debuting at Vaux on August 17, 1661, *Les Fâcheux's* protagonist is Éraste, a man whose time is wasted by the vexing behaviors of bores. His mission throughout the performance is to court his love Orphise, yet time alone with her is continually

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<sup>98</sup>Goldstein, 31.

<sup>99</sup>Molière, *Les Fâcheux*, in *The Dramatic Works of Molière Vol. 2*, trans. Henri Van Laun. (Edinburg: William Paterson, 1875), preface.

interrupted and hindered. She too, surrounded by bores, finds it difficult to give as much as a moment's glance to Éraste, though professing her love for him. Bores come and go, providing an annoying, yet comical, respite to the frustration of Éraste. His struggle with the many bores which plague his life brings humor and allows Moliere to mock some of the habits of the court and nobility. This play provides key support in showing how everyday courtly life became blurred between daily happenings and theatrical performances.

The first bore introduced is one who meets Éraste at a play, noisily making his way to sit on the stage—a custom for young men of fashion to do at the time—hiding the view of the stage to three-fourths of the pit. His loud voice and complete disregard of others watching the play distract both the audience and actors alike. He embraces Éraste, an action which Éraste criticizes stating, “I was but slightly known to him... but so it is with these men, who assume an acquaintance on nothing, whose embraces we are obliged to endure when we meet them, and who are so familiar with us as to thou and thee us.”<sup>100</sup>

Seventeenth century audiences would be familiar with the tradition of nobility sitting on stage. Their presence there brought attention to their noble status while also blurring the lines between the play and reality. Both were spectacles in their own right, one theatrical (the play) while the other one social (the seated nobility). Members of the audience seated onstage became part of the performance since their behavior was very much a part of the action taking place onstage. This tradition not only demonstrated a hierarchy in theater-goers; it also created a division as those of lower status were only able to pay for a seat in the *parterre* where their view was blocked and the spectacle experienced through glimpses of actors and non-actor noblemen.

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 98.

After his encounter with the bore on stage Éraсте stumbles across Dorante, another bore, who relates his story. One day while out stag hunting his group met with an oblivious hunter unsuited for hunting with nobility— a country-gentleman who carried a long sword and was accompanied by his equally oblivious and unskilled son. He gave airs of being a great huntsman and asked to join the party. Dorante’s description of the oblivious hunter bears all negative criticisms while describing his own actions as ones of merit. He thinks himself so great that he even interrupts his story to bring up the fact that he owns a horse from Gaveau, a well known horse-dealer of the time—a horse so marvelous that he could be fit for the king. The climax of the story has the misled hunter making an annoyance of himself, not really knowing how to hunt and proving so by shooting the animal in the forehead with a pistol. Dorante clearly expresses his disgust with the situation saying, “Good Heavens! Did anyone ever hear of pistols in stag-hunting?” continuing that he was so angry that he spurred his horse in rage and returned home without saying a word to the ignorant fool.<sup>101</sup>

Similar to the first bore, noble audience members would have recognized and laughed at the ridiculousness of Dorante’s inability to control his temper and his rigidity in adhering to the strict rules that were involved in hunting. Yet Dorante was a hunter who wanted his abilities and prized horse to be recognized and adored, traits which the nobility themselves could relate to. The fact that it was the king himself who wanted a hunter bore included—as noted in the preface—in order to make a flattering mockery of his audience members is further proof of the blurring of theater and reality. Each bore represented an exaggerated equivalent of someone in society. That person being mocked and portrayed onstage was often someone seated in the audience and the spectators were

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 119.

aware of either the type of person being portrayed or knew of the person himself. What Molière was attempting to demonstrate was that any member of society could be portrayed onstage. All that was required was a bit of exaggeration and mockery as well as a willing audience who would not take offense at being made fun of.

In addition to Molière's mockery, the king's input regarding the hunter bore demonstrates the ability to blur the lines between reality and theater as well as the power and influence the king had. The privileged viewpoint in the theater was essentially the king's. Seated in the center of the audience, the king not only saw the performance from the privileged viewpoint but also *was* the privileged viewpoint. Placed in an area where all could see him, he was very much like the actor onstage: constantly seen by the audience and encompassed by the action onstage. With the entire audience aware of his presence, they were also aware of his reaction; what he thought funny was then considered funny by the rest of the audience. The king's ability to add or alter the play, as well as become part of the performance, is another example of the ambiguity between reality and theatrical illusion. The first performance of *Les Fâcheux* did not include the hunter bore. The king, having seen the original performance, felt that the play would be better served with such a bore. This power the king had to dictate what should be included in a play manifested his absolute power and furthered his endeavors to portray himself in an authoritative light.

Each encounter with a bore continues a pattern reflecting specific aspects which were deemed important at the time—for it was under the rule of Louis XIV that culture became monopolized by the court, while questions regarding etiquette and power aptly

became the most important questions to pose in public.<sup>102</sup> The controversies—if one chooses to call them such—Molière discusses in *Les Fâcheux* suggest that “domesticity and the private side of court life had become sources of serious art and, indeed, that questions of everyday life... were suffused with social and political meaning.<sup>103</sup> Though some may deem the lifestyle of the royalty and nobility excessive, it is apparent that their behavior, their style, and their way of life were the constituents of French art.

The ability for members of the court to recognize themselves in the characters acted onstage was key to the play’s success. Their lifestyle—though art to some—was one which could be mocked. If the audience failed to see themselves in the mirror, the play was mere entertainment. But the success of *Les Fâcheux* came in part because the spectators saw their own likeness reflected back to them. Molière primarily exposed this private life in an attempt to get laughs, not necessarily to reform. Ridicule, however, is a powerful tool and though audiences may have initially laughed, situations that the play touched upon normally corresponded with more serious ones and were thus a commentary on the world.<sup>104</sup> Audiences quickly understood that not all was simply for laughs. Some of Molière’s contemporaries even argued that Molière was better able to change some of the faults of court members and noblemen than the Church:

Many people in Paris say very seriously that Molière has done more by himself to correct the faults of the Court and the City than all the preachers together: and I believe that they are right, provided that they refer only to certain qualities which do not constitute a crime as much as they do a false taste, or a stupid infatuation as you would describe the humor of prudes, of those who exaggerate styles, who

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<sup>102</sup>Emanuel S. Chill. “Tartuffe, Religion, and Courtly Culture,” *French Historical Studies* 3, no. 2 (Autumn, 1963) : 180.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

elevate themselves to Marquis, who speak incessantly of their nobility, who always have some poem of their own making to show people, etc. These are the disorders which Molière's comedies have diminished a little.<sup>105</sup>

*Les Fâcheux*'s portrayal of French noble life playfully mocked by characters in the play displays the hierarchal society in which seventeenth century noblemen and royalty lived.

The description of the play's performance reinforces the idea that the play was part of a larger performance. Presented in the gardens of Vaux, the main stage was set up in front of the grille d'eau. Jean de La Fontaine, an author and friend of Fouquet, describes the setting in the following way:

The stage was adorned with thick foliage,  
And illuminated by a hundred torches:  
The Heavens were jealous. Finally just imagine  
That when the curtains were drawn,  
Everything at Vaux conspired to please the king:  
The music, water display, the lights, the stars.<sup>106</sup>

Once the curtains parted Molière himself appeared on stage and addressed the King, apologizing for the disorder of the play, for not being able to commence on time, and for needing more actors to put on a show fit for the King. All of a sudden twenty natural cascades began flowing and a large shell became visible in the water, advancing. A Naiad who was within came to the front of the stage and began reciting the verses which served as the Prologue.<sup>107</sup> Describing how the gardens came alive, the Prologue reads,

Ye nymphs and Demi-Gods, whose Presence fills  
Their sacred Trunks, come forth; so Louis wills...  
With borrow'd Shape cheat the Spectator's Eye,

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<sup>105</sup>Bayle *Oeuvres Diverses*. (The Hague, 1737), I, 40; quoted in Emanuel S. Chill, "Tartuffe, Religion, and Courtly Culture." *French Historical Studies* 3, no. 2 (Autumn, 1963): 175.

<sup>106</sup> Jean de La Fontaine. "Lettre à M. de Maucroix's, account of an entertainment given at Vaux, 22 August 1661", *Œuvres diverses*, Pierre Clarac, Paris, Gallimard, La Pléiade, 1958, 523-525; quoted in Jean-Marie Perouse de Montclos. *Vaux le Vicomte*. (London: Scala Books, 1997), 14.

<sup>107</sup>Molière, 92.



And to Theatric Art yourselves apply.<sup>108</sup>

Nymphs and demi-gods emerged from the gardens' various trees and bushes as commanded, blurring the line between the garden's reality and the fiction of the theater. Once it had become dark, lanterns were lit and placed along pathways setting aglow the garden and château. The grotto lit up and from the grass amphitheater shot up fireworks and rockets. Finally, spectators were treated to the spectacle of a crafted whale which floated down the canal to the beat of drums and the sound of trumpets.<sup>109</sup> The elaborate garden designs described coupled with the magnificence of the performance enabled the audience to be part of the performance as its presentation was not only happening onstage before their eyes but all around them.

#### **IV. Versailles as the Garden Theater**

*Les Fâcheux* was performed at both Vaux and Versailles. The three years between its performance at Vaux and later performance at Versailles allowed for dramatic change to the court society who watched. Though the garden came to life at Vaux, a few years later, the etiquette for theater would permit members of the audience to participate in the actual performance. At Versailles, seating arrangements were put in place, flamboyant costumes and dramatic sets came together with ritual and both the play and the guests' itinerary were choreographed.<sup>110</sup>

Similar to Vaux-le-Vicomte, the designs of the gardens at Versailles contained a variety of theatrical elements, although by comparison, the designs and creations of the

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., prologue.

<sup>109</sup>Woodbridge, 193-194.

<sup>110</sup>Goldstein, 27.

gardens at Versailles were much grander. Promenades, fountains and canals lost their small, intimate feeling and attempts to impress and demonstrate the power of the king were effective through the immensity and presentation of the grounds.

The theatricality of the garden at Versailles is evident in a variety of ways. First, the gardens were meant to be seen in an almost linear spectacle—a specific route through the gardens which the king had laid out himself. Visitors were taken on this route in order to show the gardens at their best. Referred to as the “marche que le roy a ordonnée” it was stated that the route was, “la route qu’il faut tenir pour voir tout ce qu’il y a dans le jardin de Versailles.”<sup>111</sup> This planned route followed the great sculptures and fountains of the gardens and was done in a manner which would permit the fountains to be turned on at the specific time in which visitors would be passing as the water pressure was not strong enough for the fountains to be on at all times. This planned route reveals the garden as a performance, transforming reality into a spectacle for the visitor.

Second, the gardens of Versailles were the site for other types of performances. In May of 1664 an extraordinary celebration was held at Versailles known as *The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle* or *Les Plaisirs de l’Isle Enchantée*. The weeklong affair presented numerous plays, including the premieres of Molière’s *The Princess of Elis* and *Tartuffe*. The festivities were more than mere entertainment, though. The performances, presentations and extravagance that were put into the events were created with the purpose of displaying the absolute power of Louis XIV. He was the God of the garden, leading the entourage of actors through *his* creation, making it so that all obeyed his will. Each play in one way or another demonstrated the idea that the king was absolute ruler,

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<sup>111</sup>Christopher Thacker. "Louis XIV's Last 'Maniere de montrer les jardins de Versailles'" *Garden History*, 6 no. 2 (Summer, 1978): 31.

one who knew all, one who saw all. They also built upon the idea of the garden being a setting in which reality and performance blended together.

The first day's festivities of *The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle* had over six hundred persons in attendance. So great was the sense of accomplishment and grandeur that scholars noted even nature had taken care to render Versailles perfect. During a normally rainy period in France, inclement weather during the week's celebration was thankfully a non-issue. The entire production was said to have cost so much that Louis had the account records burned in order to keep prying eyes from discovering the price associated with such splendor.<sup>112</sup>

The first day featured one of the biggest spectacles of the entire production, Molière's *The Princess of Elis*, whose placement was at the beginning of the multi-day celebration. Using a vast number of members of the court, Dukes, Marquis, and other noblemen including the King himself, all took part in a procession which was the opening for the week's celebration. Over forty members of the court and royal family paraded around in a preface to the actual performance. Their inclusion in the preface of the week-long celebration manifests the way in which reality and fiction intermingled and demonstrates the ways in which theatrical performance spilled beyond the stage.

In this introduction, the king played the part of Rogier, a cavalier. At one point during the performance he and his group of courtiers found themselves stranded on an island and decided to perform a play to relieve their boredom. This play within a play was Molière's *Princess of Elis*. The king, no longer acting, took his seat in the center of

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<sup>112</sup>Anonymous author. *Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle* in *The Dramatic Works of Molière*, 3, trans. Henri Van Laun. (Edinburg: William Paterson, 1875), 5.

the audience arena: the privileged viewpoint, to both view the performance and be seen while the play was acted out.

The play within a play demonstrates the way a performance was able to take reality—members of the court—and place them within a fictional setting—a theater performance. Versailles' intricate designs created by Le Nôtre acted as the backdrop for the play with stages set up perfectly to frame different perspectives in the garden while candles added light at night, bringing an indoor feeling to the outdoor stage. The pastoral scenes in which the play was set mirrored the gardens which acted both as backdrop and as a surrounding and enclosing area.

## **V. Tartuffe**

The sixth day of the celebration presented Molière's comedy *Tartuffe* or *The Imposter*. *Tartuffe* recounts the story of Orgon, a wealthy man, who has in his household a religious advisor whose name constitutes the title of the play. The play follows the lives of Orgon and the rest of his family, who believe that their husband and father have been duped by the hypocritical Tartuffe. The play begins at a point in which Tartuffe has deceived Orgon, the family patriarch, to such an extent that he is on the brink of taking everything the family owns, all the while attempting to seduce Orgon's wife, Elmire.

The various characters in the play are figures that would have been familiar to the French audience. The role of religion, and of religious hypocrisy, was very much a subject of controversy and debate during this period, which saw conflict arise between two religious groups, the Jesuits and Jansenists. Jansenism was a well known religious movement originating during the seventeenth century ideologically opposed to the Jesuit order, which had begun just before the start of the Counter Reformation. Jesuits were

strong in their missionary zeal and set out to convert all people: both members of the church who had fallen away and those who were not yet members. To help with the conversion, members of the Jesuit movement often attempted to make the Catholic faith more appealing—their critics claimed that such a stance led to compromises regarding standards of the church. Directors of conscience, who were mainly Jesuit, were accused of being lax on punishments with too great an emphasis on mitigating circumstances.

In the play, Orgon and his mother have fallen under the spell of Tartuffe and do not do anything without asking him first. The rest of the family is disgusted with the loyalty given to Tartuffe and devises a plan that will expose his attempts to seduce Elmire in order to prove to Orgon that he is an imposter. Tartuffe falls into the trap and when various family members who witnessed the event attempt to tell their father, Tartuffe refuses to defend himself against the charges, using religious language to acknowledge his wicked ways. It is a trick though, and after numerous professions by Tartuffe about his sinful nature and actions, Orgon sides with Tartuffe, ‘punishing’ him by ordering him to be around Elmire even more often.

Tired of not being believed, Elmire takes on the role of actress, pretending as if she really wants to be with Tartuffe. She plays along with him in an attempt to dupe him and puts on a ‘mask’ or hidden identity of her own. Her main goal in pretending to give in to him is to get him to drop his own mask and act honestly. In yet another example of the blurring between truth and performance, Elmire’s staged fiction produces the truth and makes evident the ultimate reality of Tartuffe’s true desires.

This play within a play has an on-stage audience, since Orgon is convinced to listen in on Elmire’s plot to get Tartuffe to seduce her. When all happens according to

plan he attempts to have Tartuffe thrown out. But Tartuffe claims that Orgon has given him everything he needs to take the family's fortune, including self-incriminating letters from a friend. Tartuffe leaves, but with threats to return with guards who will have the family thrown from their house. Upon his return he brings with him a police officer who, after verifying Tartuffe's intent to have the family evicted from their home, arrests him instead. Unbeknownst to Tartuffe the soldier bears the wishes of the King who had heard of his antics and would have no more of it. Orgon and his family are grateful to have been saved from such a crook. Once Orgon discovers Tartuffe's falsities he vows to hate and persecute all pious men. Orgon's actions—ridiculous—are noted by Cléante who chides him for his quickness to jump from one extreme to another. He advises Orgon to not think that all pious men are like him but rather leave such rash conclusions to infidels and “distinguish virtue from its counterfeit.”<sup>113</sup>

Paying close attention to the representation of the king and his actions one sees the intelligent and observant manner in which the king desired to be presented. The emphasis is placed on his ability to oversee the situation and discern truth from error. His men have for a time been watching and waiting to catch Tartuffe at the right moment. By arresting Tartuffe the king proves that he has the privileged view—the all-seeing eye—which prevents chaos and gives order to society. Interestingly enough, no person represents the king—his wishes are carried out by the officer. Yet, the king's privileged view is carried beyond his ability to see and know all. He is in fact seated in the center of the viewing area, playing the role of privileged spectator as a member of the audience. His view has the advantage of being central not only to the stage but also to the viewing positions of the designs of Le Nôtre's garden. Just as the gardens at Versailles and Vaux

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<sup>113</sup>Molière, *Tartuffe*, trans. Richard Wilbur (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1965) 5.1-2

were designed to have viewpoints that were privileged—the châteaux’s terraces and balconies—the role of the king was similarly related. The best view of the gardens was from privileged viewpoints and once in the garden, the château could be seen from all aspects; its presence was never overshadowed, never hidden. It was the locus of power which, like God, held all things in control. The king too sat in his privileged seat—much like the balcony or terrace—and was constantly present for audience members to see—much like the château. This prestige and power the king held ordered the world which surrounded him. Nothing was ever hidden from his all-seeing eye. Though others may be fooled by the intricate gardens designed to do just that, the king—like God—never was.

While the play’s ending presents a compelling correspondence between theater and garden, it is unsure if this parallel would have existed in 1664: the text of the original play is not available, and the original 1664 version did not necessarily correspond with the 1669 text which has survived. The 1664 play performed at Versailles was found to be offensive and stirred up many controversies and history notes that the objection to the play was immediate, forcing the king to make a decision as to its fate. His decision demonstrates the king’s superior ability to see what others were not able to see—to discern true intentions from false and to protect those who were mere mortals and did not have the blessing of being able to make such discernments. Records state that,

...although the King thought [the play] was very diverting, he found so much conformity between those whom a true devotion leads in the way to Heaven, and those whom a vain ostentation of good works does not hinder from committing evil ones, that his extreme delicacy in point of religion could hardly bear that resemblance of vice and virtue which might be mistaken for one another. And although he did not doubt the good intentions of the author, he forbade its being acted in public, and deprived himself of that pleasure, so as not to deceive others who were less capable of a just discernment.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>*Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle*, 135.

Religious *dévots* had problems with the main characters of the play, in particular Orgon, who while expressing many of the basic tenets of the church and performing deeds consistent with the character of a devout man, was presented as a dupe whose actions demonstrated that he did not live by the standards of common sense, good taste, moderation, and the other qualities admired by Molière's age. Another issue was Molière's presentation of Tartuffe whose character seemed to mock Jesuits by claiming privilege to sin without showing any remorse of conscience.

Molière's comedies of the mid-1660s showed development in his work as a playwright. Though some of his plays could be deemed 'escapist fantasies' (*The Princess of Elis*), the vast majority of his writings engaged issues which were more realistic, serious, and problematic. Not only did *Tartuffe* chastise bigotry but it also satirized the moral attitudes common at court and challenged the way of the devout life.<sup>115</sup> It is obvious that the *dévots* found the play to be extremely offensive as they were the principle instigators of having its performance shut down. Though no remnants remain of the original production—making it difficult to know what exactly was performed—it has been strongly argued that the original was a more broad comedy with a low-brow bigot being presented as the dupe of “an equally vulgar confidence man. It is likely, moreover, that this petty crook, the first Tartuffe, was portrayed as a *fourbe en soutane*, a priest.”<sup>116</sup>

The prohibition of *Tartuffe*'s performance did not come about until May 27, 1664, following a reported meeting between the archbishop of Paris and the king about the evil

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<sup>115</sup>Chill, 153.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 154.



effects which the comedy might produce.<sup>117</sup> Yet only a few years later Molière was able to regain permission for a public showing of a newly revised *Tartuffe*. The affection Louis XIV had for comedy, the death of his deeply religious mother, Anne of Austria, and the loss of power of the *dévots* in the Paris region, enabled Molière to win the king's informal consent in the spring of 1667 for a public staging of the revised and expanded *Tartuffe*. On August 5, 1667, a new five-act version, called *L'Imposteur*, with the name Panulphe substituted for Tartuffe, was presented at the Palais Royal.<sup>118</sup> There it was staged a single time after which it was again prohibited, this time by the Parisian Parlement whose president, M. de Lamoignon, was a *dévo*t. It remained banned until 1669 when the performance and publication ban was permanently lifted.

Why such reactions? Responses such as this were not unusual at the time and reflected the beliefs of strict church leaders and devout worshipers. For once the blurring of theater and reality rode too close of a line. Pierre Nicole, author of *Traité de la comédie* and devout Jansenist wrote that all representations performed in the theater were inherently vicious since their measure of success depended on their abilities to arouse the passions of the audience. Blaise Pascal, prominent mathematician and philosopher, explained the belief in theater's damaging capabilities in his *Pensées* stating:

All the principal kinds of entertainment are dangerous for Christian life. But among all those which the world has invented there is none more to be feared than the theater. It gives us such a natural and delicate representation of the passions that it arouses them and engenders them in our hearts, especially that of love, mainly when it is represented as very chaste and virtuous, for the more innocent it seems to innocent souls, the more liable they are to be moved by it.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 155.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>119</sup>Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2005), 186.

True Christian principles were incapable of being represented in theater since comedy only spoke to the passions while true religion aimed at the repression of passion.<sup>120</sup> Guillaume de Lamoignon, president of the Parlement and member of the Company of the Holy Sacrament was given charge of the city of Paris while the king was away during the siege of Lille. His firm rationale as to the prohibition of the play further demonstrates the disapproval of theater's attempt to teach morals:

I cannot allow you to perform your comedy. I am persuaded that it is very pleasant and very instructive, but it is not proper for comedians to instruct men in questions of Christian ethics and of religion: It is not for the theater to preach the gospel.<sup>121</sup>

Because *Tartuffe* was built on an unusual awareness of what was currently happening in religious circles, its depiction of bourgeois society reflects commonly held beliefs of the time.<sup>122</sup> *Tartuffe* is neither Jansenist nor Jesuit but a combination of contemporary religious sentiments that would have been familiar to nobility and upper class individuals. The vagueness and multiplicity of his characteristic traits permitted his behavior to be applicable to more audiences than just one and thus also created a greater backlash.

Molière's ability to create a play in which society's biggest hypocrites took center stage enraged many, most especially the *dévots* who believed that their behavior did not deserve such mockery. Creating this social mirror seemed to suggest that members of society themselves were playing the role of hypocrite as if they were actors, watching a

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<sup>120</sup>Chill, 159-60.

<sup>121</sup>Guillaume de Lamoignon "Memoires de Brossette...," op. cit., 665; quoted in Emanuel S. Chill. "Tartuffe, Religion, and Courtly Culture." *French Historical Studies*. Vol. 3, No. 2 (Autumn, 1963) : 158.

<sup>122</sup>Chill, 169

play which would—after the performance finished—continue in the daily lives of the members of the audience. These *dévots* recognized their brand of religiosity being mocked on stage and would not stand for the reality of the scorn.

Not everyone enjoyed their portrayal onstage, as reflected by the response of the *dévots*. What is clear, though, is that plays reflected society and the elements of the gardens were able to create a more commanding space where power could be acted out. Without the contribution of wealthy patrons, gardens would not have been created on such a grand scale and thus plays and ballets would not have been performed within them. The garden designs of André Le Nôtre at Vaux-le-Vicomte and Versailles created beauty and grandeur on a level never before seen. Important aspects of the plays, such as *Tartuffe*'s inclusion of the all-knowing, ever-powerful king, *The Princess of Elis*' play within a play and *Les Fâcheux*'s call for the garden to come to life, were reflected in the garden's elements. Perspective, diminishing landscapes and hidden features were designed to add a modern touch to Classical principles of the ancients. These physical elements of the garden created the highest levels of imitation and facilitated the movement of theater towards *vraisemblance*.

These plays were part of a larger performance than what was seen onstage. Plays were able to encompass noble life, which for the court and wealthy elite consisted of riches, excess and admiration. Their lives portrayed and oft times mocked onstage, as well as their participation in plays such as *The Princess of Elis* demonstrate theater's illusion of truth by blurring the lines between reality and fiction. The French formal garden during the seventeenth century became one of the more important physical

settings for theater because of its ability to incorporate its surroundings in a manner which heightened the play's elements and sensation of reality.

Just as courtly life was dominated by the king—his viewpoint, his opinion—theater and the garden followed similarly. The privileged viewpoint in the garden was from the centrally placed château, a majestic and imposing creation of beauty. The best view was seen from high above on its balconies and terraces. In the theater the king's perspective was also the privileged one. Seated in a central location, close to the stage, the king became part of the spectacle, blurring the lines of reality and illusion as audience members intently watched both the play and the king's reaction. From the king's position outward, the hierarchy of the view diminished, the king's position always being central and the most important.

When performed in the garden, the privileged viewpoints intermingled with one another. The garden's perspective which naturally led the eye far off into the distance became the natural backdrop for a performance. No curtain or faux screen was needed as the natural beauty and view of the garden attributed a realistic touch to the fictional performance. In certain plays, garden elements—sculptures, water fountains, and trees—were played by actors, all with the purpose of bringing the garden to life and helping to maintain a feeling of illusion and spectacle within the lines of reality. This intermingling of elements brings together two of the great art forms of seventeenth century France, providing a glimpse into the courtly life, the privileged view, and the elements of illusion which created the grand spectacle of garden design and theater.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

It is easy to see how two art forms developing during the same century would naturally contain similar elements of design and presentation. Yet the intermingling of a visual art form—found in the design of the garden—and a dramatic art form—established in the theater—blended in more ways than is usually acknowledged in the field specific study of art history or theater.

It has been common in my research to find the garden and theater approached as separate entities with articles and books focusing on ways in which the two arts flourish independently. The art historical approach takes into account the ways in which the garden developed artistically and historically. Additional research focuses on the ways in which the garden influenced styles throughout garden architecture in Europe. Research regarding French theater often addresses plays within the context of French history or takes a comparative approach within the study itself. The little research that has taken a comparative approach in relation to gardens and theater is brief and tends to be more informative and historical than argumentative.

The message which garden and theater was able to convey was that man could create, control and reflect a given message through art: man could direct and sculpt

nature to create a world that expressed a specific message. Together, the garden and theater created a new reality, a reflection of the social and political power of seventeenth century France.

By arguing that the elements of garden and theater combine to create similar and powerful social and political spaces, my work opens up a different avenue of research with its inclusion of King Louis XIV. I argue that the powerful space created within the garden and theater combine to portray absolutism. The portrayal of power though is not requisite to present things as they necessarily are, but as they should and ought to be seen: the garden and theater helped Louis to be seen as he desired. By understanding that Louis's reign was more likely than not influenced by the creation and subsequent festivities at Vaux-le-Vicomte, one can consider the strength of a comparative approach and explore the ways in which the garden and theater helped to shape Louis XIV's views and implementation of absolutism.

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Fig. 1 Vaux le Vicomte, *Aerial View*, Arthus Bertrand.



Fig. 2 Villa d'Este, *Façade of the garden*. Reprinted with permission of photographer.

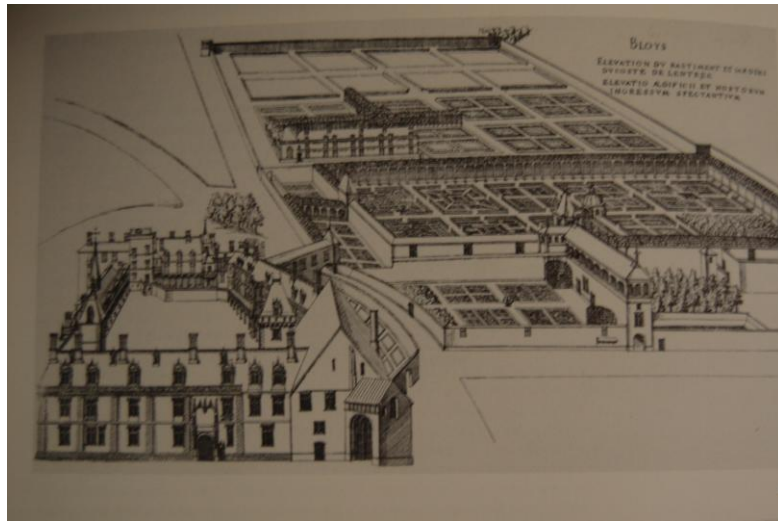


Fig. 3 Gardens of Blois



Fig. 4 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Cascade*. Photograph by author.



Fig. 5 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *La poêle*. Photograph by author.



Fig. 6 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *View from Terrace*. Reprinted by permission from Scala, *Vaux le Vicomte*.



Fig. 7 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Parterre de la Couronne*. Courtesy of Michael J. Call.



Fig. 8 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Grille d'eau*. Reprinted with permission from Georges Fessy.

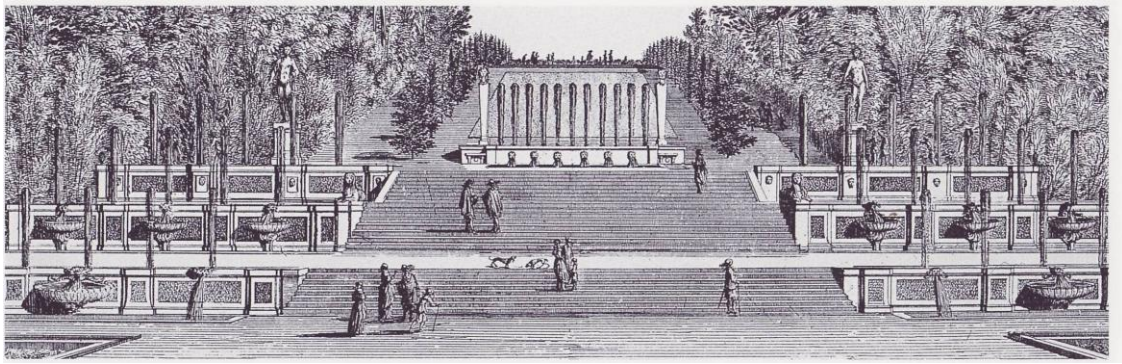


Fig. 9 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Grille d'eau*. Israël Silvestre, 1658.



Fig. 10 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Flower Parterre*. Courtesy of Michael J. Call.



Fig. 11 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Flower parterre*. Reprinted with permission from Georges Fessy.



Fig. 12 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Allée d'eau*. Israel Silvestre.



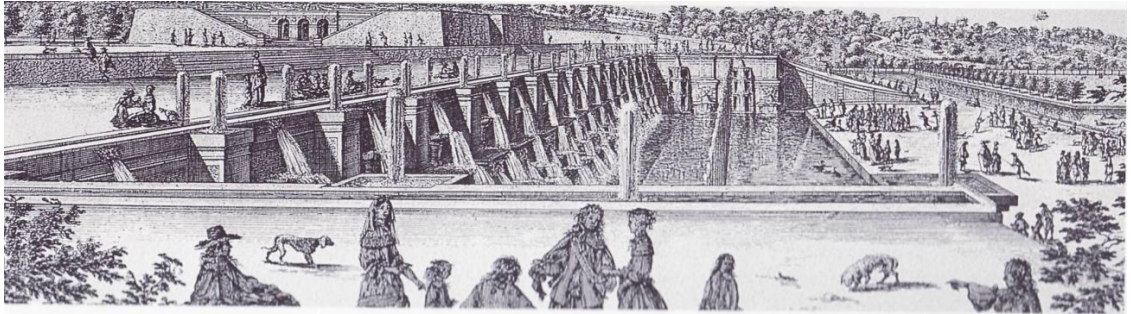


Fig. 13 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Cascade*. Israel Silvestre.



Fig. 14 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Grotto and terms*. Reprinted by permission from Scala, *Vaux le Vicomte*.



Fig. 15 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *View of Axis*. Reprinted with permission from Georges Fessy.



Fig. 16 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Entrance*. Michael J. Call.



Fig. 17 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Fountain and grotto*. Reprinted with permission from Georges Fessy.



Fig. 18 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Square Fountain*. Reprinted with permission from Georges Fessy.

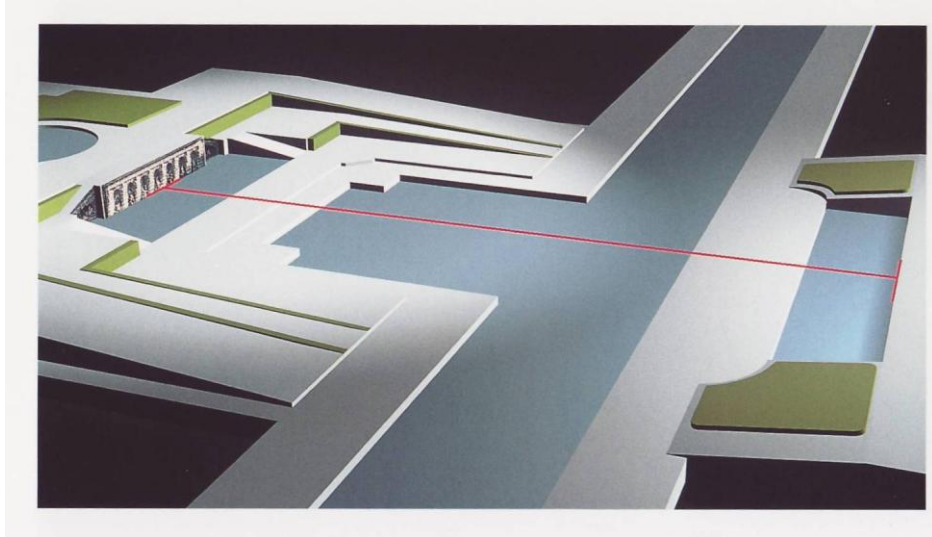


Fig. 19 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Canal and grotto elevation.*



Fig. 20 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Looking over the canal.* Photo by author.



Fig. 21 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Parterre de la Couronne*. Reprinted with permission from Georges Fessy.

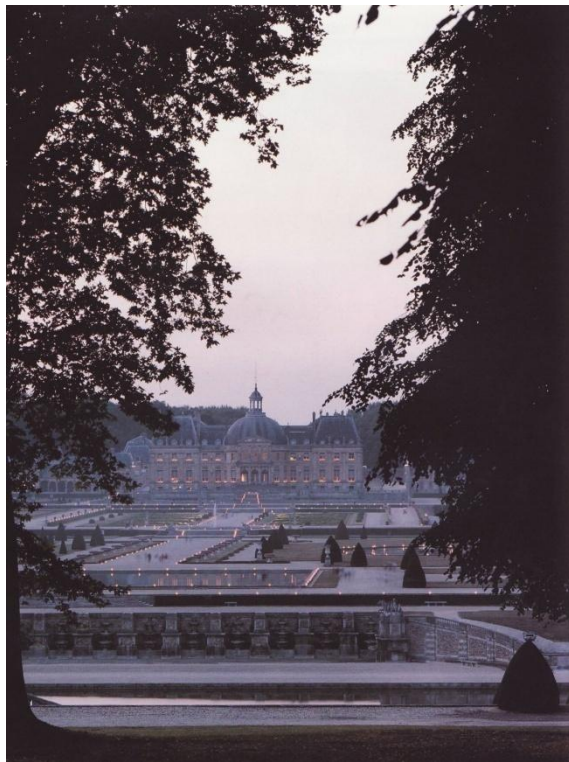


Fig. 22 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *View through the trees*. Reprinted with permission from Georges Fessy.

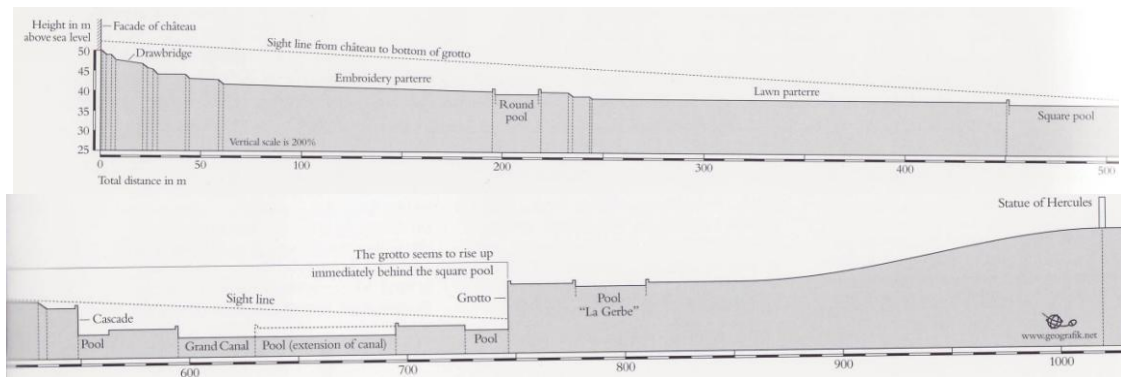


Fig. 23 Vaux-le-Vicomte, *Elevation grid*. Reprinted with permission from artist.



Fig. 24 Jean de Saint-Igny, *Louis XIII (1601-43) Anne of Austria (1601-66) and Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) at the production of 'Mirame', a play by J. Desmarest de Saint-Sorlin, at the Palais Cardinal (now Palais Royal) Paris in 1641, 1590-1647*. Bridgeman Art Library.



Fig. 25 Versailles, *Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle*. Israel Silvestre.