

SHORT LOAN

THE CULTURE OF
POWER AND
THE POWER OF
CULTURE



Old Regime Europe 1660-1789

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Louis XIV and Versailles

The political and cultural transformation which occurred in France during the middle decades of the seventeenth century can be exemplified by a tale of two bedrooms. During the night of 9–10 February 1651, the 12-year-old King Louis XIV was obliged to feign sleep in the Palais Royal, as a mob of rebellious Parisians forced their way into his room to see for themselves that he was still in his capital and still their hostage. Although they then left, it may safely be assumed that the boy-king had been terrified by the experience. Certainly, his political mentors were sufficiently intimidated to make immediate political concessions to the opposition. On the following day, a royal order was signed releasing from custody three of the leaders of the Fronde, as the rebellion was known (*Fronde* means 'sling-shot'), all of them closely related to the king—the prince de Condé, the prince de Conti, and the duc de Longueville. This invasion of the royal bedchamber was as low as the French monarchy was to come in the seventeenth century.

Fifty years later, Louis XIV's bedroom had become the centre of an elaborate ritual which demonstrated the absolute authority of the king over even his mightiest subjects.¹ Architecturally, it had been made the focal point of his

¹ Indeed, 'the state bed was the primary symbol of sovereignty in France'; see Kevin Orlin Johnson, 'Il n'y a plus de Pyrénées: The iconography of the first Versailles of Louis XIV', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 97 (1981), p. 30. The bed and the throne were regarded as interchangeable in French royal symbolism; the throne occupied by the king during a royal session of the Parlement of Paris was known as a 'bed of justice' (*lit de justice*), taking the form of five large cushions on which the sovereign reclined rather than sat; Hugh Murray Baillie, 'Étiennette and the planning of the state apartments in baroque palaces', *Archaeologia*, 101 (1967), p. 186.

great new palace at Versailles, the largest, grandest, and most glamorous secular building in Europe. A traveller arriving from Paris first entered an immense open space, bounded to left and right by the stables, big enough to house 12,000 horses and majestic enough themselves to be a royal residence. Entry to the palace proper was through a great railed screen leading into another large space, flanked by buildings occupied by officers of state. At the far end, another screen opened the way to three further courts, each narrower than the last, culminating in the 'Marble Court'.² The focal point of the last-named, commanding the central axis of the entire complex, was the king's bedroom. Similarly, from the reverse side of the palace, the central axis runs from the fountain of Apollo as he rises from the sea through the fountain of his mother (Latona), enters the palace façade between the statues of Apollo and Diana (Apollo's sister) and goes from there to the royal bedroom.³

It was there that, every morning at the *lever*, the flower of the French aristocracy gathered to wait on their king, as he rose, prayed, performed his bodily functions, chose his wig, was shaved and dressed. The marquis de Saint-Maurice recorded: 'There is no finer sight in the world than the court at the *lever* of the King. When I attended it yesterday, there were three rooms full of people of quality, such a crowd that you would not believe how difficult it was to get into His Majesty's bedchamber'.⁴ Every night at the *coucher* the courtiers gathered again, to watch their master feed his dogs, say his prayers, undress, and don his nightgown: 'He said good night with an inclination of his head, and whilst everybody was leaving the room, stood at the corner of the mantel-piece, where he gave the order to the colonel of the guards alone. Then commenced what was called the *petit coucher*, at which only the specially privileged remained. That was short. They did not leave until he got into bed.'⁵ No one other than the king ever slept in that bed: if the king needed sex, he went to the bedchamber of the queen or a mistress. Indeed, any woman who

² There is a good description of the approach to the palace in Guy Walton, *Louis XIV's Versailles* (Chicago, 1986), ch. 1, together with many illustrations and ground plans.

³ Ralph E. Gieseey, 'Models of rulership in French royal ceremonial', in Sean Wilentz (ed.), *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1985), p. 59.

⁴ Quoted in Jean-François Solnon, *La Cour de France* (Paris, 1987), p. 321. Saint-Maurice was writing about the Louvre in 1667 but his description would have applied equally well to Versailles in 1687 or 1707. He added that there were more than 800 carriages drawn up outside the palace.

⁵ W. H. Lewis (ed.), *The Memoirs of the Duc de Saint-Simon*, trans. B. St. John (London, 1904), p. 145.

passed through the royal bedroom in the course of the day was obliged to curtsy in obeisance towards the bed.⁶

The conduct of the *lever*, *coucher*, and other court ceremonies was directed by a rigorous form of etiquette linked to a strict hierarchy. At the equally formal *lever* of the queen, for example, the maid of honour enjoyed the right to pass the queen her chemise, but was obliged to forgo this privilege if a royal princess were present. On one occasion, the unfortunate Queen Marie Thérèse was obliged to stand naked as, first the duchesse d'Orléans and then the even higher-ranking comtesse de Provence arrived to claim the right to transport the royal underwear.⁷ The rigid precedence revealed by this episode only served to emphasize the distance which separated the king and his family from his court, for he alone had the power to make exceptions. He alone could indicate by special concession that this or that courtier enjoyed his special favour—or displeasure. It was an asset he exploited with relish and skill, keeping his nobles on their toes as they competed for marks of distinction. When the duc de Saint-Simon angered him by resigning from the army, Louis responded at once, first by going out of his way at the *coucher* to distinguish him (by allowing him to hold the royal candelabra for a few seconds)—and then by ignoring him completely for three years.⁸ If Hell is to be denial of the face of God, Heaven in Louis XIV's France was proximity to the king. Such was the verdict of the duchesse d'Orléans after she had been invited to dine with the king and his current mistress, Madame de Montespan:

That means that I am actually very much in fashion, and the courtiers admire whatever I do, whether it be good or bad... If the courtiers think you are in favour you may do what you like and you are sure of approval, but if they think the contrary, they would hold you up to ridicule, even if you came straight from Heaven.⁹

Louis XIV ruled France for seventy-two years, the longest-reigning monarch in European history. This was partly because he was very much a late arrival, for by the time of his birth his parents had been married for twenty-two childless years. It was partly because his father died when he was only 5; and it was partly because he had been blessed with a particularly robust physical constitution. Yet he was also the author of his own good fortune, for it should

⁶ Gieseey, 'Models of rulership', p. 60.

⁷ Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* (Oxford, 1983), p. 86.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁹ To the duchess of Hanover, Saint Germain, 14 December 1674; Gertrude Scott Stevenson (ed.), *The Letters of Madame, The Correspondence of Elisabeth-Charlotte of Bavaria, Princess Palatine, Duchesse of Orleans, called "Madame" at the Court of King Louis XIV*, 2 vols. (London, 1924-5), I, p. 29.

be remembered that kingship was not without its risks in early modern Europe. Both Henry III and Henry IV (Louis's grandfather) had been assassinated in 1589 and 1610 respectively, Charles I of England (Louis's uncle) was executed in 1649 and James II (Louis's first cousin) was to be deposed in 1688. After his distressing experience at the hands of the mob in February 1651, Louis took no chances, insisting on very careful protection. He did not move from one room to another in the Louvre without guards first being placed along the corridors and up the staircases, and if he ventured out to attend a religious service in a neighbouring church or chapel, the streets were lined with troops.¹⁰

More subtly, he cloaked himself in a protective aura none the less effective for being invisible. First at the royal palaces in and around Paris, and then definitively at Versailles, he created a royal culture which not only stabilized his own monarchy but created a model which was followed by most of the rest of Europe. It should never be supposed that the representational culture of the kind which reached its climax at Versailles was an expression of unbounded confidence. On the contrary, the greater the doubts about the stability or legitimacy of a throne, the greater the need for display. There was always a strong undertow of anxiety beneath the smooth surface of courtly confidence. It was a neurosis which found appropriate expression in meticulous attention to detail. The apparently absurd etiquette which attached so much importance to holding the king's candle or fetching the royal chamber-pot was an integral part of this creation. The royal routine was made deliberately and increasingly complex to multiply the opportunities to show who was coming in—and who was going out.¹¹ As Louis himself pointed out:

Those people are gravely mistaken who imagine that all this is mere ceremony. The people over whom we rule, unable to see to the bottom of things, usually judge by what they see from the outside, and most often it is by precedence and rank that they measure their respect and obedience. As it is important to the public to be governed only by a single one, it also matters to it that the person performing this function should be so elevated above the others, that no-one can be confused or compared with him; and one cannot, without doing harm to the whole body of the state, deprive its head of the least mark of superiority distinguishing him from the limbs.¹²

Louis also reveals here the essence of royal absolutism—distance. It was by elevating himself so far above the other great magnates of France that he

¹⁰ Baillie, 'Etiquette and the planning of the state-apartments in baroque palaces', p. 184.

¹¹ Roger Mettam, *Power and Faction in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford, 1988), p. 53.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 117, quoting from Louis's *Memoirs*.

dispelled any confusion as to where the power to command was located. This was not just a question of coercion. Certainly, he had grasped that the essence of a state was 'a monopoly of legitimate force', as Max Weber famously defined it. It was for that reason that Louis put an end to the private armies which had ravaged France repeatedly for the past hundred years. But he also realized that states were centres of authority as well as power and could be effective only if their coercive capability was recognized as legitimate by their members. It was in pursuit of this legitimacy that he unfolded his grand cultural programme. As Frederick the Great observed admiringly: 'Greedy for every kind of glory, he wanted to make his nation as supreme in matters of taste and literature as it was already in power, conquests, politics and commerce'.¹³

In 1661, the year in which he assumed personal control of government on the death of Cardinal Mazarin, Louis demonstrated his determination to distance himself from his aristocracy by breaking his superintendent of finances—Nicolas Fouquet, marquis de Belle Isle. The latter fell prey to the intrigues of his rival, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, by his own imprudence. By maintaining a private military force on his eponymous island of Belle-Île-en-Mer off the coast of Brittany, Fouquet attracted the charge of treason. By building a great palace at Vaux-le-Vicomte near Paris and patronizing the most celebrated creative artists of the day (La Fontaine, Molière, Louis Le Vau, Nicolas Poussin, André le Nôtre, and Charles Le Brun), he created a court far more glamorous than the king's. 18,000 men toiled on its construction, at a cost of 18,000,000 *livres*.¹⁴ This peacock display allowed his enemy, Colbert, to accuse him of embezzlement and, more seriously, to suggest that he was usurping the cultural role of the king. When Louis attended the lavish festivities mounted there on 17 August 1661, when 6,000 guests dined off silver and gold plate and then attended a play by Molière with sets by Le Brun, followed by a Lully ballet and a gigantic fireworks display, he must have felt like a poor relation. In what was the first major political move of his personal rule, he ordered Fouquet's arrest and imprisonment in a distant Piedmontese fortress. There the disgraced financier festered until his death nineteen years later, an awful warning to any other aspiring Icarus.

¹³ Frederick the Great, *Über die deutsche Literatur; die Mängel, die man ihr vorwerfen kann, die Ursachen derselben und die Mittel, sie zu verbessern*, in Horst Steinmetz (ed.), *Friedrich II., König von Preußen und die deutsche Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts. Texte und Dokumente* (Stuttgart, 1985), p. 96.

¹⁴ Rolf Hellmut Foerster, *Das Barock-Schloß. Geschichte und Architektur* (Cologne, 1981), p. 41.

There could be only one sun in the French firmament and that was the king. Indeed the cult of Apollo and *Le roi soleil* (the Sun-King), was already well under way by this time, his birth on a Sunday being regarded as especially propitious.¹⁵ As early as 1649, at the height of the Fronde, little Louis had been eulogized in a pamphlet as 'this shining star, this radiant sun, this day without night, this centre, visible from all points of the circumference'.¹⁶ Four years later, the victory of the royalist forces in the civil war was celebrated by a lavish ballet at court in which the king himself took the leading role, dressed as Apollo in a fabulous costume and with gilded braids of hair simulating the rays of the sun.¹⁷ In his justification of the event, Cardinal Mazarin argued that so many victories bestowed by Heaven should not only be celebrated by *Té Deums* in churches: 'after such long travail, this winter shall be one long round of festivity'.¹⁸ The association of the sun and the sovereign was as old as antiquity, but Louis and his cultural advisers, led by Colbert, projected the image with a consistency and on a scale never seen before. In his instructions for the Dauphin, dictated in 1661 after the birth of his heir, Louis explained why the sun had been chosen as his favoured symbol:

by its unique quality,
by the lustre which surrounds it,
by the light which it shines on those other stars which surround it like a court,
by the equal and just distribution of its light which it sheds on all corners of the earth,
by the good which it brings to all places, creating joy and action in every form of life,
by its ceaseless motion while appearing constantly at rest,
by its constant and unchanging course from which it never deviates,
it is most assuredly the most vital and the most beautiful image of a great monarch.¹⁹

¹⁵ Friedrich B. Polleross, 'Sonnenkönig und österreichische Sonne. Kunst und Wissenschaft als Fortsetzung des Krieges mit anderen Mitteln', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 40 (1987), p. 243.

¹⁶ François Bluche, *Louis XIV* (Oxford, 1990), p. 157.

¹⁷ Marie-Christine Moine, *Les Fêtes à la cour du roi soleil 1653-1715* (Paris, 1984), p. 35. There is a good reproduction of Louis's costume in Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, 1992), p. 46.

¹⁸ Rudolf Braun and David Guggenli, *Maîtresse des Tanzes—Tanz der Mächigen. Hoffeste und Herrschafzeremonie 1550-1914* (Munich, 1993), p. 135.

¹⁹ Quoted in Ernst H. Kantorowicz, 'Oriens Augusti—Lever du Roi', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 17 (1963), p. 173.

He was as good as his word. In a treatise published in 1679, Menestrier claimed that the royal device now appeared on innumerable artefacts 'as the glorious symbol of the greatness of his reign'.²⁰ Only the most splendid building in Europe could accommodate a solar system of metaphors. As Colbert informed his master: 'Your Majesty knows that in the absence of brilliant feats of war, nothing does more to signal the grandeur and intelligence of princes than buildings, and all posterity measures them by the yardstick of these superb palaces which they construct during their lifetime'.²¹ The result was an equally unprecedented personalization of the monarchy.

The reconstruction of the Louvre, beginning in 1663, and of the adjoining Tuileries, beginning in 1664, created two temples to Apollo, dripping with sun-king imagery. It was at Versailles, however, that the solar imagery was elevated into a cult. When Louis came to the throne, he had several royal palaces from which to choose, three in Paris—the Palais Royal, the Louvre, and the Tuileries—and Vincennes, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and Fontainebleau in the vicinity of the capital. Versailles was no more than a modest château, built as a hunting-lodge for Louis XIII in 1632-4. Why his son should have decided to make it his main residence and transform it into the biggest palace in Europe will never be entirely clear. Perhaps it was the limitations of the central site for, although adjacent, the three Parisian palaces could not be amalgamated, and remained individually inadequate for a king with Louis's pretensions. Moreover, he never did like living there, perhaps because of the childhood trauma described above, perhaps because he suffered from mild claustrophobia.²² Probably more important was the consideration that the crowded streets of the capital made it difficult to create a dazzling visual effect. Not even Perrault's east façade of the Louvre can compare with the sight of Versailles as one approaches down the Avenue de Paris (Plate 1). In Paris, the royal palaces had to compete with a host of other grand buildings, ecclesiastical, aristocratic, and municipal; at Versailles, the king's house was *hors concours*. Although the move to Versailles was not completed until 1682, the decision had been announced five years before that. By then, Louis had long

²⁰ C.-F. Menestrier, *La Devise du Roi justifiée. Avec un recueil de cinq cent devises faites pour Sa Majesté et toute la Maison Royale* (Paris, 1679), quoted in Polleross, 'Sonnenkönig und österreichische Sonne', p. 243.

²¹ Antoine Schnapper, 'The King of France as collector in the seventeenth century', in Robert I. Rothberg and Theodore K. Rabb (eds.), *Art and history. Images and their meaning* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 198-9.

²² Bluche, *Louis XIV*, p. 57.

ceased to be a Parisian king, for his last stay at the Louvre had been in 1666 and work on modernizing the Tuileries had been cancelled in 1671.²³ Among many other things, the splendour of Versailles confirmed the superior status of the French palace as a model: whereas Italian *palazzi* are blocks, facing inwards to an interior courtyard, with their living rooms shielded from direct sunlight, Versailles and its successors are opened towards visitors, leading their eye on a central axis through the *cour d'honneur*.²⁴

Yet this does not explain why the other rural residences were not preferred, for arguably they had more to offer in terms of natural assets. The duc de Saint-Simon dismissed Versailles as 'the dullest and most ungrateful of places, without prospect, without wood, without water, without soil; for the ground is all shifting sand or swamp, the air accordingly bad'.²⁵ Again, one can only speculate, but it seems likely that it was just the thought of turning this unpromising site into a terrestrial paradise which appealed to Louis's imperious nature. His glory could brook no rival, not even from his ancestors. Whatever the reason, he brought to the project a determination so fierce and sustained that all obstacles were overcome. In 1682, the year in which the move of court and government to Versailles was finally completed, the marquise de Scourches observed: 'he loves this house with a passion that is boundless'.²⁶ So if Le Vau, Mansart, Le Brun, and Le Nôtre—and the rest of the army of architects, painters, and gardeners—must be listed as the creators of the individual components, and if Colbert takes the credit for supplying both the funds and the administrative backbone, only one signature may appear on the total work of art.

The canvas was gigantic. By the time it was fully operational, the court at Versailles numbered some 20,000 people, with approximately 1,000 nobles and 4,000 servants living in the palace complex proper and another 4,000 nobles and their servants living in the town: 'Far from being merely an assemblage of the higher nobility drawn in from the various provinces of the realm, it was a whole society in miniature, with its own priests, soldiers, officials, tradesmen and domestic servants'.²⁷ And it was also, of course, the

²³ Hélène Himelfarb, 'Versailles, fonctions et légendes', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1984), vol. II, *La Nation*, p. 235; William Ritchey Newton, *L'Espace du roi. La cour de France au château de Versailles 1682-1789* (Paris, 2000), pp. 16-17.

²⁴ Foerster, *Das Barock-Schloß. Geschichte und Architektur*, pp. 26-7.

²⁵ Lewis (ed.), *The Memoirs of the Duc de Saint-Simon*, p. 132.

²⁶ Pierre Verlet, *Le Château de Versailles* (Paris, 1985), pp. 132, 142.

²⁷ Olivier Chaline, 'The Kingdoms of France and Navarre: the Valois and Bourbon courts c. 1515-1750', in John Adamson, *The Princely Courts of Europe: Ritual, Politics and Culture under the Ancien Régime 1500-1750* (London, 1999), p. 70. See also Manfred Kossoff, *Am Hofe Ludwigs*

seat of government. The presence of all these thousands was informed by a single purpose: the representation and enforcement of the glory of Louis XIV. Many great palaces had been built in the past to advertise the grandeur of their owners, but none had been dedicated in such an exclusive fashion to the elevation of a single individual. The nearest equivalent in terms of size and consistency was the Escorial, the vast palace north of Madrid built by Philip II almost exactly a century earlier. But the Escorial is as much a monastery as a palace, its central axis dominated not by a royal bedroom but by a church of cathedral-like proportions.²⁸ Although undeniably splendid, the chapel at Versailles is located outside the Cour Royal (the collective name of the three inner courtyards) and was not completed until 1710. Moreover, there are no Christian images in the palace outside the chapel.²⁹ Iconographically, the centre of Versailles was the 'Salon of Apollo', the throne-room which formed the climax to the sequence of 'grand appartements'. As the painted ceiling depicting 'Apollo in his chariot in company with the seasons' proclaimed, this was a wholly secular shrine. In the unlikely event of anyone failing to make the connection, the meaning of the allegorical complex was spelt out in numerous descriptions of the palace. In the very first, published in 1674, André Félibien told his readers:

It is well to note that as the sun is the king's device and as poets confound the sun and Apollo, there is nothing in this superb house that is not in rapport with this divinity; therefore all the figures and ornaments to be seen there have not been placed there by chance, but have a relationship either to the sun or to those places where they have been put.³⁰

The solar motif was repeated in innumerable ways in the great gardens constructed around the palace, most explicitly in 'Apollo's Chariot' created by Jean-Baptiste Tuby in 1668-70. Situated on the main east-west axis, this colossal group of statuary depicts the Sun God emerging from the ocean to begin his daily journey across the sky. The complexity, sophistication, and

XIV. (Stuttgart 1990), p. 50. By the end of Louis XIV's reign, the town of Versailles had a population of 15,000. It began to grow again when the court returned from Paris in 1723, reaching 70,000 in 1789, by which time it was the seventh largest city in France; Michel Antoine, *Louis XIV* (Paris, 1989), p. 233.

²⁸ Even Philip IV's pleasure palace Buen Retiro outside Madrid was placed next to the royal church and convent of San Jerónimo and its gardens contained several hermitage chapels ('retiro' here implying retreat in a spiritual as well as a recreational sense); J. H. Elliott, 'Power and propaganda in the Spain of Philip IV', in Wilentz (ed.), *Rites of Power*, p. 151.

²⁹ Giesey, 'Models of rulership', p. 60.

³⁰ Quoted in Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King* (London, 1988), p. 188.

rectilinearity of the gardens' design proclaimed their patron's mastery of nature. It was Louis XIV himself who wrote the first guide-book, the *Manner in which the Gardens of Versailles are to be shown*, which set down a specific itinerary, so that the effect would be maximized.³¹ As Chandra Mukerji has written: 'Versailles was a model of material domination of nature that fairly shouted its excessive claims about the strength of France... France was clearly meant to be the new Rome. A few steps into the great formal garden at Versailles provided all that anyone needed to know about the natural authority of the king, the state, and the land of France.'³²

In the gardens, meteorological considerations limited the media at the disposal of Louis's image-builders, but inside they could use frescoes, paintings, statuary, bas-reliefs, mosaics, and tapestries to celebrate his various achievements: charitable ('The Foundation of the Hôtel des Invalides'), cultural ('Portrait of Louis XIV as Protector of the Academy of Painting and Sculpture'), martial ('Louis XIV on horseback trampling on his enemies and crowned by glory') (Plate 2), political ('Louis XIV taking up personal government'), diplomatic ('Louis XIV bestowing peace on Europe') and sexual ('The baptism of the Grand Dauphin'). The climax was reached in the great Hall of Mirrors, which stretched for seventy-five metres along the entire length of the garden front of the Cour Royal. It was here that the transition from allusive allegory to unconcealed eulogy was made. When consulted in 1679 about the decorative scheme, the royal 'first painter', Charles Le Brun, first thought of depicting his master in the guise of Apollo or Hercules. It was decided higher up, however, that more direct treatment was needed, so in each of the paintings Louis stands at the centre of the composition unconcealed by allegory. Worship of Louis as Sun King made way for worship of Louis in his own persona. No part of government, it was proclaimed, had been neglected by the King's beneficent hand: 'Order restored to finances', 'Patronage granted to the fine arts', 'Navigation re-established', 'Justice reformed', 'Police and public order established in Paris', 'The rage of duelling arrested', and so on.³³ But it was his military achievements which were given pride of place: of the twenty-seven paintings in the Hall of Mirrors, seventeen are devoted to foreign policy, nine of them celebrating victories in the war against

³¹ Chaline, 'The Kingdoms of France and Navarre', p. 85.

³² Chandra Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 2, 334.

³³ There is a detailed description and analysis of every major painting, not just in the Hall of Mirrors, but in every state-room, in Gérard Sabatier, *Versailles ou la figure du roi* (Paris, 2000), here in chs. 6-9.

the Dutch, concluded in 1678.³⁴ At one end of the Hall it is the Dutch alliance with France's enemies which is depicted, at the other end it is the Dutch acceptance of a separate peace—or, in other words, there is a progression from provocation to retribution.³⁵ In between could be found visual depictions of Louis's foreign-policy achievements such as 'The pre-eminence of France recognized by Spain, 1662', 'The war against Spain to defend the rights of the Queen, 1667', 'Franche-Comté conquered for the second time, 1674', and 'The capture of the city and fortress of Ghent in six days, 1678'.³⁶ At the centre of the whole iconographical scheme stood the decisive moment: 'The King governs by himself, 1661'. This multi-media exercise in glorification included the bust sculpted by Bernini during his otherwise fruitless visit to France in 1665. Everything about this extraordinary figure (perhaps the finest 'swagger portrait bust' ever created), from the set of the king's head to the cloak which swirls over his armour, expresses the vigour, glamour, and self-confidence of the young king.³⁷

These were essential qualities if the court were to be made to work. The Bourbon dynasty was barely fifty years old when Louis XIV came to the throne and there were many great French families who regarded him as only *primus inter pares*. Not even the most sumptuous setting could have made him supreme if he had not been blessed with the capacity to command respect. Every contemporary account agreed that he enjoyed this asset in full measure. He compensated for his relatively small stature (he was only 5 feet 3 inches tall)³⁸ with a dominating personality expressed by deportment, gesture, speech, and simple 'presence'. His natural skill and long training as a dancer had taught him, among other things, how to make an entrance and how to conduct himself in public to maximum effect.³⁹ Jean-Baptiste Primi Visconti, count of San-Maiolo, recorded in 1673 'I went [to Saint Germain] in the month

³⁴ Christophe Pincemaille, 'La guerre de Hollande dans le programme iconographique de la grande galerie de Versailles', *Histoire, Économie et Société*, 4, 3 (1985), p. 313. See also Joël Cornette, *Le roi de guerre. Essai sur la souveraineté dans la France du Grand Siècle* (Paris, 1993), ch. 8 *passim*. There is a useful key to all thirty ceiling frescoes on p. 245.

³⁵ Édouard Pommier, 'Versailles, l'image du souverain', in Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, II, p. 208.

³⁶ Sabatier, *Versailles*, pp. 308-85.

³⁷ There is a particularly fine reproduction in Rudolf Wittkower, *Bernini* (London, 1955), plate 97.

³⁸ Burke, *The fabrication of Louis XIV*, p. 125.

³⁹ 'The dance class, which Louis XIV took for twenty-five years, turned the dull little prince into a self-assured, self-possessed, totally regal creature'; Régine Astier, 'Louis XIV, "premier danseur"', in David Lee Rubin (ed.), *Sun King: The Ascendancy of French Culture during the Reign of Louis XIV* (Washington, 1992), p. 75.

of February. I caught sight of the king on his way to Mass. Although I had never seen him before and he was lost in a crowd of courtiers, I immediately recognized him. He had a grand majestic air, and by his stature and demeanour you could tell that if he hadn't already been a king, he would have deserved to be one in the eyes of the beholders.⁴⁰ Even one of Louis's sharpest critics, the duc de Saint-Simon, paid the following eloquent tribute: 'Louis XIV was made for a brilliant Court. In the midst of other men, his figure, his courage, his grace, his beauty, his grand mien, even the tone of his voice and the majestic and natural charm of his person, distinguished him till his death.'⁴¹ This priceless asset was also singled out by Voltaire: 'Above all his courtiers Louis rose supreme by the grace of his figure and the majestic nobility of his countenance. The sound of his voice, at once dignified and charming, won the hearts of those whom his presence had intimidated. His bearing was such as befitted himself and his rank alone, and would have been ridiculous in any other. The awe which he inspired in those who spoke with him secretly flattered the consciousness of his own superiority.'⁴²

So the court of Louis XIV elevated the king from *primus inter pares* to being both *solus* and *solaris*. But for a French aristocrat, attendance at court was not just submission to a grim instrument of cultural distancing, it was also an opportunity to participate in the most lavish and exciting entertainment to be found in Europe. No one expressed better the general conviction that the royal court was the only place to be than the marquis de Vardes when he told Louis: 'Sire, when one is away from you, one is not just wretched, one is ridiculous.'⁴³ From the outset, it was made clear that all that was best in aristocratic forms of recreation would become a royal monopoly. All the writers and artists employed by Fouquet⁴⁴ passed into the service of the king. To demonstrate just how far a sovereign could outdistance even the mightiest subject when it came to festivity, Louis organized on 5-6 June 1662 a great *Carrousel* (tournament) at the Tuileries which set new standards for extravagant display. Five teams of noblemen dressed as Romans, Persians, Turks, Indians, and Americans jostled, fenced, and tilted, with the *victor ludorum* on each of the two days receiving from the queen a diamond worth 25,000 écus and a portrait of the king set in a frame of precious stones.⁴⁵ This flamboyant opulence also

⁴⁰ Quoted in William Beik, *Louis XIV and Absolutism* (Boston and New York, 2000), p. 59.

⁴¹ Lewis (ed.), *The Memoirs of the Duc de Saint-Simon*, p. 129.

⁴² Voltaire, *The Age of Louis XIV*, trans. Martyn P. Pollack (London, 1961), p. 267.

⁴³ Quoted in Solnon, *La Cour de France*, p. 339.

⁴⁴ See above, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Moine, *Les Fêtes à la cour du roi soleil*, p. 28; Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, p. 66.

enjoyed the endorsement of the Church. In the words of Bishop Bossuet, Louis's tame prelate: 'God forbade ostentation inspired by vanity and the foolish display bred by the intoxication of riches: however, it was also his wish that the courts of kings should be dazzling and magnificent to inspire respect in the common people.'⁴⁶

In fact, it was the nobility rather than the *plebs* which was the main target of Louis's peacock display. When he appeared in a coat encrusted with 14,000,000 *livres*-worth of diamonds, for example, he was demonstrating to his court that no private individual could compete with royal resources.⁴⁷ But the courtiers could compete among themselves, constantly outbidding each other in their pursuit of the extravagant fashions set by the king. The colossal expense involved proved to be another instrument of social control, for nobles who spent their revenues on high living at Versailles were nobles with little or nothing left for political intrigue in the provinces. Conspicuous consumption also made most of them dependent on royal largesse. Mme de Maintenon estimated that a single noble at Versailles with a staff of twelve servants would need at least 12,000 *livres* per annum. Only a minority enjoyed that kind of income, the rest could keep afloat only with the financial buoyancy provided by pensions and sinecures.⁴⁸ In 1683 1,400,000 *livres* were paid out in royal pensions, a substantial sum representing about 1.2 per cent of total government expenditure but even so a cost-effective investment in social harmony.⁴⁹ Control was also exercised in a more direct way through the simple expedient of opening the courtiers' mail in search of anything subversive.⁵⁰

Although the Versailles project was undoubtedly an exercise in political and social control, the familiar image of an emasculated aristocracy pining in its gilded cage is misleading. As the exponents of the 'new court history' have pointed out, not even the court of Louis XIV was a monolith but rather a coalition. To use John Adamson's appropriate metaphor: 'The courtier's firmament contained a constellation, not a single blazing sun.'⁵¹

⁴⁶ Marion, 'Cour', in *Dictionnaire des institutions de la France*, p. 155.

⁴⁷ Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1967), p. 72.

⁴⁸ Étienne François, 'Der Hof Ludwig XIV.', in August Buck, Georg Kauffmann, Blake Lee Spahr, and Conrad Wiedemann (eds.), *Europäische Hofkultur im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Vorträge und Referate gehalten anlässlich des Kongresses des Wolfenbütteler Arbeitskreises für Barockliteratur in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel vom 4. bis 8. September 1979* (Hamburg, 1981), vol. II, p. 729.

⁴⁹ Solnon, *La Cour de France*, p. 363.

⁵⁰ Newton, *L'Espagne du roi*, p. 18.

⁵¹ John Adamson, 'The making of the Ancien Régime court 1500-1700', in idem, *The Princely Courts of Europe*, p. 17.

Overemphasis on the concept of 'state-building' has obscured the extent to which the court allowed sovereign and courtiers to renegotiate their relationship in a spirit of cooperation, with the former making as many sacrifices as the latter: 'Far from being the cause of the nobles' ensnarement, as was once supposed, service at court generally appears to have been one of the principal means by which aristocratic authority and influence were maintained,' albeit on Louis XIV's terms.⁵²

The *Carrousel* of 1662 was also the last major urban festivity of the reign. It was Versailles which now became the representational centre, the first great set-piece being the evocatively named 'Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle' in 1664. At the all-night celebrations held in 1668 to celebrate the end of the war against the Spanish, all the senses of the 600 guests were titillated—by a banquet, a ball, a comedy (Molière's *George Dandin*) and a fireworks display, all taking place in a park transformed into fairyland by illuminated transparencies.⁵³ Although made possible by improved lighting, this move to nocturnal festivities also served to distance the leisured world of the court from the round of mundane toil. In an age when workplaces opened at five in summer and six in winter to maximize use of natural light, the courtiers were going home to sleep as lesser mortals were leaving home to work. For the ordinary royal subject, there was a strict division between festive days and working days, between festive spaces and working spaces, but 'in the world of the court, every space is a festive space and every time is a festive time. Court life is totally festive.'⁵⁴

Not even the royal purse was deep enough to sustain too many of the grand occasions, especially when warfare became virtually constant after 1672. In between times, the courtiers were entertained three times a week at the *appartements*, when 'the King, the Queen and the whole royal family descend from their heights to play with members of the assembly,' as the official gazette, the *Mercur Galant*, put it in December 1682.⁵⁵ 'Play' in this context meant billiards, cards, and refreshments, as well as the opportunity for the gossip which was the dominant discourse of a society obsessed with precedence and favour. It also meant dancing. The king himself was, by all accounts, a superlative dancer who could out-perform any courtier and hold his own with the professionals. Although he appeared for the last time in a formal ballet

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵³ Jean-Marie Apostolides, 'From Roi Soleil to Louis le Grand', in Denis Hollier (ed.), *A New History of French Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1989), pp. 315–16.

⁵⁴ R. Alewuyt, *Das große Welttheater: die Epoche der höfischen Feste* (Hamburg, 1959), pp. 13, 31.

⁵⁵ Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, p. 91.

in 1669, his continued passion for social dancing ensured that there was no decline in activity. The marquis de Dangeau recorded in his diary that in the six months between 10 September 1684 and 3 March 1685, there were no fewer than seventy royal entertainments involving dancing, including one grand ball, nine masquerades, and fifty-eight *appartements*, or in other words one every two or three days.⁵⁶ One must wonder, however, whether even the most dedicated dancer did not weary of such a surfeit, but there was no escape: a royal invitation to the dance was a command. The formal balls especially were strictly regimented affairs, serving more to demonstrate the hierarchical structure of the court and the social disciplining of its members than to allow rhythmic intercourse.⁵⁷ Only a small proportion of those attending actually danced; the great majority were spectators. As a contemporary recorded: 'First one must know that no one is admitted to the circle except princes and princesses of the blood, then the dukes and peers and the duchesses, and after these the other lords and ladies of the court, each according to rank.'⁵⁸

Also functional as well as recreational were the *ballets de cour*, lengthy and elaborate combinations of dance, music, verse, and spectacular theatrical effects. In the appropriately orotund words of their most recent historian, they 'responded to a triple aim: to inform the curious; to guide subjects by glorifying the prince—God's image on earth; and to enchant by entertaining a hierarchical but turbulent society by momentarily releasing its aggressiveness and its violence, without forgetting to satisfy an eroticism shared between wanton freshness and gallant preciousness'.⁵⁹ Their development mirrored politics. Beginning as private entertainments performed by nobles for nobles, they became representational displays of royal grandeur, performed by professional dancers for the King, with the nobles attending as passive spectators.⁶⁰ By 1680 this Italian-bred hybrid developed into distinctively French opera. Ironically, the man mainly responsible was a Florentine, Giovanni Battista Lulli, who in 1660 at the age of 28 became 'Composer of the King's Chamber Music' and the following year 'Music Master of the Royal Family'.

⁵⁶ Braun and Guggelli, *Macht des Tänzers—Tanz der Mächtigen*, p. 145.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Rebecca Harris-Warrick, 'Ballroom dancing at the court of Louis XIV', *Early Music*, 14 (1986), 41.

⁵⁹ Marie-Françoise Christout, *Le Ballet de Cour au XVII^e siècle* (Geneva, 1987), p. 8.

⁶⁰ Marie-Claude Genova-Green, 'Le ballet de cour en France', in Pierre Béhar and Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Spectaculum Europaeum: Theatre and Spectacle in Europe (1580–1750)*, Wolfenbütteler Arbeiten zur Barockforschung, vol. 31 (Wiesbaden, 1999), p. 508.

Marrying the daughter of another senior figure of the royal musical establishment and adopting French nationality, the newly Gallicized Jean-Baptiste Lully encouraged the king to turn his back on the previously dominant Italian school. The last Italian opera to be performed in France for sixty-seven years was Cavalli's *Erocole* in 1662 and in 1666 Louis dismissed his Italian musicians.⁶¹

To fill their place, he greatly expanded the modest native musical establishment he had inherited, subdivided into the chapel, the chamber, and the stables. Music was omnipresent at Versailles: it was played during the *lever* and the *coucher*, in chapel, at the departure of the hunt, at firework displays, at balls and masquerades, as an aural background to meals, promenades, receptions, and almost every other form of social intercourse, as well as in the more formal context of concerts, ballets, and operas. During Versailles's heyday, more than 200 singers and instrumentalists were engaged in the task of making France the musical arbiter of Europe.⁶² The king was only too eager to adopt Perrin's maxim: 'the glory of the King and of France make it unseemly that a nation otherwise invincible should be ruled by foreigners in matters pertaining to the fine arts, poetry and music.'⁶³

It was Lully's task to realize the musical objective and in this he succeeded triumphantly. By the time he died in 1687, he had created a distinctively French operatic genre. From the *ballets de cour* of the 1650s and early 1660s, he progressed to writing *comédies-ballets* and *tragédies-ballets* and then, from 1672, the fully fledged *tragédies lyriques*.⁶⁴ Their invariable features included a prologue, devoted to singing the praises of Louis XIV, a five-act structure, and subject-matter drawn from classical mythology or (less often) medieval romance.⁶⁵ Eschewing the sweet melodies and brilliant singing of the Italian tradition, Lully's prime concern was dramatic dialogue, conducted mainly in the form of melodic recitative, interspersed with short lyrical passages for the expression of especially impassioned moments. These austere exchanges, which can all too easily become monotonous in performance, were interrupted periodically by *divertissements* in the shape of choruses, ballets, and

⁶¹ Robert M. Isherwood, *Music in the Service of the King: France in the Seventeenth Century* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1973), pp. 133-4.

⁶² Solnon, *La Cour de France*, p. 411.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

⁶⁴ James R. Anthony, 'Jean-Baptiste Lully', in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols. (London, 1980), vol. 11, p. 318; Jérôme de la Gorce, 'L'opéra en France', in Béhar and Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Spectaculum Europaeum*, pp. 389-90.

⁶⁵ Donald Jay Grout, 'Some forerunners of the Lully opera', *Music and Letters*, 22 (1941), p. 1.

magical stage effects.⁶⁶ As any reader familiar with the operas of Rameau, Gluck, Cherubini, Spontini, or Meyerbeer will appreciate, the operatic style codified by Lully was to have a long future.⁶⁷ The subject-matter of the libretti was mainly classical (*Cadmus et Hermione*, *Alceste*, *Atrys*, etc.), although the opportunities for magical transformation scenes made the epic poems of Tasso and Ariosto popular too (*Roland*, *Armide et Renaud*).

As with the visual expression of Louis XIV's glory at Versailles, the representational significance of these works was made explicit. In the 'Ballet of Psyche or the Power of love, danced by His Majesty on the 16th Day of January 1656', for example, the king entered in the role of 'Spring', accompanied by an adoring party of nymphs chanting:

Oh how happy we all are
To see this amorous Spring
Who radiates such dazzling glory!

'Glory' herself appears later in the work, apostrophizing Louis as her most illustrious manifestation:

Great King, what is your destiny?
You who now have the whole world at your feet.

In this pristine world of royal love and royal glory, there is no room for aristocratic rancour or intrigue, so in the fourth *entrée*, the characters representing 'Discord', 'Sorrow', 'Fear', and 'Jealousy' are repulsed when they try to gain admission to the Temple of Love.⁶⁸

As these thinly veiled references to the Fronde demonstrated, the primary purpose of Lully's creations was political. In the 'Ballet of the Seasons' at Fontainebleau on 23 July 1661, just four months after assuming personal control of his kingdom following the death of Mazarin, Louis again appeared

⁶⁶ There is an excellent summary of the Lully operatic tradition in Cynthia Verba, *Music and the French Enlightenment: Reconstruction of a Dialogue 1750-1764* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 12-13. Grout's severe verdict on the genre was 'Anyone who plays through the whole score of a Lully opera is likely to emerge from that experience (if he survives it at all) with a confused impression of page upon page of music void of imagination, pale in colour, thin in harmony, monotonous in invention, stereotyped in rhythm, limited in melody, barren of contrapuntal resource and so cut into little sections by perpetually recurring cadences that all sense of movement seems lost in a desert of clichés, relieved all too rarely by oases of real beauty'. 'Some forerunners of the Lully opera', p. 2.

⁶⁷ Significantly perhaps, only one of these masters of the 'French style' was French.

⁶⁸ *Ballet de Psyché ou De la Puissance de l'Amour, dansé par sa Majesté le 16. jour de Janvier 1656* (Paris, 1656), pp. 6, 12, 27.

as 'Spring' in the eighth *entrée*: 'The scene which represented Winter is transformed into a garden into which Spring, followed by Laughter, Joy, and Plenty, comes to reign for all eternity.' As Louis demonstrated his skill as a dancer on stage, his aristocratic audience was told:

The youthful vigour of Spring
Has chased away bad weather,
All those mutinous and disordered winds,
Which in amongst the thick fog
Caused such fierce squalls,
Have been banished for ever,
And Spring has restored to the atmosphere profound peace.
This season we find so pleasing
Has sent back to the cold climate of the North
The Winter which brought us war,
And has nurtured for our happiness
The great and immortal flower
Whose fragrance will be spread throughout Europe.⁶⁹

In this *balllet de cour*, as in the other court presentations, politics and culture combined. In the ninth and final *entrée* of the 'Balllet of the Seasons', the Nine Muses, guided by Apollo and Cupid, came to establish themselves at Fontainebleau, accompanied by the Seven Liberal Arts, together with Prosperity, Health, Peace, and Pleasure. The entire team vowed that it would never leave such a blessed place.⁷⁰ To make sure that it did not, Louis XIV continued and greatly extended Cardinal Richelieu's policy of subjecting culture to royal control. Early in 1634, Richelieu had discovered that a group of intellectuals had been holding secret social meetings in Paris. As both a clergyman and a politician, he was especially prone to minding other people's business, so at once he took action to bring this private initiative under state control. Reluctantly sacrificing their independence, the group accepted in return financial sponsorship and the title of Académie Française. The control their new patron sought to exercise was both cultural and political. On the one hand, he charged them with the task of supervising 'the exact rules' of the French language, 'to render it capable of treating the arts and sciences'. On the other hand, he made it clear that the academicians had to be loyal royalists: 'matters political and moral shall be treated in the Academy in conformity with

⁶⁹ *Balllet des saisons dansé à Fontainebleau par sa Majesté le 23 Juillet 1661 (à Paris par Robert Ballard, seul imprimeur du Roy pour la Musique, M DC. LXI. Avec Privilège de sa Majesté)*, p. 18.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

the authority of the Prince, the state of the government, and the laws of the realm.⁷¹

As events were to show, the carrots of financial security and enhanced status were sufficiently alluring to make the coercive stick of government direction unnecessary. The next academy to be founded, that of Painting and Sculpture in 1648, was also derived from a private initiative. This time it was a group of court painters, seeking to escape from the onerous restrictions and artisanal status of the guilds. After a prolonged struggle, they emerged victorious in 1654, with a monopoly of life-drawing and the same rights as their literary counterparts in the Académie Française.⁷² The date was significant: it was both the king and his academicians who were the victors of the Fronde. The next move to royal absolutism with the beginning of Louis XIV's sole rule in 1661 also brought an increase in the number of academies. In the same year, the balletomane monarch created the Academy of Dance. In 1663 it was joined by the Academy of Inscriptions and Letters, in 1666 by the Academy of Sciences, in 1669 by the Academy of Music, and in 1671 by the Academy of Architecture. By that time there was no branch of high culture not subject to state control.⁷³ It was also extended to the fledgling press. In 1663, the historian Eudes de Mézeray was granted permission to publish a literary journal on the grounds that the arts and the sciences enhanced a state's prestige no less than feats of arms and that French intellect was in no way inferior to French valour. But although de Mézeray was authorized to report on innovations in every branch of culture, he was strictly forbidden to venture any opinion on matters of morality, religion, or politics.⁷⁴

The monopoly enforced by the academies ensured that any ambitious and talented artist was obliged to accept state service. Given the scale of Louis XIV's patronage at Versailles and elsewhere, there was also a strong financial incentive to enter the gilded cage. Consequently, almost all the great names of the age—Corneille, Racine, Molière, Lully, Delalande, Couperin, Le Vau, Mansart, de Cotte, Le Nôtre, Le Brun, Mignard, Rigaud, Largillière,

⁷¹ Timothy Murray, 'The Académie Française', in Hollier (ed.), *A New History of French Literature*, pp. 267–8.

⁷² Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art—Past and Present* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 85–7; Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Paris* (New Haven and London, 1985), pp. 22–8.

⁷³ As Anthony Blunt observed, Colbert and Louis XIV established 'the closest and most complete State control ever exercised before the present century'; *Art and Architecture in France 1500–1700* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 322.

⁷⁴ Claude Bellanger, Jacques Godechot, Pierre Guiral, and Fernand Terrou (eds.), *Histoire générale de la presse française*, vol. 1: *Des origines à 1814* (Paris, 1969), p. 125.

Girardon, Coysevox—enjoyed an intimate relationship with the state through pensions or appointments. In many ways the most important exceptions—Poussin, Descartes, and Pascal—are more revealing than the rule. First, they did not live to experience the full flowering of the new absolutist culture, dying in 1665, 1650, and 1662 respectively. Secondly, Poussin and Descartes spent most of their adult life outside France. Moving to Rome in 1624, Poussin returned in 1640 on the orders of the king, only to find the commissions he was expected to fulfil—allegories of Cardinal Richelieu—so distasteful that he soon left again.⁷⁵ After much restlessness wandering across the continent, Descartes settled in Amsterdam, taking full advantage of tolerant Dutch culture. It could also be said that Pascal went into self-imposed exile, albeit inside France at the Jansenist convent of Port-Royal. Thirdly, all three of them were important inspirations for the various forms of anti-absolutist counter-culture which developed in the course of the eighteenth century: it has become something of a cliché to say that the neo-classicism which culminated in Jacques-Louis David's 'revolutionary art' was really neo-Poussinism; Cartesian rationality and its methodology of 'systematic doubt' was central to the Enlightenment; Pascal made a powerful contribution to the development of Jansenism, perhaps the most subversive movement of old regime France.⁷⁶

That was all in the future. In the meantime the academies, directed by the firm controlling hand of Colbert, developed a style perfectly designed to represent the glory of Louis XIV. It was secular, rational, imposing, restrained, orderly, and uniform.⁷⁷ Above all, the individual genres—visual, musical, balletic, and literary—meshed to form a total work of art. A performance in the gardens of Versailles of a *comédie-ballet* with music by Lully and a text by Molière represented the regime's legitimacy before the great nobles of France in a manner they found irresistible (for the time being). It was also a manner which the rest of France found irresistible. All over the country, it was the style dictated by the centre which prevailed. When commissioning a new building or painting or when organizing a public festivity, provincial patrons sought the

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁷⁶ Anita Brookner, *Jacques-Louis David* (London, 1980), pp. 44, 64; Wend Graf Kalnein and Michael Levey, *Art and Architecture of the Eighteenth Century in France* (London, 1972), p. 192; Roland Mousnier, 'Les concepts d'"ordre", d'"états", de "fidélité" et de "monarchie absolue" en France de la fin du XVII^e siècle à la fin du XVIII^e', *Revue Historique*, 502 (1972), p. 295; J. S. Bromley, 'The decline of absolute monarchy', in J. Wallace-Hadrill and J. McManners (eds.), *France: Government and Society*, 2nd edn. (London, 1970), pp. 144-5.

⁷⁷ For an excellent description and analysis of the official style in the visual arts, see Blunt, *Art and Architecture in France*, p. 325.

services of an artist associated with the court. Failing that, they obtained metropolitan models for their local artists to imitate.⁷⁸ If classicism can be defined as 'the psychological centre of a national culture',⁷⁹ then it was during the middle decades of the seventeenth century that French classicism was codified if not created.

The rest of Europe succumbed too, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The sophistication, self-confidence, and sheer quality of Louis XIV's achievement made most foreign cultures come to seem old-fashioned, dull and—fatal stigma—provincial. Those who could not travel to Versailles to experience its wonders at first hand could make their acquaintance through the numerous descriptions and illustrations which were published. In 1663 Louis instructed Israel Silvestre to engrave 'all his palaces, royal houses, the most beautiful views and aspects of his gardens, public assemblies, Carroussels and outskirts of cities'.⁸⁰ This commission initiated a series of magnificent volumes, themselves art objects of high value, which broadcast French culture across the length and breadth of Europe. As Félibien commented: 'it is again by means of these prints that all nations can admire the sumptuous edifices which the king has built everywhere, and the rich ornamentation which embellishes them'.⁸¹ A symbolic moment in the assertion of French cultural supremacy was the failure of Bernini's visit in 1665. Although it yielded the portrait-bust already mentioned, it failed to lead to the reconstruction of the Louvre in the Italian baroque manner. Instead, a French architect was commissioned to design a more austere—and more French—exterior.⁸² This episode appears to have marked something of a watershed, as from then on the increasingly self-confident French patrons abandoned Italian architects in favour of natives.⁸³ By 1682 Ménestrier could claim that the cultural hegemony of Italy was over—it was France that now set the standards in all the arts:

It is the glory of France to have succeeded in establishing the rules for all the fine arts. During the past twenty years, scholarly dissertations have regulated drama, epic poetry, epigrams, eclogues, painting, music, architecture, heraldry, mottoes, riddles,

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ T. J. Reed, *The Classical Centre: Goethe and Weimar 1775-1832* (London, 1980), p. 13. As he was writing a history of German literature, Reed wrote 'the psychological centre of a national literature' but his insight applies just as well to a whole culture.

⁸⁰ Schnapper, 'The King of France as collector in the seventeenth century', p. 195.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁸² François Bluche, *Louis XIV* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 172-4.

⁸³ Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters. A Study in Relations between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque* (London, 1963), p. 189.

emblems, history and rhetoric. All branches of knowledge are now conducted in our language.⁸⁴

Of all these emblems, it was language which was the most important. In 1685 Pierre Bayle observed from his Dutch exile: 'in future it will be the French language which will serve as the means of communication for all the peoples of Europe,' adding that every educated person wanted to acquire what had become a mark of good breeding.⁸⁵ His forecast was confirmed in 1694 by the official journal, the *Mercurie Galant*: 'The range of the French language has crossed the kingdom's frontiers. It is confined neither by the Pyrenees, nor by the Alps nor by the Rhine. French is to be heard all over Europe. The French language is spoken at all the courts: the princes and the *grands* speak it, the ambassadors write it and high society makes it fashionable.'⁸⁶

Nothing advertised better the cultural hegemony achieved by Louis XIV's France than this peaceful linguistic conquest of the continent. When Louis came to the throne in 1643, French was only one of several competing languages. Either Spanish or Italian could have made as good if not a better claim to be the lingua franca of educated Europe, while Latin still dominated academic discourse. Halfway through his reign it could be claimed that French had become the world language, 'as current among the savages of America as it was among the most civilized nations of Europe.'⁸⁷ By the end of the century, the marquis de Dangeau could tell the Académie Française with majestic complacency: 'All our works contribute to the embellishment of our language and help to make it known to foreigners. The wonders achieved by the King have made French as familiar to our neighbours as their own vernacular, indeed the events of these past few years have broadcast it over all the oceans of the globe, making it as essential to the New World as to the Old.'⁸⁸ It was a process greatly assisted by the codification of the French language in the great dictionary of the Académie Française, completed in 1694.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Quoted in Braun and Guggenli, *Macht des Tanzes—Tanz der Mächtigen*, pp. 123–4.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Louis Réau, *L'Europe française au siècle des lumières* (Paris, 1951), pp. 3, 18.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸⁷ By Bouhours in *Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Éugène*, quoted in René Guiet, 'La question de la langue française dans les querelles musicales au XVIIIe siècle', in Caroline B. Bourland et al. (eds.), *Essays Contributed in Honor of President William Allan Neilson*, Smith College Studies in Modern Languages (Northampton, Mass., 1940), p. 92.

⁸⁸ Nicole Ferrier-Caverivière, *L'Image de Louis XIV dans la littérature française de 1660 à 1715* (Paris, 1981), p. 371 n. 71.

⁸⁹ Alain Rey, 'Linguistic absolutism', in Hollier (ed.), *A New History of French Literature*, pp. 373–5.

Several illustrations of the (temporary) validity of Dangeau's boast could be found. The most revealing was the dispute which erupted in 1687 between 'Ancients' and 'Moderns', as the latter dared to claim that the culture of contemporary France was the equal of that of the Greeks and the Romans. In the words of the poem which started it all—*The Century of Louis XIV*, read to the Académie Française by Charles Perrault in February 1687:

Classical antiquity was always worthy of respect,
But I never saw it as an object of adoration.

I regard the Ancients without bending the knee,
They are great, it is true, but they are men just like us;
And we can compare without fearing to be unjust
The century of Louis with that of Augustus.⁹⁰

Wherever he turned in the France of today, Perrault went on, he was overwhelmed by marvellous accomplishments, in the theatre, in literature, in music, and in the visual arts. As for Versailles:

This is not just a palace, it is an entire city,
Superb in its grandeur, superb in its substance—
No, rather it is a world by itself, where all kinds of wonders
Are brought together from all over the universe...
What can be found in all antiquity
To equal their splendour and variety?⁹¹

In the world of power politics, the decisive revelation of French hegemony came in 1714, the year before Louis's death, when for the first time a Holy Roman Emperor deigned to sign an international treaty (Rastatt) drafted in the French language.⁹² With the advantage of hindsight, we can see that the future of French as the world's favoured language was destined to be short, but for most educated Europeans in the eighteenth century its status was unchallenged. Even the Russians now spoke French, noted Coyer in 1779, and thus demonstrated that Leibniz's ambition to create a universal language had now been realized.⁹³ It was partly on the grounds that the French language had been 'settled by the good writers of the age of Louis XIV', while 'German' was still an aggregate of dialects, that Frederick the

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 12. This may have been less the result of French cultural hegemony than of the inability of the French negotiator, the maréchal de Villars, to understand Latin; André Corvisier, *Arts et sociétés dans l'Europe du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1978), p. 21.

⁹³ G. F. Coyer, *Nouvelles observations sur l'Angleterre par un voyageur* (Paris, 1779), p. 163.

Great justified his decision to use the former for his voluminous literary oeuvre.⁹⁴

Frederick's admiration of French culture was legendary in France and notorious in Germany. Voltaire reported from Potsdam that one might think oneself in France, for everyone at the Prussian court spoke French and French alone, indeed he had never heard a word of German spoken by the king or his entourage. He concluded: 'our language and our literature have made more conquests than Charlemagne ever did.'⁹⁵ Those words were written in 1750, when Prussia and France were still allies. Seven years later, at the battle of Rossbach, Frederick inflicted on his land of cultural allegiance a defeat so total that—according to Voltaire—it represented a humiliation greater than Crécy, Poitiers, or Agincourt.⁹⁶ Arguably, it marked the beginning of the end for the old regime.⁹⁷

Rosbach also demonstrated the limits of French cultural hegemony. When it came to exercising control of Central Europe, a Prussian bayonet proved to be more effective than a Lully *comédie-ballet*. Yet it does not disprove the intimate relationship between culture, society, and politics presented in the previous chapter.⁹⁸ As we shall see below, the impact of Rossbach and the other Prussian achievements in the Seven Years War produced great fissures in the foundations of French cultural supremacy. No less a person than Goethe observed that: 'The first true and really vital material of the higher order came into German literature through Frederick the Great and the deeds of the Seven Years War'.⁹⁹ Before that process can be examined, however, we must turn our attention to the development of representational culture outside France.

⁹⁴ Réau, *L'Europe française*, p. 23.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁹⁶ Theodor Schieder, *Friedrich der Große: ein Königstum der Widersprüche* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, and Vienna, 1983), p. 455.

⁹⁷ I have discussed this in *The French Revolutionary Wars 1787–1802* (London, 1996), pp. 17, 23.

⁹⁸ See above, pp. 2–3.

⁹⁹ *Goethes Werke, brsg. im Auftrage der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen*, 133 vols (Weimar, 1887–1912), XXVII, 104.

2

The Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy

In his treatise on the customs of mankind, Frederick the Great commented on the French cultural conquests of the past hundred years with characteristic asperity (and misogyny):

The taste for French drama was imported into Germany together with French fashions: enthused by the magnificence which Louis XIV impressed on all his actions, by the sophistication of his court and by the great names who were the ornaments of his reign, all Europe sought to imitate the France it admired. All Germany went there: a young man counted for a fool if he had not spent some time at the court of Versailles. French taste ruled our kitchens, our furniture, our clothes and all those knick-knacks which are so much at the mercy of the tyranny of fashion. Carried to excess, this passion degenerated into a frenzy; women, who are often prey to exaggeration, pushed it to the point of extravagance.¹

Certainly, examples can be found of German princes great and small imitating Louis XIV, sometimes to comic effect—as in the case of the Prince of Hohenlohe who sought to represent his glory by placing outside his remodelled residence at Weikersheim statues of the four great conquerors of the world: Ninus, Cyrus, Alexander, and Caesar.² Only marginally more

¹ *Des mœurs, des coutumes, de l'industrie, des progrès de l'esprit humain dans les arts et dans les sciences; Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, 30 vols. (Berlin, 1846–56), I, p. 232.

² Heinrich von Treitschke, *Deutsche Geschichte im 19. Jahrhundert*, 5 vols. (Leipzig, 1917), I, p. 19.

convincing was the Elector of Bavaria's staging in 1658 of an elaborate pageant at Munich in conscious imitation of Louis XIV's *Cavalcade* of two years earlier; in the course of which the Elector himself appeared in the guise of the Sun.³

It was not just the discrepancy between pretension and reality which made these attempts at self-aggrandisement so reminiscent of La Fontaine's frog.⁴ The extravagant courts which mushroomed in the Holy Roman Empire also had a decidedly *parvenu* air, for they were of comparatively recent origin. Even the greatest of them, the court of the Habsburgs, was very much a seventeenth-century creation. It was not until the reign of Ferdinand II (1619–37) that the dynasty abandoned its peripatetic ways and finally came to rest for good in Vienna. In 1519 the imperial court had numbered just 472 and continued to hover around the 500 mark for the next century or so, but then accelerated to soar over 2,000 by the time of Charles VI (1711–40).⁵ The inflation can be charted with some precision by counting the number of *Kämmerer* (or 'gentlemen of the bedchamber', that is to say courtiers officially in attendance on the Emperor). When Maximilian I died in 1619, there were only six; in 1566 Maximilian II attended the imperial parliament at Regensburg accompanied by just eight, while Rudolf II made the same journey with twelve in 1594. Then the tally began to mount rapidly, reaching almost a hundred in 1633, 340 in 1678, and 423 by 1705. Charles VI appointed 226 in 1732 alone, so by the time Joseph II began his purge of the court in 1780, there were about 1,500 *Kämmerer*.⁶ Apart from anything else, this increase advertised the success of the Habsburgs in making a position at their court attractive to a large and ever-increasing number of the German nobility.

The timing of the rise of the court and its culture in the Holy Roman Empire was determined in large measure by politics. Until 1648 at the earliest, the German princes were preoccupied by struggles with their representative assemblies ('Estates') inside their territories and struggles with the emperor or

³ Marie-Christine Moine, *Les Fêtes à la cour du roi soleil 1653–1715* (Paris, 1984) p. 168.

⁴ 'Une Grenouille vit un Boeuf / Qui lui sembla de belle taille. / Elle, qui n'était pas grosse en tout comme un oeuf. / Envieuse, s'étend, et s'enfle, et se travaille, / Pour égaler l'animal en grosseur, / Disant : "Regardez bien, ma soeur ; / Est-ce assez ? dites-moi ; n'y suis-je point encore ? /—Nenni.—M'y voici donc ?—Point du tout.—M'y voilà ? /—Vous n'en approchez point. "La chétive péclore / S'enfla si bien qu'elle creva. / Le monde est plein de gens qui ne sont pas plus sages : / Tout bourgeois veut bâtir comme les grands seigneurs, / Tout petit prince a des ambassadeurs, / Tout marquis veut avoir des pages.'

⁵ Jürgen Freiherr von Krüdener, *Die Rolle des Hofes im Absolutismus* (Stuttgart, 1973), p. 4.

⁶ Hubert Ch. Ehalt, *Ausdrucksformen absolutistischer Herrschaft. Der Wiener Hof im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1980), p. 39.

their fellow princes outside them. From 1618 until 1648, the Thirty Years War made simple survival the main priority, as Spanish, French, Danish, and Swedish armies inflicted devastation on a scale and of a duration not seen before in Europe. Recovery was slow and painful, interrupted by further French incursions. In the Duchy of Württemberg, a survey conducted in the mid-1650s revealed that the population had fallen by 57 per cent, that one half of all buildings were still in ruins, and that a third of cultivable land was still waste.⁷ It says a great deal for the attraction exerted by the French model that the dukes should have sought to emulate it even against this dismal background. As soon as he returned from the wars, Duke Eberhard III (1633–74) began to spend lavishly, on new livery, on silverware, on a new state coach from Metz ('of a kind that is used by the most eminent of princes'), and so on.⁸

Judged by French standards, Eberhard's court was still uncouth, housed in a residence that was more like a castle than a palace and characterized by the excessive drinking and general 'beer and sausages' culture thought by French sophisticates such as Voltaire to be typically German.⁹ Even so, there were signs of French influence other than lavish display. In 1664 Eberhard sent the tutor of the ducal pages to Paris to find out what was happening at the cutting edge of European fashion, in 1651 French cuisine made its first appearance, and in 1660 the first of what became an army of French valets arrived to teach the Württembergers how to dress *à la mode*.¹⁰ However, it was when Duke Friedrich Carl assumed control in 1677 as regent for his infant nephew Eberhard Ludwig that French influence really asserted itself. He had given an earnest of his intention by writing the diary he kept during his Grand Tour in the French language.¹¹

An engraving of Eberhard III made in the year of his death (1674) depicts 'the bluff old monarch as a benign, though stern father of his people [*Landvater*]'.¹² He wears his own hair rather than a wig, is set against a plain background and is decorated only by the ducal coat of arms. The style is the man. Friedrich Carl, on the other hand, chose to be represented as an elegant

⁷ James Allen Vann, *The Making of a State: Württemberg 1593–1793* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1984), p. 95; Werner Fleischauer, *Barock im Herzogtum Württemberg*, 2nd edn. (Stuttgart, 1981), p. 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 56–7.

⁹ See below, pp. 241–2. They could draw on a rich store of unflattering stereotypes dating back to Tacitus and confirmed more recently by travellers passing through Germany on the Grand Tour.

¹⁰ Fleischauer, *Barock im Herzogtum Württemberg*, p. 64.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Vann, *The Making of a State*, p. 91.

man of fashion, complete with rosebud mouth and full-bottomed wig, set against a background of swirling drapes, surrounded by symbols of various forms of strength (a sword, a satyr, a lion, an eagle, and Hercules) and accompanied by a bare-breasted personification of Fame trumpeting forth his glory. The paternal image of the *Landesvater* has made way for majesty.¹³ The French provenance of this transformation was not in doubt, as life at court was remodelled according to the precepts of Versailles. The unruly drinking bouts favoured in the past were replaced by opera, ballets, and balls. At a *Divertissement à la française* staged by the Regent in 1684, for example, the 8-year-old Duke Eberhard Ludwig was obliged to imitate Louis XIV by dancing the role of Cupid.¹⁴ Württembergers attending the duchy's first *salon*, introduced by Friedrich Karl's prime minister, the French-educated Baron von Forster-Dambenoy, were expected to speak French and be able to talk about the latest French fashions.¹⁵

Unlike its French model, the Württemberg cultural complex developed in the second half of the seventeenth century cannot have been aimed at the disciplining of the nobles, for the good reason that the duchy had none to discipline. The nobles of the region had established independence from ducal authority in the sixteenth century by making good their claim to be 'Imperial Knights'.¹⁶ In other words, they acknowledged only the Holy Roman Emperor as their sovereign, were not subject to the Duke of Württemberg and were not represented in the duchy's Estates. The latter consisted of two houses, one comprising the fourteen Protestant abbots of the secularized monasteries and the other the representatives of sixty towns.¹⁷ Far from being overawed or seduced by the lavish court unfolded by Friedrich Karl and his successors, the Württemberg burghers were horrified and alienated. As the Regent was also seeking to ally with France to create a standing army, an association was made between Francophilia, despotism, and profligacy every bit as acute as in Stuart England. In 1681, for example, the Estates campaigned for the dismissal of a French governess and a French dancing master, employed to instruct the young duke, on the grounds that they were likely to corrupt their charge with 'loose French morals', 'lascivious

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁴ Fleischauer, *Barock im Herzogtum Württemberg*, p. 59.

¹⁵ Vann, *The Making of a State*, p. 136.

¹⁶ F. L. Carsten, *Princes and Parliaments in Germany from the 15th to the 18th Century* (Oxford, 1959), p. 3.

¹⁷ F. L. Carsten, 'The causes of the decline of the German estates' in his *Essays in German History* (London, 1985), pp. 119–26.

French ways', 'conversation punctuated with obscene and evil jokes' and 'a style of manners that placed topics of erotic love at the centre of polite discourse'.¹⁸

As this disapproving but excited obsession with sexuality suggests, a further similarity with contemporary England was the religious flavour of the clash between prince and parliament. The Lutheranism of the Estates deputies, which was being given an increasingly Puritanical edge by the burgeoning Pietist movement, was utterly at odds with the secular hedonism of the Regent's court and what his critics called his 'mocking of the very premises of a legitimate, Christian, German-oriented, non-Machiavellian polity'.¹⁹ For his part, Friedrich Karl took the high ground of absolutism, denouncing the Estates for 'shocking expressions touching his *gloire*'.²⁰ It was he, however, who lost the struggle, being deposed as Regent in 1693 by the Emperor Leopold I. Although his fate was determined more by the pressures of international conflict, Friedrich Karl's failure demonstrated that representational culture could prove dysfunctional. In the case of Württemberg, it served only to intensify divisions and to make the absolutist ambitions of the Duke that much more difficult to realize. It may well have helped to attract and tame the Imperial Knights of the region, but they represented no political threat anyway. It was the burghers of Stuttgart, Tübingen, and the other towns whose cooperation, or at least acquiescence, was most needed, but they were just the people most alienated by the 'loose and lascivious' French culture of the court and correspondingly more determined to resist its political dimension. As so often in early modern Europe, political opposition supported by religious conviction proved especially tenacious. Unlike the aristocratic targets of Louis XIV's representational culture, the Württembergers did not roll over to have their stomachs stroked. They remained upright, usually seeking cooperation rather than confrontation and often obliged to make concessions, but stubbornly resisting attempts to emasculate the ancient liberties and traditional constitution. They were also successful, prompting no less a person than Charles James Fox to observe later in the century that there were only two

¹⁸ Vann, *The Making of a State*, p. 153.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 159. At least Friedrich Karl remained notionally a Lutheran. His son, Karl Alexander, who succeeded Eberhard Ludwig when he died without a male heir in 1733, had converted to Catholicism in 1712. Karl Alexander's long-reigning son, Karl Eugen (1737–93), was also a Catholic; Gabriele Haug-Moritz, *Württembergischer Ständekampf und deutscher Dualismus. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Reichsvertrags in der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für geschichtliche Landeskunde in Baden-Württemberg, series B (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 32, 142, 186.

²⁰ Vann, *The Making of a State*, p. 156.

countries in Europe blessed with true constitutions—Great Britain and Württemberg.²¹

Friedrich Karl might well have rejoindered that the culture he represented had lost the battle but won the war. There was to be no reversion to the simple faith and homespun artefacts of the small-town burghers, for they were increasingly marginalized. Whatever the political disadvantages of the court culture may have been, it certainly increased the distance between the elite and the rest of the population. Perhaps its most graphic manifestation was the difference in dress. As clothes became more elaborate, more expensive, and more French, so were the courtiers increasingly marked off visually. On the one hand, the dukes sent artisans to Paris to learn the latest techniques, such as embroidery, and to buy the latest fabrics; on the other hand they imposed strict limits on what their ordinary subjects might wear. A stream of sumptuary ordinances laid down very precise instructions as to just what various classes might and might not wear. In 1712, for the first time, 'French attire' was confined to the top five groups and denied to all others except native-born French. Even the most exalted members of the aristocracy were denied certain luxury fabrics, which were reserved for the exclusive use of the duke.²² Some idea of the attention to detail lavished on this social distancing was an ordinance of the same year which confined sleigh-riding to the nobility.

The world of the court and the world of work could not remain wholly separate, even after the former had moved from Stuttgart to the Württemberg version of Versailles at Ludwigsburg, built during the first quarter of the eighteenth century (Plate 7). Indeed, this internal migration created a large new workplace, for the construction of the palace was accompanied by the creation of a new town to service its needs. Moreover, it was a town designed to be in the van of modernity—laid out on rational lines, open to all denominations, and concentrating on urban pursuits conducted on the principle of freedom of trade. It was both a challenge and an affront to Württemberg burghers who relied on the exclusion of non-Lutherans and the restrictive practices of the guilds to preserve their livelihoods.²³ This construction of Ludwigsburg as an island of toleration and enterprise in an ocean of tradition should guard against a natural tendency to view the dukes as representing the old regime and the burghers the new. It was the need to raise the huge sums needed for the

²¹ Carsten, *Princes and Parliaments*, p. 5.

²² Fleischauer, *Barock im Herzogtum Württemberg*, p. 261.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

new palace, court, and town which prompted the dukes to pursue bureaucratic, fiscal, social, and economic modernization. Although many of the schemes were of short duration, it appears that their efforts did eventually bear fruit, for it was in just the regions they favoured that industrialization flourished in the nineteenth century.²⁴

Their primary interest, however, was not industrial but political. Far from being the somnolent hulk of legend, the Holy Roman Empire was an intensely competitive and fluid polity. For princely dynasties able to combine ambition with skill and luck, glittering prizes in the shape of territorial expansion and titular elevation beckoned. Every duke or landgrave aspired to become an elector, and every elector aspired to become a king. For the very greatest princes—Bavaria or Brandenburg—power could be expressed in the most direct and obvious manner, in armed might. For the great majority, however, the main currency of imperial competition was cultural achievement. So the representational display expressed in palaces, academies, opera houses, hunting establishments, and the like was not pure self-indulgence, nor was it deception; it was a constitutive element of power itself. That was why Duke Eberhard Ludwig told his Estates that the castle at Stuttgart was quite inadequate to express a prince's *gloire* and that an entirely new palace was needed. (Their reply that an old-fashioned structure was just the right medium for the old-fashioned princely virtues of duty and piety only indicated how fundamental was the political rift between ruler and representatives.)²⁵ That was also why Duke Karl Eugen (1744–93) marked his birthday in 1763 with two weeks of balls, banquets, fireworks displays, operas, ballets, concerts, and hunting, not despite but *because* the Seven Years War had just ended.²⁶ For the baroque prince, representational display was not self-indulgence, it was his *métier*.²⁷

It was also necessary if he were to keep his place on the slippery pole of imperial politics. For all the apparent self-confidence of the great palaces and the brash swagger portraits of their builders, this was a culture with a strong nervous undertow beneath the complacent surface. As we have seen, even Louis XIV and anxiety were born together.²⁸ How much more was that the

²⁴ Vann, *The Making of a State*, pp. 176–7, 236–7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

²⁶ R. Alewyn, *Das große Weltbetrachten: die Epoche der Loftrichter Feste* (Hamburg, 1959), p. 11.

²⁷ This is not to suggest that 'cultural competition' was the only means of asserting princely power. A middling state such as Württemberg could also raise an army large enough to enhance its influence in the Empire. This has been demonstrated by Peter Wilson in *War, State and Society in Württemberg, 1677–1793* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 28, 127–8, 248.

²⁸ See above, pp. 29, 31–3.

case in central and eastern Europe, where frontiers waxed and waned so rapidly and where opportunity knocked with the same insistence that danger threatened. The troubled decades around 1700 were marked by a surge in palace building, for example, at Nymphenburg and Schleissheim in Bavaria, at Berlin and Charlottenburg in Prussia, at Dresden and Moritzburg in Saxony, at Herrenhausen in Hanover, at Mannheim in the Palatinate, at Wilhelmshöhe in Hessen-Kassel, at Ludwigsburg in Württemberg, and at several ecclesiastical courts, most notably Brühl (Cologne), Bruchsal (Speyer), Mainz, Bamberg, and Würzburg.²⁹ A particularly fine example of the dialectic between display and anxiety was provided by the rise and fall of the Electorate of Saxony between the middle of the seventeenth and the middle of the eighteenth century, a switchback ride which left in its wake one of the supreme examples of representational culture.

Among many other things, the Saxon experience demonstrated the need for resources. Situated astride the mighty River Elbe and at the crossroads of trade routes from north to south and east to west, the Electorate was probably the richest principality in the Holy Roman Empire. Densely populated by contemporary standards, it boasted two of the major German cities—Dresden, whose population rose from 21,000 in 1700 to over 60,000 by the middle of the century, and Leipzig, whose population increased by more than 50 per cent during the same period to over 30,000.³⁰ The latter city was the main entrepôt for colonial produce sent from Holland and Hamburg, so to its three great annual fairs came merchants from all over central and eastern Europe, the number from Russia alone multiplying tenfold in the course of the eighteenth century.³¹ Textile manufacturing, mining, and agriculture all helped to swell taxable wealth.³² Saxony had also benefited economically from its status as the home of the Lutheran Reformation, by attracting persecuted co-religionists

(especially from neighbouring Bohemia) and by encouraging high rates of literacy through insistence on the need to study the Word.³³

In short, Saxony enjoyed all manner of geographical, economic, social, and cultural advantages. What it lacked was bulk. In terms of area and population (only about 1,400,000 in 1700),³⁴ it was only a middling state. In 1696, however, the opportunity arose for massive territorial expansion on the death of John III Sobieski, King of Poland. The Polish-Lithuanian empire he had ruled was comparable in size to the entire Holy Roman Empire, stretching as it did from the River Oder in the west to the Dvina in the east, from the Baltic in the north almost as far as the Black Sea in the south. If its institutions were as primitive as those of Saxony were advanced, the combination of Polish quantity with Saxon quality offered a combination with enormous potential. After a prolonged and intensive diplomatic contest, which need not delay us here, in 1697 Frederick Augustus I, Elector of Saxony, was elected King of Poland, taking the title of Augustus II (Plate 5).

It was one thing to get elected in Poland, quite another to hold on to the prize. In his election campaign, Augustus had been supported by Austria and Russia but opposed by a substantial group of Polish nobles supported and financed by France. To make good his claim he now needed to present himself to his new subjects as a king worthy of the name and thus dispel the notion that he was just a middling German prince imposed by foreign powers. He also needed to persuade his existing population that his elevation was worthwhile, not least because one cost of his election had been conversion to Roman Catholicism. Augustus might well take the view that Poland was worth a Mass, but the overwhelmingly Lutheran Saxons were naturally sceptical.

In pursuit of regal status, Augustus now created a representational court culture which, in terms of both splendour and quality, was arguably 'the most dazzling court in Europe', the authoritative verdict of the peripatetic Baron Pöllnitz in 1729.³⁵ It was his creation and it did succeed in attracting large numbers of high-born visitors from all over Europe.³⁶ As Augustus's

²⁹ Volker Press, *Kriege und Krisen. Deutschland 1600–1715* (Munich, 1991), p. 370.

³⁰ Schmidt and Syndram (eds.), *Unter einer Krone*, p. 26.

³¹ *Mémoires de Charles-Louis Baron de Pöllnitz, contenant les observations qu'il a faites dans ses voyages et le caractère des personnes qui composent les principales cours de l'Europe*, new edn., 3 vols. (Lisège, 1734), I, p. 154. The best route to a visual impression of this culture is through the magnificent and numerous illustrations to be found in Schmidt and Syndram (eds.), *Unter einer Krone*.

³² Dirk Syndram, 'Die Kunst am Hofe Augusts des Starken in Dresden', in Schmidt and Syndram (eds.), *Unter einer Krone*, p. 308.

²⁹ Peter Baumgart, 'Der deutsche Hof der Barockzeit als politische Institution', in August Buck, Georg Kauffmann, Blake Lee Spahr, and Conrad Wiedemann (eds.), *Europäische Hofkultur im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Vorträge und Referate gehalten anlässlich des Kongresses des Wolfenbütteler Arbeitskreises für Barockliteratur in der Herzog-August-Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel vom 4. bis 8. September 1979* (Hamburg, 1981), p. 28.

³⁰ Karlheinz Blaschke and H. Kretzschmar, 'Obersachsen und die Lausitzen', in Georg Wilhelm Sante (ed.), *Geschichte der deutschen Länder: "Territorien Ploetz"*, 2 vols (Würzburg, 1964–71), I, p. 490.

³¹ Karl Czok, 'Zur Leipziger Kulturgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts', in Reinhard Szekus (ed.), *Johann Sebastian Bach und die Aufklärung* (Leipzig, 1982), p. 27.

³² Werner Schmidt, 'Das augusteische Zeitalter Sachsens', in Werner Schmidt and Dirk Syndram (eds.), *Unter einer Krone. Kunst und Kultur der sächsisch-polnischen Union* (Leipzig, 1997), pp. 26–7

Grand Tour had lasted two years and included visits to Lisbon, Madrid, Milan, Florence, Venice, Vienna, and—above all—Paris-Versailles, he was well-acquainted with international standards of display.³⁷ He brought to his projects excellent taste, relentless energy, and a determination to have his own way: there are still hundreds of plans in the Saxon archives marked 'from the hand of the King himself' or 'from an idea of the King'.³⁸ His most celebrated achievement was also the acme of representational architecture—the Zwinger at Dresden, a large open space surrounded by galleries punctuated by pavilions and expressly designed for courtly display (Plate 6).³⁹ Here the King-Elector and his nobles performed ritual tournaments as elaborate as they were lavish, proclaiming that this was indeed a court fit for a king.⁴⁰ Inside the royal palaces, every decorative art was enlisted to create a world of opulent display worthy of the mightiest monarch. One example must suffice, a creation of the court jeweller Johann Melchior Dinglinger entitled 'The court of the Grand Mogul Aureng Zeb on his birthday'. It was expressly designed to be the most extraordinary work of its kind that ever was, and in that it surely succeeded. On a base of gold and silver roughly one metre square, Dinglinger employed thousands of diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and pearls to depict 132 figures presenting the Grand Mogul with thirty-two gifts of appropriate splendour. The discovery of the secret of porcelain manufacture in 1710 (the first in Europe) and the subsequent development of the manufactory at Meissen gave Augustus a luxury item which spread the fame of his state across Europe, and indeed the world.⁴¹

This cultural climbing did pay dividends. The clearest sign that Augustus had thrust his way into the first division of European sovereigns came in 1719 when his son and heir, Frederick Augustus, was married to the Habsburg Archduchess Maria Josepha, daughter of the late Emperor Joseph I. To celebrate the occasion, Augustus unleashed the full panoply of his court.

³⁷ Cornelius Gurlitt, *August der Starke. Ein Fürstenleben aus der Zeit des deutschen Barock*, 2 vols. (Dresden, 1924), I, pp. 22, 34. This first tour, undertaken in 1687, had to be curtailed because of war, but he made good the deficiency in 1693–4 when he made an extended visit to Italy, including Rome and Naples.

³⁸ Herbert Pönicke, *August der Starke. Ein Fürst des Barock* (Göttingen, 1972), p. 45.

³⁹ Many excellent illustrations, in the form of both contemporary prints and modern photographs can be found in Karl Czok, *Am Hofe Augustus des Starken* (Leipzig, 1980) and John Man, *Zwinger Palace, Dresden* (London, 1990).

⁴⁰ For an excellent and well-illustrated account of the festivities at the court of Augustus, see Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Triumphball Säwe: Tournaments at German-speaking Courts in their European Context 1560–1730* (Berlin, 1992), pp. 125–38.

⁴¹ For a good introduction, see Ingelore Menzhausen, *Early Meissen Porcelain in Dresden* (London, 1990).

Two years of preparations, which involved among other things the extension of the Zwinger and the construction of the largest opera house north of the Alps, reached a climax with a full month of festivities to greet the bride and bridegroom on their return from Vienna. The ceremonies can be followed with some precision, for Augustus was careful to have each one recorded in word and image and then broadcast to the world by brochures and engravings. He seized this opportunity to advertise the wealth of his state with both hands. Among the entertainments organized, for example, was a mining festival, at which the main dignitaries were seated in a pavilion shaped like a mountain, while 1,700 miners paraded in a demonstration of every aspect of their industry. At the banquet that followed, the mining motif reappeared in the shape of sugar-mountains placed on the tables, themselves laid out in the shape of the letter 'A' for Augustus.⁴² This breakthrough into the first rank of European sovereigns paid a recurring dividend for succeeding generations of the dynasty. Of Augustus II's grandchildren, Maria Amalia married Charles III of Spain; Maria Anna married Maximilian III Joseph, Elector of Bavaria; Josepha married the Dauphin of France, and thus was the mother of Louis XVI; Albert married Maria Christina, daughter of the Empress Maria Theresa, and so became Governor of the Austrian Netherlands; Clemens Wenzeslaus became Prince-Bishop of Freising, Regensburg, and Augsburg and Archbishop-Elector of Trier; and Kunigunde became Princess-Abbess of Thorn and Essen (where she could seek spiritual consolation for having been jilted by Joseph II).⁴³ This list alone should be sufficient to remind us that dynastic politics could bring material benefits.

Among the highlights of the marriage celebrations of 1719 was a performance of *Teofane*, an *opera seria* by Antonio Lotti, the leading Venetian composer, who had been brought to Dresden expressly for the occasion. Among the all-star cast was the greatest castrato of the day, Francesco Bernardi, better known as 'Senesino'. Among the audience of princes and nobles from all over the Empire, room was found for at least two men capable of appreciating the music, namely Georg Philipp Telemann and Georg Friedrich Händel.⁴⁴ *Opera seria* was the representational genre *par excellence*, for it was grand, formal, classical, elitist, hierarchical, and ideally suited to the propagation of an absolutist political message. In the case of *Teofane*, it was conveyed through analogy, for it dealt with the marriage of the great Saxon Emperor Otto II to

⁴² The engravings illustrating these episodes are to be found in Czok, *Am Hofe Augustus des Starken*, pp. 101, 108.

⁴³ See the family tree in Schmidt and Syndram (eds.), *Unter einer Krone*, p. 43.

⁴⁴ The immensely elaborate sets by Alessandro Mauro are illustrated in *ibid.*, p. 107.

Theophanu, daughter of the Byzantine Emperor.⁴⁵ Baroque kingship was inherently theatrical anyway, so no wonder that *opera seria*'s highly artificial combination of verse, singing, and dancing should have proved so popular with royal patrons.

Undoubtedly the finest *opera seria* composed for the court of Augustus, and indeed one of the finest composed anywhere, was *Cleofide*, with music by Johann Adolf Hasse and libretto by Michelangelo Boccardi. There is a good deal to be learned about the culture it exemplified from the title-page of the libretto distributed to those who attended the first night on 13 September 1731 (Figure 1).

The most striking feature is the size of the type used to display the name of the patron, twice the size of that of the composer, thus advertising that this was an occasion first and foremost to celebrate the grandeur of 'His Majesty by Grace of God' and was taking place only because he commanded it. Moreover, it took place in his own private theatre—in the *Royal Court Theatre*, to which admission was by invitation only: there were no tickets for sale and access was determined solely by the patron. Indeed, the first performance of *Cleofide* had taken place on 17 August and had been an entirely private affair for Augustus, his immediate family, and a few favoured intimates.⁴⁶ It was a theatre with an interior dominated by an immense royal box surmounted by a crown and a stage area larger than the auditorium.⁴⁷ It was a theatre in which the audience was seated strictly according to rank. It was also a theatre in which applause or disapproval was strictly forbidden unless the king indicated otherwise.

That a man who had been chased from Poland by the Swedes in 1704, and who had returned only by courtesy of the Russian Tsar, should describe himself as 'always great and invincible' says a great deal for his nerve, if not his brazen effrontery. Although of course common to all *opera seria*, the use of the Italian language was also significant. Quite apart from its mellifluous

⁴⁵ The best general introduction to *opera seria* is Thomas Bauman, 'The eighteenth century: serious opera', in Roger Parker (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 47–83. This also contains some excellent illustrations of the opera house at Dresden. Reinhard Strohm has pointed out that *opera seria* as the name of the genre did not appear until the late eighteenth century; previously it was known as *dramma per musica*; *Essays on Handel and Italian opera* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 96.

⁴⁶ Frederick L. Millner, *The Operas of Johann Adolf Hasse* (n.p., 1979), p. 6.
⁴⁷ The best accessible illustration, showing a performance of *Teofane* in progress, is to be found in Parker (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera*, p. 49. The stage measured 890 square metres, which made it larger than most modern stages; Gurlitt, *August der Starke*, II, p. 273.

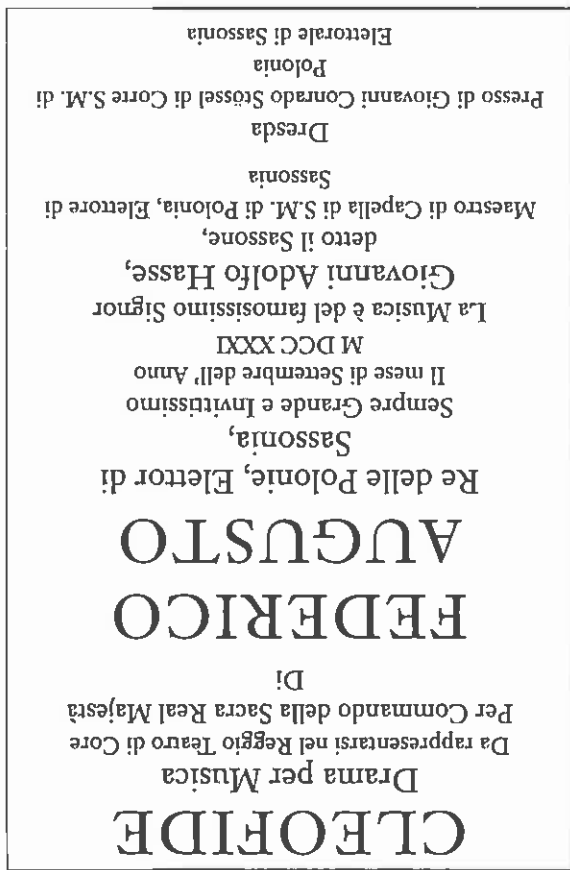
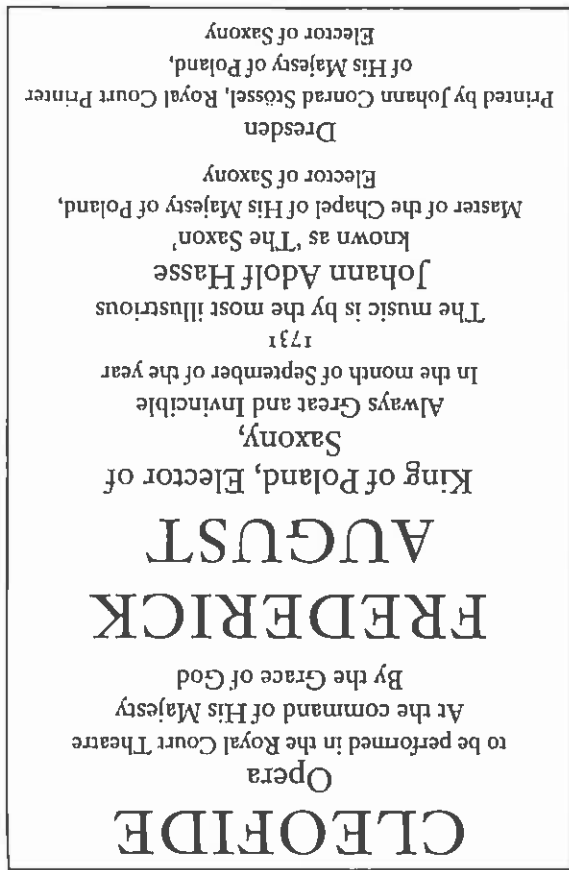


Figure 1. The title-page of the original libretto of *Cleofide*

qualities, it served to distance the aristocratic, classically educated audience from their social inferiors, whose Saxon dialect was deemed unfit for any kind of polite discourse.⁴⁸

Attempting to summarize even the bare essentials of the immensely complex plot of this very long opera, which contains thirty arias and nearly four hours of music, is a formidable undertaking, but necessary if the nature of the genre is to be appreciated. Set in Northern India in 325 BC, it deals with the events surrounding the invasion of Alexander the Great. At the centre is the love between King Poros and Queen Cleofide, rulers of adjacent Indian kingdoms. Defeated but not captured by Alexander, Poros takes the identity of his general, Gandarte. The two constant themes in the labyrinthine plot are Poros' jealousy of Alexander, whom he believes correctly to be a rival for the hand of Cleofide, and Alexander's unswerving magnanimity. No matter how beastly the other characters are to him, he always turns the other cheek. The action takes place at two levels—the personal, based on mistaken identity, for Poros and Gandarte have exchanged identities; and the military, for Poros makes another and equally unsuccessful attempt to defeat the invader. Believing Poros to be dead, Cleofide agrees to marry Alexander in order to bring about peace between the Greeks and the Indians, but secretly resolves to kill herself immediately after the wedding. However, it all ends happily. Poros returns as his true self, Alexander gives back to Poros and Cleofide both their liberty and their kingdoms and bestows his blessing on their marriage. The opera ends amid general rejoicing and unanimous praise for the magnanimous Alexander.

This story had not been tailor-made for Augustus of Saxony. It was adapted from Pietro Metastasio's *Alessandro nell'Italia*, first performed in Rome two years earlier. It is not difficult to appreciate why it might have appealed to its new patron. Alexander, of course, represented the 'always great and invincible' Augustus, behaving with heroic forbearance towards the vanquished Eastern monarch Peter the Great, represented by Poros, and graciously declining the opportunity to add the Russian Empire to Saxony-Poland.⁴⁹ If the characters on stage did not all swivel towards the royal box in the final scene when singing 'O Grande! O Magnanimo!' they missed an obvious opportunity to ingratiate

⁴⁸ A later and much greater Saxon composer—Richard Wagner—retained a thick Saxon accent throughout his life; Robert W. Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, his Mind and his Music* (London, 1968), p. 26.

⁴⁹ Reinhard Strohm, 'Hasse's opera "Cleofide" and its background', in the booklet accompanying the recording of *Cleofide* by William Christie and Capella Coloniensis (Capriccio CD 10.193/96, 1987), p. 31.

themselves with their employer. That Augustus was in reality a client of Peter the Great matters not at all. In the world of representational culture, realism was conspicuous by its absence.

Until relatively recently, the axiom that truth is to be found in realistic representation has impeded appreciation of *opera seria*. As we shall see later in this volume, the romantic revolution in aesthetics created a world diametrically opposed to representational culture. Now that directors feel free to express ideas in any historical setting, or indeed none, and a positive virtue can be made of anachronism, we are better placed to understand works such as *Cleofide* and to take at least the first steps towards rehabilitating Hasse and restoring him to his contemporary eminence. One of the very first German musical journalists, Lorenz Mizler, wrote in 1737:

Who is it that has received the approbation of a whole nation, a nation that has always been considered as the most knowledgeable about music? Director of Music [*Kapellmeister*] Hasse, a German, is so famous that the Italians prefer him, a foreigner, to all of their local composers. I have been assured that if an opera is to be successful in Italy, then it must be composed by Hasse.⁵⁰

Throughout his career Hasse followed the strict conventions of *opera seria*, which almost invariably began with an overture or *sinfonia* in three sections (fast-slow-fast), consisted almost entirely of *da capo* arias,⁵¹ with very few duets or ensembles, and ended with a rousing chorus to make explicit the opera's central message. The libretto was usually based on a subject taken from classical antiquity, employed six characters—two pairs of lovers, a noble king, and a treacherous general—and ended happily with the pairing-off of the lovers, the exposure of the villain, and the apotheosis of the ruler. This was very much 'singer's opera', with the main emphasis on the ability of each of the principals to demonstrate their mastery in the three styles of Italian singing—*cantabile*, *grazioso*, and *bravura*. Especially in the third section of the *da capo* aria, the singer was not just permitted but encouraged to improvise, embellish, and take risks to dazzle the audience with technical virtuosity.⁵² This required a great deal of verbal repetition, which can seem wearisome if not absurd to

⁵⁰ Quoted in Milliner, *The Operas of Johann Adolf Hasse*, p. 251. Milliner includes several other similar tributes from contemporaries.

⁵¹ A *da capo* aria (literally 'from the beginning') is an aria in three parts, the third being a repetition of the first and the second presenting a contrast in tempo and usually in melody.

⁵² Dennis Libby, 'Italy: two opera centres', in Neal Zaslaw, *The Classical Era: From the 1740s to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1989), pp. 17-18; Egon Wellesz and Fredrick Sternfeld, *The Age of Enlightenment 1745-1790. The New Oxford History of Music*, vol. VII (Oxford, 1973), p. 8.

modern ears but should not be allowed to obscure the importance of the text. Contemporary aesthetics held that the voice was the only true means of expression and that therefore the prime function of music was to intensify the meaning and expression embodied in the words.⁵³ The text should not be regarded as a 'libretto' in the nineteenth-century sense; it was a drama and the genre was not called *drama* (or *dramma*) *per musica* for nothing.⁵⁴ Members of the audience had every opportunity to verify the contemporary belief that Metastasio was a great poet in his own right, for the house lights were not dimmed and they could follow every word in the text they were handed at the door.

The apparently anomalous character of *opera seria* diminishes, if it does not vanish altogether, when it is placed in its cultural context and its achievements are compared with its intentions. There is little point in criticizing the characters' lack of personality, for classical aesthetics did not believe that giving each character individuality enhanced dramatic impact. Far from seeking the universal in the individual, *opera seria* sought the universal in the universal and so presented generic types.⁵⁵ So in *Cleofide* Alexander was made to behave as an emperor ought to behave, not in the style of—say—Macbeth, as a tormented murderer. As the singing of a poetic text was the main medium of the drama, it was natural to employ *castrati* for the male roles, for they combined power with clarity and sweetness with agility. No one in 1731 found it strange that King Augustus, lightly disguised as Alexander the Great, should be represented on stage by a eunuch.⁵⁶ As *opera seria* existed primarily to advertise the virtues of the existing social and political order, its ritualistic

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁴ Stefan Kunze, 'Die opera seria und ihr Zeitalter', in Friedrich Lippmann (ed.), *Colloquium Johann Adolf Hasses und die Musik seiner Zeit* (Siena, 1983), Veröffentlichungen der musikalischen Abteilung des Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Rom (n.p., 1987), pp. 5–8.

⁵⁵ Libby, 'Italy: two opera centres', p. 27.

⁵⁶ A stout—and good—defence of the use of the castrato to depict virile male characters was made by the anonymous English translator of Ragueneau's pamphlet comparing French and Italian music, first published in 1702: 'I can't think the Bass-Voice more proper for a King, a Hero, or any other distinguish'd Person, than the Counter-tenor, since the Difference of the Voice in Man is merely accidental. And as the Abilities of a Man's Mind are not measur'd by his Stature, so certainly we are not to judge on a Heroe by his Voice: For this Reason I can't see why the part of Caesar or Alexander may not be properly enough be perform'd by a Counter-tenor or Tenor, or any other Voice; provided the Performer, in Acting as well as Singing, is able to maintain the Dignity of the Character he represents'; François Ragueneau, *A Comparison between the French and Italian Musick and Operas. Translated from the French, with some remarks. To which is added a critical discourse upon operas in England, and a means proposed for their improvement*, ed. Charles Cudworth (Farnborough, 1968), p. 6.

qualities did not betray a lack of imagination but were intrinsic to the genre. This was revealed by Metastasio when, in reply to an inquiry from the Saxon court about the best way to perform *Demofonte* (another work set by Hasse), he sent detailed instructions about where the characters were to position themselves on stage, the object being to reveal visually their relative rank.⁵⁷ For the same reason, it was entirely appropriate to impose a happy end on what was usually a tangled web of conflict and misunderstanding, often by means of a highly improbable *deus ex machina*, because the main purpose of the work was to demonstrate and commend the eirenic qualities of the sovereign.

Cleofide had the advantage of presenting Augustus as both strong and generous. Those who attended the performance in what was then the largest opera house in Germany (seating around 2,000)⁵⁸ could not have doubted that here was a king with both the taste and the resources to mount a spectacle whose magnificence was matched by its quality. Resplendent in the royal box, Augustus certainly looked the part. By the standards of the age he was a tall man (over 5 feet 9 inches), with a massive frame (he weighed around 19 stone) and a commanding presence. Even making allowances for flattery, Louis de Silvestre's magnificent portrait of Augustus in his prime (plate 5) conveys a good sense of the vitality which helped to give him the sobriquet 'the strong'. Anecdotes of his feats of physical strength were legion: that in Spain on the Grand Tour he had caused a sensation at a bullfight by severing the bull's head with one stroke of his sword; that in single combat with a bear he had lost a finger as he tried to tear his opponent's tongue out; that he could break horseshoes with his bare hands; that he had wrestled with a wild boar and killed it single-handed; and so on.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Bruce Alan Brown, 'Maria Theresa's Vienna', in Zaslav, *The Classical Era*, p. 103. The Metastasio-Hasse team was especially favoured by the rulers of central and eastern Europe for grand occasions. Perhaps the climax of representational art under the old regime came in 1742, following the coronation in Moscow of the Tsarina Elizabeth I. While some monarchs might have been content with a specially commissioned work, Elizabeth went one better and had a theatre built, specially and solely for the occasion. An army of more than 500 artisans ran up a vast wooden structure, said to be capable of holding 5,000 spectators, in just two months. A prologue—'Russia bereaved but comforted'—was followed by a ballet 'Joy of the nations at the appearance of Astrea [i.e. the new Tsarina] on the Horizon and the Restoration of the Golden Age' and then by the main event, *La Clemenza di Tito* by Metastasio and Hasse; Malcolm Burgess, *A Survey of the Stage in Russia from 1741 to 1783, with special reference to the development of the Russian theatre* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1953), pp. 35–41.

⁵⁸ Czok, *Arm Hofe Augusts des Starken*, p. 97.

⁵⁹ Pönicke, *August der Starken*, p. 10.

He was even more famous for his sexual prowess. If he did not sire the 365 illegitimate children of legend, he did produce enough to win him the reputation of superhuman potency. The most distinguished of the brood was Maurice de Saxe, the victor of Fontenoy and the most successful French general of the eighteenth century. Once Louis XIV had set the example, it was *de rigueur* for his imitators to take a *maitresse en titre*, even if only for the sake of appearances. Augustus embraced this French fashion with special enthusiasm, taking his first mistress at the age of 16. Indeed, flaunting his potency was very much part of his style of kingship. At one of the court festivities mounted to mark the visit of Frederick IV of Denmark to Dresden in 1709, for example, the royal visitor was induced to act as coachman to the Countess von Cosel, the current preferred mistress, while Augustus himself served as her footman. The episode was then broadcast by means of an engraving.⁶⁰ His generosity to his mistresses was notorious, as titles, palaces, and pensions were showered on them. The same court painter—Louis de Silvestre—was commissioned to paint mistress as well as queen, illegitimate as well as legitimate children.

During the course of his long reign, Augustus the Strong created a representational culture of a quality and splendour unrivalled in the Holy Roman Empire. The Dresden which has come down to us through such pictorial representations as the *vedute* of Bellotto, was as much the personal achievement of Augustus as Versailles was of Louis XIV. Yet the advantage of hindsight tells us that this tremendous structure rested on foundations of sand. After Frederick IV of Denmark had enjoyed the hospitality of Augustus at Dresden, the two monarchs travelled together to Berlin to visit their grim colleague, Frederick William I of Prussia, who despised baroque culture, saved most of his revenue, and spent money only on soldiers. Augustus is reputed to have told Frederick William on a later occasion: 'When Your Majesty collects a ducat, you just add it to your treasure, while I prefer to spend it, so that it comes back to me threefold.'⁶¹ This may have been sound economics and could also have been supported by the parable of the talents, but it did not help Augustus's son and heir, who succeeded as Augustus III in 1733, when he had to face a challenge from Frederick William's son, who succeeded as Frederick II in 1740.

The latter achieved his sobriquet 'the Great' mainly at the expense of Saxony. When Augustus the Strong died, he left his son a superlative cultural centre but also a mountain of debt. He had increased his army to the respect-

⁶⁰ Reproduced in Czok, *Am Hofe Augustus des Starken*, p. 87.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

able total of just under 30,000, but had signally failed to secure Saxony-Poland's great-power status.⁶² Frederick William I bequeathed to his son a culture so austere as to be unworthy of the name but an army 81,000 strong which in terms of quality was the best in Europe, supported by a great treasure-chest of 8,000,000 thalers in hard cash, packed in barrels in the cellars of the royal palace in Berlin.⁶³ At the beginning of the century the Saxon and Prussian armies had been almost exactly the same size, indeed, if anything the Saxon army was rather larger; by 1740 the Prussian army was three times larger and much better trained, equipped, and financed.⁶⁴ The series of wars which began in December 1740, when Frederick invaded Silesia, is usually presented as a struggle between Prussia and Austria for the domination of Germany, and rightly so. It was also, however, a struggle between Prussia and Saxony. As the son of Augustus II and an Austrian archduchess, Augustus III had a much sounder claim to Habsburg territory than did Frederick of Prussia. If he had succeeded in adding Silesia to Saxony and Poland, he would have created an unbroken territorial complex reaching from the heart of Germany to the frontiers of Russia.⁶⁵ This was one reason why his Prussian rival was so anxious to strike first.

In the first Silesian war of 1740–2, the Saxons had supported Frederick's raid on the Habsburg monarchy, but they deserted him in 1743. So his victory in the second Silesian war of 1744–5 was a Saxon defeat. That was revealed with brutal clarity in 1756 when the third Silesian war (better known in western Europe as the Seven Years War) began. On 29 August Frederick invaded Saxony, hoping to destroy both his immediate target and the Habsburg monarchy further to the south before the dreaded Russian juggernaut could be brought into play the following year. In that he failed, but he did succeed in taking control of Saxony and then milking it for all it was worth. The Saxon army he simply incorporated into his own. The Saxon resources he requisitioned and requisitioned until there should have been nothing left.

⁶² Reinhold Müller, *Die Armee Augustus des Starken. Das sächsische Heer von 1730 bis 1733* (Berlin, 1984), p. 8.

⁶³ Otto Hintze, *Die Hohenzollern und ihr Werk*, 8th edn. (Berlin, 1916), p. 299.

⁶⁴ I owe these figures to Dr Peter Wilson of the University of Sunderland.

⁶⁵ Peter-Michael Hahn, 'Kursachsen und Brandenburg-Preußen. Ungleiche Gegenspieler (1485–1740)', in *Sachsen und die Wettiner. Chancen und Realitäten* (Dresden, 1990), p. 98. In 1705 Augustus the Strong had written in his own hand a 'Plan in the event of the House of Austria dying out' which envisaged the imperial title passing from the Habsburgs to the Wettins; Monika Schlechte, 'HERCULES SAXONIXUS—Versuch einer ikonographischen Deutung', in *ibid.*, p. 298.

Such was the natural wealth of the country, however, that there was always something to be found by the Prussian foragers. As Frederick himself said, Saxony was like a flour-sack—no matter how hard or often one hit it, a puff of flour would always come out.⁶⁶ It can be said with only slight exaggeration that it was the Saxons who financed Prussia's achievement of great-power status, for their involuntary sacrifices financed fully one third of the Prussian war effort.⁶⁷

The end of the Seven Years War in 1763 was also marked by the death of Augustus III and the end of the Polish connection, for Frederick the Great now cooperated with Catherine of Russia to have one of the latter's superannuated lovers (Stanislas Poniatowski) elected as king of Poland. It also marked the end of Dresden as the great German centre of representational culture, for the new Elector was obliged to retrench on every possible front to reduce the mountain of debt created by his two profligate predecessors and the Prussian occupation. The fate of Hasse, 'Il Sassone', was symbolic. He returned to Dresden at the end of the war to find his home in ruins and the opera house devastated. He and his wife (the star soprano Faustina Bordoni) were paid off with two years' salary but no pension. They moved to Vienna.⁶⁸ Forty-five years later, the distinguished Prussian composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt reported that complaints from travellers that Dresden was dull compared with Prague or Vienna were well-founded but did not take into account the fact that ever since 1763 the Elector had been struggling to achieve solvency through the strictest possible economy.⁶⁹

The King of France, the Holy Roman Emperor, the Duke of Württemberg, and the Elector of Saxony were all to a greater or lesser extent players in the European states system. Yet representational art was not the prerogative of actual or aspiring great powers. In terms of quality, some of the supreme achievements were the work of very small fry. One example must suffice, but it is a particularly good one (Plate 3). It can best be introduced by the impact it made on one of the greatest minds of the eighteenth century, David Hume, when he visited it in 1748:

⁶⁶ Günter Vogler and Klaus Vetter, *Preußen von den Anfängen bis zur Reichsgründung* (Cologne, 1981), p. 82.

⁶⁷ Christopher Duffy, *The Army of Frederick the Great* (London, 1974), p. 130. These are the figures originally compiled by Gustav Schmoller.

⁶⁸ David J. Nichols and Sven Hansell, 'Johann Adolf (Adolph) Hasse', in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 8 (London, 1980), p. 284.

⁶⁹ Johann Friedrich Reichardt, *Verrätene Briefe geschrieben auf einer Reise nach Wien und den österreichischen Staaten zu Ende des Jahres 1808 und zu Anfang 1809*, ed. Gustav Gugitz, 2 vols. (Munich, 1915), I, p. 66.

What renders [Würzburg] chiefly remarkable is a Building which surprised us all, because we had never before heard of it, & did not there expect to meet with such a thing. This a prodigious magnificent Palace of the Bishop, who is the Sovereign. This all of hewn Stone and of the richest Architecture. I do think the King of France has not such a House. If it be less than Versailles, tis more compleat and finish'd. What a surprising thing it is, that these petty Princes can build such Palaces? But it has been fifty years a rearing; & tis the chief Expence of Ecclesiastics.⁷⁰

This compliment was even greater than it seems, for if Hume had returned five years later he would have found the Residenz (as it came to be known) adorned with what by general consent are some of the finest frescoes ever painted.

The Würzburg Residenz exemplifies the characteristically baroque mixture of ambition and anxiety we have noted already. First and foremost, it represented the arrival on the imperial scene of the Schönborns, a family of Imperial Knights who during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had succeeded in securing election to a remarkable number of ecclesiastical states, including Mainz (twice), Trier, Worms (twice), Würzburg (twice), Bamberg (twice), Speyer, Konstanz, and Ellwangen.⁷¹ Among their numerous architectural achievements, the episcopal palace at Bruchsal and the family seat at Pommersfelden are remarkable enough, but even these are eclipsed by Würzburg. Building began not 'fifty years' before Hume's visit but in 1719, when Johann Philipp Franz von Schönborn was elected prince-bishop. It was fortunate for him that he found in the principality's tiny army a 32-year-old engineering officer who proved to be an architect of genius, arguably the greatest of the German baroque. This was Balthasar Neumann, whose own good fortune was to complete his architectural training just as the ideal patron arrived on the scene.⁷²

By the time Hume paid his visit, the exterior was virtually complete but much of the interior decoration remained to be done. The election in 1749 of a

⁷⁰ Quoted in Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall, *Trepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence* (New Haven, 1994), p. 101. The volume contains some magnificent illustrations of the Residenz but a less satisfactory text. Even better illustrations are to be found in Peter O. Krückmann (ed.), *Der Himmel auf Erden. Trepolo in Würzburg*, 2 vols. (Munich and New York, 1996).

⁷¹ There is an excellent illustration of the success of the family in the shape of a group portrait of eleven Schönborns to be found in the parish church of their seat at Gaibach. It is reproduced in Richard Sedlmaier and Rudolf Pfister, *Die fürstbischöfliche Residenz zu Würzburg*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1923), I, p. 3.

⁷² A good and well-illustrated introduction to Neumann's life and work is Max H. von Freeden, *Balthasar Neumann. Leben und Werk*, 2nd edn. (Munich and Berlin, 1963).

Schönborn cousin, Karl Philipp von Greiffenklau (also spelt Greiffenclau), gave the project the necessary final impetus. It was his inspired decision in 1750 to commission Giambattista Tiepolo to paint the frescoes in the grandest of the parade rooms, the Kaisersaal or 'Emperor's Hall'. Its formal purpose was to provide an appropriate setting in which to receive the Holy Roman Emperor, but as that happened on only very rare occasions, in reality it served as the prince-bishop's main assembly room. The patron's choice of subject for the frescoes had a clear programme. The first depicts the marriage of the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa to Beatrice of Burgundy in 1156, at which the Bishop of Würzburg had officiated (Plate 4). As Tiepolo gave the bishop the features of the current incumbent, Karl Philipp's guests could observe the greatest of the medieval German emperors kneeling before their host.⁷³ The fresco on the other side of the hall, however, revealed that this was more than an exercise in self-glorification. The prince-bishop again has Karl Philipp von Greiffenklau's features, but this time it is he who kneels to Barbarossa, as he is invested with the duchy of Franconia. Uniting the two is a ceiling fresco which shows Beatrice borne across the sky by Apollo to the *Genius Imperii*, a personification of the Holy Roman Empire, sitting on a throne and attended by the *Genius Franconiae*, a personification of Franconia.⁷⁴ Greiffenklau was well aware of the dangers which threatened his principality, for during the first Silesian War, Frederick the Great had threatened the then prince-bishop (Friedrich Karl von Schönborn) with secularization if he lent his support to Maria Theresa. So the complementary frescoes in the Kaisersaal were a potent visual reminder of the interdependence of Emperor and Prince-Bishop.⁷⁵

There was no shared glory in Tiepolo's final and greatest contribution to Würzburg—the fresco over the staircase. The German baroque specialized in grand staircases but Würzburg is the acme, a perfect match between architecture and painting. Neumann's structure gave Tiepolo about 600 square metres on which to operate, making the finished product one of the largest paintings in Europe. To analyse the complex iconography of the fresco, whose full title is *Olympus with the four continents of the earth and allegories*, in any detail would easily consume a chapter or even a book. The main object of the exercise is plain enough, however. An important guest would be driven straight into the

⁷³ There is an excellent illustration in Antonio Morassi, *Tiepolo. His life and work* (London, 1955), plate VII.

⁷⁴ Frank Büttner, 'Ikonographie, Rhetorik und Zeremoniell in Tiepolos Fresken der Würzburger Residenz', in Krückmann (ed.), *Der Himmel auf Erden. Tiepolo in Würzburg*, II, pp. 54–5.

⁷⁵ Max H. von Freeden, *Das Meisterwerk des Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. Die Fresken der Würzburger Residenz* (Munich, 1956), pp. 41–2.

low-roofed and dimly lit vestibule.⁷⁶ As he stepped from his carriage, the light of the staircase stretched ahead. The first image which came into view as he began his ascent was the exotic figure of America, a bare-breasted woman wearing only a feathered head-dress and sitting on a gigantic alligator. Her outstretched arm points to a flag bedecked with a griffon, the Greiffenklau's heraldic device. As the visitor reaches the half-landing, he sees the full width of the fresco for the first time, as the figures of Asia and Africa come into view. As he turns for the final stage, he is confronted by Europe: against a background of architectural motifs taken from the Würzburg Residenz, Europa sits on her throne to receive her court. The sceptre in her hand and the globe at her feet symbolize European domination of the world. Her continent's cultural supremacy is registered by symbols of Christianity and the arts. She is looking up at a portrait of none other than Bishop Greiffenklau as he ascends towards Olympus, heralded by Fame's long trumpet and escorted by Genius, who bears his coronet. As Mercury rushes to greet the new arrival, Saturn with his symbols of mortality—the scythe and the hourglass—averts his eyes from one so obviously destined to live for ever.⁷⁷ That the ruler of a Franconian principality with only about a quarter of a million people⁷⁸ should have himself presented as the mightiest ruler of the mightiest continent on earth may seem grotesque, yet the need of the Schönborn clan both to advertise their grandeur and legitimate their rule in the face of danger produced a total work of art of enduring power. For that reason, the last word should go to Michael Levey's eloquent tribute to Tiepolo's achievement:

Although there seems something a little grandiloquent in a cosmic view which gives such prominence to Carl Philipp von Greiffenklau, ornament of the western world, what his patronage helped to bring into being justifies his claim on the world's attention. There is, thanks to Tiepolo, more than rhetoric to the idea of his fame and glory. An artistic Joshua, Tiepolo has stopped the sun. He has reversed the decline of the *ancien régime* and offered on the Residenz ceiling the most optimistic of

⁷⁶ The best guided tour is provided by Peter Krückmann, 'Tiepolo in Würzburg. Fürstbischöfliche Repräsentation und die Kunst der Inszenierung', in Krückmann (ed.), *Der Himmel auf Erden. Tiepolo in Würzburg*, I, pp. 32–42.

⁷⁷ Although the best illustrations are to be found in Krückmann's book, the most lucid exposition of the symbolism is to be found in Freeden, *Das Meisterwerk des Giovanni Battista Tiepolo*, pp. 93–7.

⁷⁸ The population in 1803, when it ceased to exist as an independent principality, totalled 262,000; Gerhard Köbler, *Historisches Lexikon der deutschen Länder. Die deutschen Territorien und reichsunmittelbaren Geschlechter vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, 5th edn. (Munich, 1995), p. 709.

all philosophies, a complete harmony of mankind and nature and art, on a stupendous scale and with a confidence and exhilaration that he never surpassed.⁷⁹

Würzburg, it should be noted, was no pale reflection of a sun which had shone first and brightest at Versailles. The most important artists to work at Würzburg were not French but Germans or Italians, and if Neumann was sent to Paris to consult Robert de Cotte, he was also sent to Vienna to consult Fischer von Erlach and Hildebrandt. Although it is a tribute to the power of Louis XIV's propaganda machine that every European palace built after 1682 should so often be regarded as yet another of his satellites, there were other solar systems. The conviction of French historians such as Louis Réau that 'during this period the true artistic capital of the German-speaking territories was neither Vienna nor Berlin but Paris'⁸⁰ reveals a short-sighted inability to detect any line of influence other than that radiating from Versailles. The polycentricity of the Holy Roman Empire was cultural as well as political, as befitted its geographical centrality on the European continent.⁸¹ It absorbed influences from the Netherlands, the Slavonic world, Italy, and Spain, as well as from France. Indeed, the most recent historian of the German courts has identified five categories to introduce order to their wonderful variety: the ceremonial court, the imperial court, the patriarchal court, the sociable court, and the cultural court.⁸² Only the first of those can be said to have been influenced directly by Versailles. Moreover, even the most enthusiastic emulators of Louis XIV, such as Augustus the Strong, did not adopt the French model completely and uncritically. It was not French *tragédie lyrique* but Italian *opera seria* that provided the centrepiece of Dresden's representational culture, while its most enduring architectural monument—the wildly exuberant Zwinger—is an aesthetic world away from the restrained classicism of Versailles.

⁷⁹ Michael Levey, *Giambattista Tiepolo: His Life and Art* (New Haven and London, 1986), p. 206.

⁸⁰ Réau, *L'Europe française au siècle des Lumières*, p. 250.

⁸¹ Norman Davies's belief that the centre of Europe is located in 'the suburbs of Warsaw or the depths of Lithuania'—*Europe: A History* (Oxford, 1996), p. 14—can be justified only by reference to the mathematics of latitude and longitude.

⁸² Volker Bauer, *Die böhmische Gesellschaft in Deutschland von der Mitte des 17. bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts. Versuch einer Typologie* (Tübingen, 1993), pp. 63–73. Cf. Peter Baumgart, 'Der deutsche Hof der Barockzeit als politische Institution' and Renate Wagner-Rieger, 'Zur Typologie des Barockschlosses', both in August Buck, Georg Kauffmann, Blake Lee Spahr, and Conrad Wiedemann (eds.), *Europäische Hofkultur im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Vorträge und Referate gehalten anlässlich des Kongresses des Wolfenbütteler Arbeitskreises für Barockliteratur in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel vom 4. bis 8. September 1979* (Hamburg, 1981), pp. 25–57–9.

Yet if the triumphalism of the French propagandists—'Paris is to Europe what Greece once was to the ancient world'⁸³—was ill-founded in fact, it created a myth which was to prove long-lived. Its longevity was assisted by foreign acknowledgements of French superiority. When Augustus the Strong, for example, instructed his court artist Louis de Silvestre to capture on canvas the moment when the Crown Prince of Saxony was presented to Louis XIV at Fontainebleau in 1714, he was also tacitly recognizing French hegemony.⁸⁴ So did those who deplored it—the anonymous German, for example, who lamented in 1689: 'French language, French clothes, French food, French furniture, French dances, French music, the French pox... perhaps there is also a French death! Hardly have the children emerged from their mothers' wombs than people think of giving them a French teacher... To please the girls, even if one is ugly and deformed, one must wear French clothes'.⁸⁵ It was a myth that was powerful, but it was also dangerous. So long as it was supported by sufficient cultural achievement to lend it credibility, it could justify both French arrogance and foreign cringing. But once other cultural centres acquired self-confidence, the supportive structure that Louis XIV had provided through his cultural establishments became a serious liability for both monarch and nation.

⁸³ Louis Réau, *L'Europe française au siècle des Lumières* (Paris, 1951), p. 115.

⁸⁴ A reproduction of the painting can be found in Karl Czok, *August der Starke und seine Zeit*, 3rd edn. (Leipzig, 1997), p. 95.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Adrien Fauchier-Magnan, *The Small German Courts in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1958), p. 27.