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Author(s): Charles Dill

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Rameau's Imaginary Monsters: Knowledge, Theory, and Chromaticism in *Hippolyte et Aricie*

CHARLES DILL

A dialectic existed at the heart of Enlightenment thought, a tension that sutured instrumental reason into place by offering the image of its irrational other. Embedded within the rational order of encyclopedic enterprises lay the threat posed by superstition, both religious and unlettered; contained and controlled by the solid foundations of social contracts was the disturbing image of chaos, evoked musically by Jean-Féry Rebel and Franz Joseph Haydn, and among the nobly formed figures of humankind and nature there lurked deformity and aberration, there lurked the monster. As eighteenth-century studies and European studies in general have shown in recent years, monsters were not a secondary concern, relegated to the particularized interests of natural history, but rather one of the figures of the irrational that allowed thinkers to conceive orderly universes.¹ In giving a name, if not a

An early version of this paper was read as part of the musicology colloquium series at Stanford University on 8 February 1999. Among those who have generously offered criticisms and observations in its development, I must express particular gratitude to Karol Berger, Thomas Grey, Brian Hyer, Ronald Radano, and, a debt of long standing, Cynthia Verba.

1. The dialectic I have in mind here parallels those outlined in Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), esp. 3–21; and Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Blackwell, 1990), 13–30. The literature on monstrosity is extensive, covering more than the period and principles with which this essay is concerned. The following, however, have proven helpful in developing my thoughts for this project: Patrick Tort, *L'ordre et les monstres. Le débat sur l'origine des déviations anatomiques au xviii^e siècle*, 2d ed. (Paris: Syllepse, 1998); idem, "La logique du déviant (Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire et la classification des monstres)," *Revue des sciences humaines* 188 (1982–84): 7–32; Hélène Merlin, "Où est le monstre? Remarques sur l'esthétique de l'âge classique," *Revue des sciences humaines* 188 (1982–84): 179–93; Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991); Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991): 93–124; Georges Canguihelm, *La connaissance de la vie*, 2d ed. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1992); Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and Andrew Curran and Patrick Graille, "The Faces of Eighteenth-Century Monstrosity," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21, no. 2 (1997): 1–15. In

stable shape, to the absence of reason, societies and individuals validated their concerns. Monsters lent urgency and purpose to intellectual pursuits.² This implies, however, that a certain precariousness of the Enlightenment project must have been apparent to some of its participants, especially at those moments when an idea did not fit easily into the established schema of knowledge. Individual thinkers struggled with less-than-pure, monstrous forms of knowledge, whether as social constructs, contingent devices, agencies for power, or threats of failure.

In just this way, monstrosity allows us access to the anxieties plaguing French opera during the first half of the eighteenth century. Critical writers on opera embraced the image of the monster not only to identify instances where they perceived genre to be ambiguous or to have failed, but even to lay out cases for and against opera as a sister art, comparable to painting and literature; they labeled opera itself as “monstrous” for aesthetic and even ethical reasons. In what was surely an ironic twist, critics used this same notion as well to characterize their ambivalence toward the compositions and theoretical writings of Jean-Philippe Rameau, who contrary to all such accusations considered himself an heir to Cartesian logic and an apostle of Newtonian empiricism.³ Not only were his compositions monstrous, but he himself became by metonymic extension the chimerical image of his music: “I hear, I see the cannibal: neck of an ostrich, wrinkled eyes, jaundiced, spiky-haired, crooked nose—the true mask of satire—mouth for murdering and not for laughing, pointed head and lying heart, dried-up legs.”⁴ With the premiere of his first

addition, the following special issues, devoted to the problem of monstrous epistemology, have proven especially helpful for this project: *Revue des sciences humaines* 188 (1982–84), entitled *Le Monstre*; and *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21, no. 2 (1997), entitled *Faces of Monstrosity in Eighteenth-Century Thought*, ed. Andrew Curran, Robert P. Maccubbin, and David F. Morrill.

2. Patrick Tort shows that the very creation in the early nineteenth century of the field of teratology—the biological study of monsters, their development, and their classification—involved precisely the dialectic I am outlining here: “C’est ainsi que le retour marqué de l’ordre dans la tératogenèse du début du xix^e siècle . . . n’a pu effectivement avoir lieu que grâce à la médiation—bel exemple de dialectique—du *désordre* de Lémery, qui avait assuré à la monstruosité de pouvoir être considérée comme une pathologie organique” (“Thus the marked return of *order* in the genesis of monsters at the beginning of the nineteenth century effectively took place by mediation—a fine example of dialectic—of the *disorder* of Lémery, which had assured monstrosity of being considered as an organic pathology”) (“La logique du déviant,” 12). (All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.) It is interesting to observe that Saint-Hilaire’s successful rehabilitation of monstrosity involves precisely the sort of table discussed below, which the Encyclopedists derived from Francis Bacon (see Tort, “La logique du déviant,” 26–27).

3. On Rameau as rationalist thinker, see Catherine Kintzler, *Jean-Philippe Rameau: Splendeur et naufrage de l’esthétique du plaisir à l’âge classique*, 2d ed. (Paris: Minerve, 1988), 15–40; and Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 31–38.

4. “J’entends, je vois l’Anthropage / Col d’Autruch, sourcil froncé, / Cuirejaune, et de poil hérissé, Nez creux, vray masque de Satire, / Bouche pour mordre, et non pour rire, / Teste

opera for the Académie Royale de Musique, the *tragédie en musique Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733), Rameau became the focal point for critical misgivings. His carefully or, some would have said, overly wrought music symbolized the common assumption that music per se could not convey semantic content and was therefore irrational.⁵

It is interesting in this context to observe that Simon-Joseph Pellegrin's livret for *Hippolyte et Aricie* fairly bristles with monsters. While incredible creatures were a common, indeed controversial, feature of French opera, I would argue that Pellegrin here created something more. Following Racine's famous tragedy *Phèdre*, he used monstrosity emblematically to highlight tragic relationships in his story. In addition to the creature that kills Hippolyte at the end of act 4, monsters appear in speeches by the goddess Diane, the king Thésée, and his queen, Phèdre. The monster was a literary trope of considerable force, a discomfiting image familiar from most forms of artistic and critical representation. In using it, Pellegrin, perhaps by design, drew together and raised social issues regarded with some urgency by the opera-going public: the merit of opera in general, its social relevance, its ascendancy or decline, and the importance of music to its conception. In turn, by setting this livret to music, Rameau did much more than make his entrance into the world of the Académie Royale de Musique; he also entered into and became metonymically attached to these same public concerns. By working with and teasing out Pellegrin's imagery, he inadvertently invited public consideration of the value of his musical ideas. In a critical sense as well as a practical one, the public judged Rameau's theories of music—that its properties arose in nature, that these could be explained and, moreover, used to create more effective musical entities—with reference to operas like *Hippolyte et Aricie*, and, to some extent, his theories stood and fell according to perceptions of his operas and their musical efficacy.

This has ramifications for our perceptions of Rameau's work. The composer-theorist becomes more than an organizer of musical knowledge or a popularizer of various styles; he locates himself in that space where what is knowable

pointu, et cour Menton, / Jambes seches comme Ecriton" (Chansonnier Maurepas, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fr. 12634, 141–45). See also the appendix in Graham Sadler, "Patrons and Pasquinades: Rameau in the 1730s," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 113 (1988): 314–37, esp. 335, lines 36–47.

5. This paragraph summarizes the argument found in Charles Dill, *Monstrous Opera: Rameau and the Tragic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); see especially pp. 3–56. Here, as in *Monstrous Opera*, it is not my purpose to assert an essential status for the trope of monstrosity, but rather to take advantage of the image's potency for framing certain epistemological problems relevant to the period. Whereas in *Monstrous Opera* those problems centered on creating a plausible narrative of Rameau's compositional career, I now wish to focus on the status of his ongoing theoretical project as it pertains to the intellectual and cultural climate of music discourse. In this respect, the present essay forms part of a larger undertaking that will consider the earliest French discursive formations involving opera.

and what isn't intersected. His struggles in the fields of music theory and music composition limn its very terrain. In the case of his theoretical writings, we know from Thomas Christensen's research that Rameau's ideas developed in remarkable ways throughout his career and that he adapted them in response not only to criticism, but to shifting intellectual fashions. We know, too, that something similar occurred with respect to his operas: he not only rewrote his most important pieces, but altered their meaning and musical ontology, occasionally in ways contradicting those same theories.⁶ This, in turn, holds out the possibility that both aspects of Rameau's *oeuvre*—his theories and his operas—might each comment on the other, might even underscore the values, hierarchies, and compromises organizing his thought. They can uncover the dialectical process of knowing as it was practiced. Precisely because shifting critical and creative values were active in both fields, we may understand them better by noting where and how theory and music, along with the epistemological valorizations that bound them, intersected.

In what follows, I propose to collapse together these various manifestations of monstrosity—the dialectical aspect of instrumental reason, Rameau's complicated reputation, and its basis in his musical and theoretical practices—to give a clearer view of the composer's developing epistemology. First, I will survey Rameau's place as individual theorist within contemporary conceptions of knowledge, using the image of the monster to underscore those aspects of his thought deemed problematic by critics. I will argue that perceived difficulties in reading Rameau's theories and relating them to musical practice arose, at least in part, from the ways in which he structured them. Second, I will illustrate how these same issues may have played out practically, tracing the values informing Rameau's creative decisions by observing how he figured musically the monsters of *Hippolyte et Aricie*, what these figures said about theoretical ideas he was concurrently developing, and how public opinion caused him to reconsider some of those cherished notions. Here we will encounter Rameau's remarkable early use of the chromatic modulation to illustrate irrational, monstrous forces. Third, I will employ this latter musical example historically to trace Rameau's changing theories of the chromatic genus itself, first as an irrational harmonic progression and then, later, as an altogether natural, fully rationalized one. In this way, we can gather some idea of Rameau's intellectual and creative formation in the 1730s and, more generally, how public opinion was mobilized by the irrational threat of his music; we can also gain some sense of music's own unstable role in public debates over the nature of knowledge. Finally, I will conclude by suggesting that Rameau's failure to articulate

6. On Rameau's shifting approaches to his theories, see Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, esp. 5–20; Marie-Elisabeth Duchez, "Valeur épistémologique de la théorie de la basse fondamentale de Jean-Philippe Rameau: Connaissance scientifique et représentation de la musique," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 245 (1986): 91–130; and Brian Hyer, "Before Rameau and After," *Music Analysis* 15 (1996): 75–100. On the similarly shifting values in Rameau's operas, see Dill, *Monstrous Opera*, esp. 57–105.

convincingly a stable systemic logic for his theories—one that could be expressed in simple terms and discussed—confirmed the widespread belief that music existed over and against logical thought, epitomizing irrational and pleasurable pursuits.

Reason and Monstrosity

We can begin untangling these strands by tracing the connections between Rameau's music-theoretical ideas and more general epistemological concerns over monstrosity. In its very properties as a system, any given version of Rameau's theories holds for modern readers an experience similar to what contemporary ones may have encountered. His goals are not always clear. To some extent this experience resulted from Rameau's difficulties in expressing ideas, and commentators frequently observed that his ideas outpaced his ability to convey them. Jean le Rond d'Alembert noted as much in his explanation of Rameau's theories, the *Elémens de musique theorique et pratique, suivant les principes de M. Rameau* (1752), although he tactfully remarked that he had written his treatise for those who were curious but knew little of music.⁷ Later, when defending Rousseau from Rameau's anonymous accusations in the *Erreurs sur la musique dans l'Encyclopédie* (1755), the editor of the *Encyclopédie* again hinted at the problem: "M. Rousseau . . . joins to his great knowledge of and taste for music the talent of thinking and expressing himself clearly, as musicians have not always done."⁸ The point is one with which any reader of Rameau can sympathize; nevertheless, problems with his theories go beyond matters of clarity.

7. [Jean le Rond d'Alembert], *Elémens de musique theorique et pratique, suivant les principes de M. Rameau* (Paris: David, Le Breton, Durand, 1752; facsimile ed., New York: Broude, 1966). In an undated letter, probably from late 1750, d'Alembert wrote to Rameau concerning the *Elémens*: "Je vous prie de l'examiner avec soin, & de mettre par écrit vos remarques afin que j'en profite. un mot suffira pour me mettre au fait. j'ay taché de composer cet ouvrage de maniere qu'il puisse etre entendu de tout le monde" ("I beg you examine [the *Elémens*] with care, and put your remarks in writing so that I may profit from them. A word will suffice to put me right. I have attempted to write this work in such a manner that it can be disseminated widely") (see the commentary to Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Complete Theoretical Writings*, ed. Erwin R. Jacobi [N.p.: American Institute of Musicology, 1967–72], 6:228–34 [hereafter *CTW*]). (Here and throughout this paper I have preserved eighteenth-century orthography.) More generally, see Thomas Christensen, "Science and Music Theory in the Enlightenment: D'Alembert's Critique of Rameau" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1985).

8. "M. Rousseau qui joint à beaucoup de connoissances & de goût en Musique le talent de penser & de s'exprimer avec netteté, que les Musiciens n'ont pas toujours" (*Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers . . .*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert [Paris: various publishers, 1751–72; facsimile ed., New York and Paris: Pergamon Press, 1969], 6:i). This comment was also rather different in tone from that of the *Discours préliminaire* (see Jean le Rond d'Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot*, trans Richard N. Schwab [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995], 100–101).

By attempting to account fully for the theoretical ramifications of his ideas, Rameau's thoughts ranged far afield. From recollections of ideas broached in his first treatise, the *Traité de l'harmonie* (1722), to the introduction of newer propositions, from definitions of key notions to elaborate descriptions of their origins, from rules for part-writing to abstruse mathematical justifications, Rameau felt compelled to rationalize not only musical phenomena per se, but also the small, seemingly trivial details resulting from his ideas. Otherwise he would have failed in his attempt to account for music in its plenitude. This led him into complicated maneuvers.⁹ An understanding of the problems underlying the organization of Rameau's theoretical works will therefore take us a long way toward understanding the relative importance of his individual theoretical ideas.

In the sense that he struggled with, and thus focused on, systemic organization, Rameau behaved in a manner consistent with contemporary thought. This same impulse remained strong years later, when the *philosophes* undertook the composition of the *Encyclopédie*. Perhaps the best example of what I have in mind is located at the end of that work, in the *Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts mécaniques*. There one encounters a need for thoroughness and level of detail that, *mutatis mutandis*, matches Rameau's. Approximately three thousand engraved plates record in detail the inner workings of industrial machinery as well as minute variations in the style and composition of material goods: implements, gadgetry, and kinds of shoes march past the reader in vertiginous array.¹⁰ For the editors of the *Encyclopédie*, however, it was not enough to record these details. As d'Alembert showed in his *Discours préliminaire*, the factual data of daily experience required systematic organization as well. D'Alembert assumed as his task for the *Encyclopédie* not simply the alphabetical arrangement of entries, but through this process the ordering of knowledge itself into a recognizable and iterable form:

If one reflects somewhat upon the connection that discoveries have with one another, it is readily apparent that the sciences and the arts are mutually sup-

9. Take, for example, his notion of *double emploi* as it is commonly understood. Rameau's doubling of a single collection of pitches into two closely related harmonic identities resulted not only from the need to conceptualize a subdominant function per se, but also from the necessity of working within definitions previously posited in the *Traité de l'harmonie*. If, as stated there, the tonic constitutes the only fully consonant harmony, then by necessity one must find a conceptual means of adding dissonances to harmonies built on the fourth scale degree, which elaborate the subdominant function. As a result, Rameau conflated the second-inversion supertonic harmony with the subdominant triad with added sixth. Audibly, they form a single entity, but they can also be viewed from two different root positions. On the famous example of the *double emploi* in Rameau's theories, see Matthew Shirlaw, *The Theory of Harmony* (London: Novello, 1917; facsimile ed., New York: Dover, 1969), 147–51, 191–213; Graham Sadler and Albert Cohen, "Jean-Philippe Rameau," in *The New Grove French Baroque Masters*, by H. Wiley Hitchcock et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 205–308, esp. 281–83; and Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, 193–99.

10. These were presented as volumes 18 through 28 (and *suite*) of the *Encyclopédie*.

porting, and that consequently there is a chain that binds them together. But, if it is often difficult to reduce each particular science or art to a small number of rules or general notions, it is no less difficult to encompass the infinitely varied branches of human knowledge in a truly unified system.

The first step which lies before us in our endeavor is to examine, if we may be permitted to use this term, the genealogy and the filiation of the parts of our knowledge, the causes that brought the various branches of our knowledge into being, and the characteristics that distinguish them.¹¹

To ensure the clarity of what he was providing, d'Alembert included a diagram of this genealogy, a "système figuré des connoissances humaines" based on the outline of knowledge presented in Francis Bacon's *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning Divine and Humane* (1605). His concern with the *systematic* aspect of knowledge notably echoes the beginning of Condillac's *Traité des systèmes*:

A system is nothing more than the disposition of the different parts of an art or science in an order where they sustain each other mutually and where the latter [parts] are explained by the first. Those [parts] that give account of the others are called *principles*, and the system is all the more perfect when the principles are fewest in number: it is even desirable that they reduce to a single principle.¹²

The treelike or genealogical conception of knowledge was significant. As Robert Darnton has noted, this fascination with *la mappemonde* ("the map of the world"), the project of mapping out the very boundaries of knowledge itself, was at the core of undertakings by the *philosophes*, allowing them to cast themselves as the natural inheritors of reason and logic.¹³ The same task, albeit on a more modest scale, awaited Rameau with each new treatise.

The structure of meaning served as the guarantee against the absence of meaning, and because Rameau aspired to be known as a philosopher as well as a composer of music, his writings necessarily addressed this issue. He noted in

11. D'Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse*, 5. For the original version of this text, see *Encyclopédie* 1:i-li.

12. "Un système n'est autre chose que la disposition des différentes parties d'un art ou d'une science dans un ordre où elles se soutiennent toutes mutuellement, et où les dernières s'expliquent par les premières. Celles qui rendent raison des autres, s'appellent *principes*; et le système est d'autant plus parfait, que les principes sont en plus petit nombre: il est même à souhaiter qu'on les réduise à un seul" (Etienne Bonnot, abbé de Condillac, *Traité des systèmes* [n.p.: Fayard, 1991], 1).

13. *Encyclopédie* 1:li-lii. On Bacon's table, see for example Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. William Aldis Wright, 5th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963); the table is often missing or inconsistently reproduced in modern editions. On the appropriation of Bacon's table by the *philosophes*, see Robert Darnton, "Philosophers Trim the Tree of Knowledge: The Epistemological Strategy of the *Encyclopédie*," in his book *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 191–213, esp. 194–95. On the relationship between language and this kind of eighteenth-century visualization of knowledge, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 83–107.

the *Generation harmonique*: “To find a method for guiding the imagination is already a great deal, but to find one on which imagined things are necessarily established—and by which the source of all these things renders itself point by point in the order they are dictated—I believe this is the great knot.”¹⁴ The challenge posed by nonmeaning and ignorance can be perceived in Rameau’s longstanding and ongoing need to structure music qua meaningful, natural entity. Indeed, part of the difficulty one encounters in comprehending Rameau’s writings lies in his desire for and inability to achieve systematization, to establish clear and orderly relationships between any given theoretical item and the complex of issues within which it is embedded. His system of musical understanding relied both on the soundness of its multiply related, individual parts and on their ability to fit together into a rational whole. Yet this aspect of Rameau’s thought is the most difficult to apprehend and was also the one dismissed by the *philosophes*. Rousseau commented that “these various works [of Rameau’s] contain nothing useful and intelligent except for the principle of the fundamental bass,” and d’Alembert ridiculed Rameau’s philosophical aspirations in his encyclopedia article “Fondamentale”:

We will permit ourselves here only to say this: that the consideration of proportions and progressions is entirely useless to the theory of musical art. I think I’ve sufficiently proven it with my *Elémens de musique*, where I’ve given, it seems to me, a rather well deduced theory of harmony following the principles of M. Rameau, without having made there any use of proportions or progressions.¹⁵

What d’Alembert idealized in the *Discours préliminaire*, Rameau struggled with throughout his career as a theorist. The difficulty in reading Rameau lies not only with his difficult prose, then, but with his task of formulating a consistent and convincing epistemological position, one that would protect him from charges of unreason. Very often the systematic, philosophical thought of which Rameau was so proud devolves into a steady procession of chapters and musical examples, similar to each other in weight and thus difficult to generalize effectively. His theory of music must to a large extent be inferred by the reader, while at the same time being subject to constant revision by its author.

14. “Trouver une Méthode pour guider l’imagination, c’est déjà beaucoup; mais en trouver une sur laquelle les choses imaginées sont nécessairement établies, & par laquelle le fond de toutes ces choses se rend de point en point dans l’ordre où elles ont été dictées, je crois que c’est-là le grand noeud” (Rameau, *Generation harmonique, ou Traité de musique theorique et pratique* [Paris: Prault, 1737], 216; *CTW* 3:122).

15. “Ces différens ouvrages ne renferment rien de neuf ni d’utile que le principe de la Basse fondamentale” ([Jean-Jacques Rousseau], *Lettre a M. Grimm au sujet des remarques ajoutées à sa Lettre sur Omphale* [n.p.: n.p., 1752], 21; facsimile in Denise Launay, ed., *La Querelle des bouffons* [Geneva: Minkoff, 1973], 1:87–117). “Nous nous permettrons seulement de dire ici, que la considération des proportions & des progressions est entierement inutile à la théorie de l’art musical: je pense l’avoir suffisamment prouvé par mes élémens même de Musique, où j’ai donné, ce me semble, une théorie de l’harmonie assez bien déduite, suivant les principes de M. Rameau, sans y avoir fait aucun usage des proportions ni des progressions” (*Encyclopédie* 7:62). See also, more generally, Duchez, “Valeur épistémologique de la théorie,” 114–20.

These problems were set in motion from the opening pages of the *Traité de l'harmonie*. There Rameau offered a Cartesian rejection of experience that cannot be verbalized as the very opposite of philosophical enterprise, effectively warning composers, performers, and audience members that their experiences of music were heretofore lacking in substance:

However much progress music may have made until our time, it appears that the more sensitive the ear has become to the marvelous effects of this art, the less inquisitive the mind has been about its true principles. One might say that reason has lost its rights, while experience has acquired a certain authority. . . .

Even if experience can enlighten us concerning the different properties of music, it alone cannot lead us to discover the principle behind these properties with the precision appropriate to reason. Conclusions drawn from experience are often false, or at least leave us with doubts that only reason can dispel.¹⁶

Reason, and more specifically its embodiment in the fundamental bass, single-handedly provided a purpose and obligation for understanding music that listening alone could not. They served in the *Traité* as what Lacanians call a “unary trait,” a master signifier that holds together a broad collection of related but unstable signifiers; ideas like fundamental bass tied together Rameau's various observations and the empirical details of musical experience, organizing it into a tree or genealogy of what was known about music.¹⁷

Despite Rameau's efforts, however, the pall cast by unreason extended even to his “introduction” to the *Traité*, the *Nouveau système*, which appeared four years later. (Indeed, one might argue that the need to compose an introduction to the earlier treatise, a preliminary discourse after the fact, captures some of the author's struggle at formulating the overarching system within which his ideas could be contained.) In the preface to the later work, Rameau

16. Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Treatise on Harmony*, trans. Philip Gossett (New York: Dover, 1971), xxxiii. The original reads: “Quelque progrès que la Musique ait fait jusques à nous, il semble que l'esprit ait été moins curieux d'en approfondir les véritables principes, à mesure que l'oreille est devenuë sensible aux merveilleux effets de cet Art; de sorte qu'on peut dire, que la raison y a perdu de ses droits, tandis que l'expérience s'y est acquise quelque autorité. . . .

“Si l'expérience peut nous prévenir sur les différentes propriétés de la Musique, elle n'est pas d'ailleurs seule capable de nous faire découvrir le principe de ces propriétés avec toute la précision qui convient à la raison: Les conséquences qu'on en tire sont souvent fausses, ou du moins nous laissent dans un certain doute, qu'il n'appartient qu'à la raison de dissiper” (Rameau, *Traité de l'harmonie réduite à ses principes naturels* [Paris: Ballard, 1722], preface; CTW 1:1).

17. I have derived this semiotic notion of the unary trait from the theories of Jacques Lacan, who also uses the expressions “master signifier” and *point de capiton* to make similar points. Lacan first developed this idea in the mid 1950s (see Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses, 1955–1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg [New York: W. W. Norton, 1993], 258–70). See also Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 306; and idem, “Compte rendu d'enseignements,” *Ornicar?* 29 (1984): 8–25. My discussion here owes much to that of Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (New York: Verso, 1991), 7–61.

emphasized the importance of the fundamental bass as the idea that draws together the loosely connected observations based on experience:

I have made [readers] see that, for want of having known the fundamental bass, reason and the ear have not yet been able to reconcile in music. Not that this observation can diminish the merit of our great musicians; I believe to the contrary that it ought to raise [their merit] higher, since, despite the poor principles they have received from their teachers, they have carried their art to a high degree of perfection.¹⁸

This admission, a response to criticism of the *Traité*, opened a chink in Rameau's project: he had previously argued for the rationalization of an experience considered to be purely sensory. By the 1730s, other unary signifiers—notably the *corps sonore* in the *Generation harmonique* (1737) and later writings—bolstered or displaced the fundamental bass, even as other details of Rameau's theoretical project remained unchanged. As Christensen has shown, in recasting his theories Rameau was sensitive to developing philosophical fashions, especially midcentury empirical thought, and ultimately he became convinced that music provided a “unified field theory” for all the arts. Significant features of Rameau's musical practice, as theorized in subsequent treatises, shifted in response to these developments. The justifications for adding dissonances to harmonies or, as we will see, implementing both chromatic and enharmonic progressions and modulations, often changed with each new treatise. Rameau's theories thus offered the reader a particular kind of experience. They presented neither true introductions to nor overviews of his work—this task was reserved for d'Alembert's *Elemens*, which stripped them of their philosophical trappings—but rather attempts at abstraction, adumbrations of the philosophical tone their author so obviously desired. Each treatise offered a new genealogical ordering of music, which had to be mastered in order for Rameau's system to make sense.

From the late 1720s on, then, Rameau became concerned with reconciling music's rational and empirical features. In typically convoluted fashion, he reminded readers that his theories described an existing musical practice, the very sensory experiences he had questioned at the beginning of the *Traité*, rather than justifying more radical forms of musical expression. For example, in the *Nouveau système* he devoted a chapter to reassuring readers that a com-

18. “Enfin, je fais voir, que, faute d'avoir connu la *Basse-Fondamentale*, la raison & l'oreille n'ont encore pu s'accorder dans la Musique: Non que cette remarque puisse diminuer le merite de nos grands Musiciens; je crois au contraire, qu'elle doit servir à le relever, puisque malgré les mauvais principes qu'ils ont reçus de leurs premiers Maîtres, ils ont porté leur Art à un tres-haut degré de perfection” (Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Nouveau système de musique theorique* [Paris: Jean-Baptiste-Christoph Ballard, 1726], viii; *CTW* 2:10). In the context of the present discussion, Rameau's use of the word *relever*, with its trace implications of restoration, is especially interesting: in effect, the unary power of the fundamental bass “restores” these individuals to their former glory.

poser did not need to know his music theory to compose. Instead, as he reiterated in the *Generation harmonique*, a composer's intuitive practice had its source in nature and could only benefit from greater genealogical familiarity:

By means [of nature], the order, connection, and interdependence of successive tones will be known when nothing is overlooked there; but one has used it in an entirely different manner, and this is like abandoning the roots [*la racine*] and trunk [of a tree] in order to attach oneself to a branch.

A procedure as natural as what I propose would open a composer's eyes, and he would quickly recognize there the source of all his musical perception, the sure guide of his ear, in a word the fundamental bass that provides the necessary and indispensable succession of fundamental tones. Because ultimately, each unique sound, whatever sonorous body it may be [located] in, always carries within it the same octave, the same fifth, and the same third from which harmony is formed.¹⁹

By the appearance of his aptly named *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique* (1754), Rameau was devoting considerable labor to the sensory validation of musical phenomena.²⁰ There was, however, more to this move than meets the reader's eye or ear: when Rameau stepped outside his written theory to justify it through aural experience, he implicitly admitted the necessity, within his system, of a means of comprehension beyond rational order. As we will see, he invoked, as a justification for his system of thought, the very mode of experience for which his system of thought compensated. The rational order for which Rameau strove tipped precariously. The problem was further exacerbated by what audiences heard at performances of his operas. Encountering a more intense, sophisticated music than they were used to hearing, they could only imagine Rameau's theories as a justification for his musically radical voice, not as a description of natural phenomena.

It is here, at the juncture between meaning and certain forms of nonmeaning—at the juncture between the broaching of systematic thought and the moment of its potential failure, when it collapsed into mutually conflicting systems—that monsters lurked in eighteenth-century thought, much as they did on those maps of ages past where sea serpents marked the boundaries of

19. "Par ce moïen, l'ordre, les rapports, & les dépendances de tous les Sons successifs seront pour lors connus, rien n'y échappera: mais on en a usé tout autrement; & c'est ainsi qu'abandonnant la racine & le tronc, on ne s'est attaché qu'à l'une des branches.

"Une conduite aussi naturelle que celle que je propose, auroit fait ouvrir les yeux au Musicien, bien-tôt il y auroit reconnu la source de toutes ses sensations en Musique, le vrai guide de son Oreille, en un mot, cette Basse fondamentale que donne la succession nécessaire & indispensable des Sons fondamentaux: car enfin tout Son que l'on croit unique, dans quelque Corps sonore que ce soit, porte toujours avec lui la même Octave, la même Quinte, & la même Tierce, dont se forme l'Harmonie" (Rameau, *Generation harmonique*, préface; *CTW* 3:11–12).

20. On Rameau's turn toward empiricism and his attempts to reconcile it with his earlier work, see Duchez, "Valeur épistémologique de la théorie," 102–13; and Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, 213–41.

uncharted waters. Hélène Merlin, working with seventeenth-century French literature, has observed that “the figure of the monster . . . constitutes a liminal moment in the theory of representation at which, henceforth, representation is placed in peril and restored; [the monster is] the metaphor for a series of aporias regulated as inclusions and exclusions.”²¹

The monster was the image of something that failed to conform to rational order. As Aristotle had explained in his *Generation of Animals*:

Some [offspring] take after none of their kindred, although they take after some human being at any rate; others do not take after a human being at all in their appearance, but have gone so far that they resemble a monstrosity, and, for the matter of that, anyone who does not take after his parents is really in a way a monstrosity, since in these cases Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type.²²

But precisely because the notion of monstrosity mediated what was acceptable and unacceptable, it could just as easily be applied to metaphysical judgments. Horace had explained it this way:

Suppose a painter wished to couple a horse’s neck with a man’s head, and to lay feathers of every hue on limbs gathered here and there, so that a woman, lovely above, foully ended in an ugly fish below; would you restrain your laughter, my friends, if admitted to a private view? Believe me . . . a book will appear uncommonly like that picture, if impossible figures are wrought into it—like a sick man’s dreams—with the result that neither head nor foot is ascribed to a single shape, and unity is lost.²³

Similarly, in seventeenth-century France, writers like René Rapin, in his *Les reflexions sur la poetique de ce temps* (1675), used the image of the monster to argue for the Aristotelian unity of action:

Diversity has a vast foundation in heroic poetry: the enterprises of war, peace treaties, embassies, negotiations, voyages, embarkations, councils, deliberations, the buildings of palaces and cities, passions, unexpected recognitions, surprising and unlooked-for revolutions, and the different images of all that happens in the lives of the great can be employed, provided that they proceed to the same goal. Without this order, the most beautiful figures become monstrous and similar to the extravagances Horace ridiculed at the beginning of his *Ars poetica*.²⁴

21. Merlin, “Où est le monstre?” 181.

22. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 401. This, along with the following discussion of monsters with respect to opera, is based on Dill, *Monstrous Opera*, especially pp. 12–14, where one will find a fuller discussion.

23. *Horace on the Art of Poetry*, ed. Edward Henry Blakeney (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1928), 41.

24. “Cette diversité a un fonds bien vaste dans la poésie héroïque: les entreprises de guerre, les traitez de paix, les ambassades, les négociations, les voyages, les embarquemens, les conseils, les délibérations, les bâtimens de palais et de villes, les passions, les reconnaissances imprévues, les

Taking Nicolas Boileau as her point of departure, Merlin observes that monsters represented a critical mediator, violating the rules governing art without overturning the pragmatic goal of pleasure that had informed those rules. And for this same reason, pleasure often carried along with it the hint of immorality that comes from foreclosing the rational order imposed by social and cultural practice. (Indeed, as Antoine Furetière noted in his *Dictionnaire universel*, the monster was a “prodigy contrary to the order of nature, which one either admires or fears.”)²⁵ Boileau had opened the third *chant* of his *L'art poétique* (1674) by suggesting, paradoxically, a place for the unusual, but only insofar as it could be brought into line with prevailing taste:

Il n'est point de serpent, ni de monstre odieux,
 Qui, par l'art imité, ne puisse plaire aux yeux:
 D'un pinceau délicat l'artifice agréable
 Du plus affreux objet fait un objet aimable
 Ainsi, pour nous charmer, la Tragédie en pleurs.

(There is neither serpent nor odious monster that, imitated artistically, cannot please the eyes: with a delicate brush, pleasant artifice makes of a frightful object an obliging one. So it is that the sad tragedy charms us.)

Still more to the point was his advice two strophes later:

Jamais au spectateur n'offrez rien d'incroyable:
 Le vrai peut quelquefois n'être pas vraisemblable.
 Une merveille absurde est pour moi sans appas:
 L'esprit n'est point ému de ce qu'il ne croit pas.²⁶

(Never offer a spectator anything unbelievable: the true can sometimes be improbable. An absurd marvel is without attraction for me. The intellect is not moved by what it does not believe.)

In effect, Boileau limits entertainment to what can be expressed rationally, through language; as his famed didactic tone suggests, anything else smacks of the unseemly and immoral. Thus, whether one admired opera or despised it, one could not ignore its untraditional plots, strange characters, and fascinating music. Its discourse and its underlying epistemological assumptions were framed as issues. Outright celebrations of pleasure, to be sure, existed in this

révolutions surprenantes et inopinées, et les différentes images de tout ce qui se passe dans la vie des Grands peuvent y estre employées, pourvu qu'elles aillent au mesme but. Sans cet ordre les figures les plus belles deviennent monstrueuses et semblables à ces extravagances qu'Horace traite de ridicules, au commencement de sa *Poétique*” ([René Rapin], *Les reflexions sur la poetique de ce temps et sur les ouvrages des poètes anciens et modernes*, ed. E. T. Dubois [Paris: F. Muquet, 1675; reprint, Geneva: Droz, 1970], 77).

25. “Prodige qui est contre l'ordre de la nature, qu'on admire, ou qui fait peur” (Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel* [The Hague: Arnout & Reinier Leers, 1690], s.v. “Monstre”).

26. Nicolas Boileau, *Oeuvres classiques*, ed. Charles-Marie Des Granges (Paris: Hatier, 1914), 233, 235.

culture—as they did openly in opera—but often they were relegated to unofficial locations: the fair theaters and the illegal book trade, to name two familiar examples. Pleasure was a constant reminder that reason could not stand alone.²⁷

Simultaneously the source of fascination and revulsion, the monster represented the point at which French culture had failed to symbolize its interests adequately. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century monster thus offers us a version of the Lacanian Thing. Lacan employed this idea to characterize the “beyond of the signified”—an experience located beyond systematic thought as secured by the unary trait. The Thing is the unidentified and unidentifiable experience that begs one’s attention, the tempting, liminal point that marks the boundary for proper behavior; it is unknowable, discomfiting, and irresistible, a specter that haunts the symbolic ordering of language, society, and culture.²⁸ In just this way, debates over whether opera was an acceptable pleasure or a matter for social reform had begun in France in 1673 with the appearance of Lully’s first *tragédie en musique*, *Cadmus et Hermione*, and by Rameau’s time they represented familiar themes in critical writings. As I have argued elsewhere, Rameau’s operas were considered monstrous not least because they overturned the traditional balance between poetry and music, and hence between edification and entertainment.

It was precisely at this same juncture that circumstances worked against Rameau as a theorist, for eighteenth-century French culture was not one that easily sanctioned music as an intellectual field. Rather, it was a culture that privileged literature, and, strange though it may sound to modern observers, it conceived its operatic interests in literary terms.²⁹ To this extent, opera was caught up within the legalistic system of rules and acceptable behaviors repre-

27. Merlin, “Où est le monstre?” 181.

28. Cf. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 43–70.

29. There is an extensive secondary literature on this aspect of French aesthetics. See Paul-Marie Masson, “Musique italienne et musique française: La première querelle,” *Rivista musicale italiana* 19 (1912): 519–45; idem, “La musique italienne en France pendant le premier tiers du XVIII^e siècle,” in *Mélanges de philologie, d’histoire et de littérature offerts à Henri Hauvette* (Paris: Les Presses françaises, 1934; reprint, Geneva: Slatkine, 1972), 353–65; Georges Snyders, *Le goût musical en France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1968); Maria Rika Maniates, “‘Sonate, que me veux tu?’ The Enigma of French Musical Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century,” *Current Musicology* 9 (1969): 117–40; Georgia Cowart, *The Origins of Modern Musical Criticism: French and Italian Music, 1600–1750* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981); John Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986); and Belinda Cannone, *Philosophies de la musique, 1752–1789* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1990). Catherine Kintzler’s *Poétique de l’opéra français de Corneille à Rousseau* (n.p.: Minerve, 1991) is an extended discussion of this issue as it pertains to French opera. See also, more generally, Gloria Flaherty, *Opera in the Development of German Critical Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); and Bellamy Hosler, *Changing Aesthetic Views of Instrumental Music in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981).

sented by figures like Boileau.³⁰ Saint-Evremond, for example, found the music of opera repugnant precisely because it distracted from the poetry: “The intellect, being incapable of conceiving a hero who sings, seizes instead on the one who made the song, and that Lully is a hundred more times likely to be thought of than Thésée or Cadmus would be denied only at the [opera theater of the] Palais royal.”³¹ Later commentators may have argued in favor of opera, but they willingly acknowledged that continuous song was problematic, if not preposterous. Thus Gabriel Bonnot de Mably would argue in 1741 that the mythical nymphs, gods, and creatures populating opera justified music’s presence: “These chimerical beings, of whom the spectator has no precise idea, all allow the composer the liberty of giving them a more musical language.”³² This attribute of opera—its inability to account fully for its musical component—earned it the epithet “monstrous.” The poet Pierre de Villiers referred to opera as “a monstrous jumble” and complained of its “monstrous heroes.”³³ For some audience members, music *was* the monster, and no amount of reasoning could rehabilitate it.

By longstanding tradition, then, the French were not interested in hearing about rules and reason as applied to music, and long before Rameau or his theories became known, they greeted with the epithet *géomètre* those writers and composers who attempted to discuss such matters. For example, a 1713 comparison of French music with Italian, published in the *Mercur de France*, made the case that knowledge of the kind Rameau would later espouse did not solve the problem of music’s relevance. Music could be understood only through its proximity to language:

The rules of harmony do not show how to make a beautiful song, of which it is the soul; how to imagine a form, to render the expression of the words well; to know where to place cadences to complete the sense, as periods and commas do in discourse; to change the mode when the words change in character and sentiment: a good mathematician fully possesses the rules of composition and is a very bad composer.³⁴

30. See Sima Godfrey, preface to *The Anxiety of Anticipation*, ed. Sima Godfrey, Yale French Studies 66 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), iii–ix; and, in the same volume, her essay “The Anxiety of Anticipation: Ulterior Motives in French Poetry,” 1–26.

31. “L’esprit ne pouvant concevoir un Héros qui chante, s’attache à celui qui fait chanter, et on ne sauroit nier qu’aux représentations du Palais Royal, on ne songe cent fois plus à Baptiste, qu’à Thésée ni à Cadmus” (Charles de Saint-Denis, Seigneur de Saint-Evremond, “Sur les opéras,” in *Oeuvres en prose*, ed. René Ternois [Paris: Marcel Didier, 1962–69], 3:152–53).

32. “Ces Etres chimériques dont le Spectateur n’a pas d’idée bien précise, laissent la liberté au Musicien de leur donner un langage plus musical” ([Gabriel Bonnot de Mably], *Lettres à madame la marquise de P. . . sur l’opera* [Paris: Didot, 1741; facsimile ed., New York: AMS Press, 1978], 49).

33. “Les Opera ne sont qu’un fatras monstrueux” ([Pierre de Villiers], “Eptre III. A un Homme qui estimoit de mauvais ouvrages, & sur tout les tragédies de l’opera,” *Poesies de D* V****, rev. ed. [Paris: Jacques Collombat, 1728], 297; see also pp. 305, 308).

34. “Les regles de l’harmonie ne montrent pas à faire un beau chant, qui en est l’ame, à imaginer un dessein, à bien rendre l’expression des paroles, à sçavoir placer les cadences aux sens finis,

And, shortly after the premiere of *Hippolyte et Aricie*, an allegorical piece in the same journal tarred all such composers with the same brush:

Everyone worked with the desire of composing music, each praising his work and the efforts he put into it. Even the geometers joined in. They praised the vast calculations they had made in order to find the means of traversing in violin airs all the different combinations of *re* or *mi* with the other tones. It is true that this was not vocal music, and in this constrained music, so difficult to compose, nothing flowed from the source: no genius animated [the composers]; they avoided nature and sentiment.³⁵

Later, when the abbé Noël-Antoine Pluche advanced a place for rules and reason in the creation and appreciation of music, he did so grudgingly, with little sense of detail and an abiding interest for maintaining the audience's power over judgment:

There is no one who is not permitted to have taste [for music], and just as one can, without being a poet, feel very well the difference between Virgil, who paints nature, and Lucan, who depicts the intellect, one can also feel the true beauties of music and wisely judge the merits of musicians without being a musician. But let us not risk either assigning any scorn to [musicians] or wishing to give preference to one over the other without the aid of an enlightening rule, avowed by musicians themselves, that decides the just value of their method.³⁶

Rameau's ideas—and it is important to recall that when he undertook his first official opera he was known principally through his theoretical writings—steered perilously close to being epistemologically inconsequential. For some

comme les points & les virgules dans le discours; à sçavoir changer de mode quand les paroles changent de caractere & de sentiment. Un bon Matematicien possède à fonds les regles de la composition, & est un fort mauvais compositeur” (“Dissertation sur la musique italienne & française,” *Mercure de France*, November 1713, 3–62; see especially pp. 47–48).

35. “Tous travaillent à l’envi à composer de la Musique, chacun vantoit son travail et la peine qu’il s’étoit donnée, les Geomètres même s’en mêlerent, ils loüoient les calculs immenses qu’ils avoient fait pour trouver moyen de parcourir dans les Airs de violon toutes les différentes combinaisons; d’un *ré* ou d’un *mi*, avec les autres Notes: il est vrai que cet Air n’avoit point de chant, et dans cette Musique contrainte et si pénible à composer, rien ne couloit de source, nul génie ne les animoit, ils fuioient la nature et le sentiment” (“Lettre de M.*** à Mlle. *** sur l’origine de la musique,” *Mercure de France*, May 1734, 867–68). See also Paul-Marie Masson, “Lullistes et Ramistes: 1733–1752,” *L’année musicale* 1 (1911): 187–213, esp. 201–2.

36. “Il n’y a personne à qui il ne soit permis d’y prendre quelque goût: & comme sans être poète on peut très-bien sentir la différence qu’il y a de Virgile qui peint la nature, à Lucain qui fait montre d’esprit; on peut sans être musicien sentir les vraies beautés de la musique, & juger sainement du mérite des musiciens. Mais ne risquons ni de leur attribuer aucune méprise, ni de vouloir donner à l’un aucune préférence sur un autre, qu’à l’aide d’une règle lumineuse qui soit avouée des musiciens mêmes, & qui décide de la juste valeur de leur méthode” ([Noël-Antoine Pluche], *Le spectacle de la nature, ou Entretiens sur les particularités de l’histoire naturelle*, rev. ed. [Paris: Frères Estienne, 1755], 7:97–98).

readers, the musical knowledge he offered was irrelevant, unthinkable, and unchartable with respect to their own musical experiences and to the social order they imagined in relation to opera.

Rameau thus found himself in an awkward position when he began work on his first opera. He was known principally as an intellectual, yet he worked in a field where reason was not generally recognized. Further, he was entering an area of composition where the public placed little value on intellectual knowledge per se, assuming it could discern musical value instead through an inchoate and nonspecific sense of taste. Finally, in *Hippolyte and Aricie's* story he was taking on a plot rife with monsters, both literal and figurative. It was a setting in which no single aspect of his theoretical and compositional craft could remain unquestioned, either by the composer himself or by the public.

The Monsters in *Hippolyte et Aricie*

The collaboration between Rameau and Pellegrin on *Hippolyte et Aricie* was unusual, and it is difficult to know how audiences regarded it. On the one hand, Pellegrin had enjoyed recent success with his livret for *Jephté* (1732), the culmination of an active career writing livrets that extended back twenty years with *Médée et Jason* (1713), *Télémaque* (1714), and *Théonoé* (1715). It was from the vantage point of those long years of experience that the poet could demand of the fledgling opera composer Rameau a promissory note for five hundred livres as indemnity against the failure of *Hippolyte et Aricie*. (He tore up the note, so the story goes, upon hearing the work in rehearsal.)³⁷ On the other hand, Pellegrin was not a poet favored by the Parisian public. As a cleric who had not taken holy orders, the abbé Pellegrin placed himself in the position, awkward for a religious figure even by the standards of the day, of writing for the theater and composing poetry—compliments, birthday odes, epithalamia, and epitaphs—for a living, and as the sometimes controversial theater critic for the *Mercur de France*, he faced ambivalence, not to mention outright scorn. (In Voltaire's correspondence, Pellegrin appeared as the epitome of the poetaster: Voltaire disdained his livelihood as well as his literary skill.)³⁸ Pellegrin's status in 1733 thus embraced the same liminal position, the same aporia of success and failure, reason and nonsense, that would characterize Rameau's operas after the premiere of *Hippolyte*. For the composer, there would have been prestige in working with an established poet, but he also

37. See, for example, the "Essai d'éloge historique de feu M. Rameau . . .," *Mercur de France*, October 1764, 182–99, esp. 187.

38. For a study of Pellegrin's complex relationship with his critics, contemporaries, Voltaire, and Rameau, see Charles Dill, "Pellegrin, Opera, and Tragedy," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10 (1998): 247–57. Little or nothing has been written about him as a reviewer for the *Mercur*, but there is some indication of his controversial status in defensive essays such as that found in the December 1714 issue of *Mercur de France* (pp. 3–15), which he may have written.

thereby opened his music up to criticism. It was a serious commitment for him to make in a society that assumed literary approaches to opera.

We have every reason to believe that Pellegrin took *Hippolyte et Aricie* seriously, despite his initial reservations. He had acquired a measure of respectability with *Jephté* and this at a time when truly successful new lyric tragedies were declining in number; to offer the public a less ambitious livret would have been self-defeating.³⁹ As his *avertissement* to the *Hippolyte* livret indicated, the poet took the formidable task of following in Racine's footsteps as a chance to prove his own literary and dramatic mettle. There, in a tone familiar from his theater criticism, he attempted to prove that his own version of the story was *raisonnable* by offering a critique of Racine's play. Racine's Thésée had been too quick to believe his son's guilt, and so Pellegrin recounted his attempts to remedy this fault. He then anticipated criticisms of his emplotment. Though an audience would not have assumed unity of place in an opera, Pellegrin defended his decision to set the second act in the underworld. Further, he summarized his rationale for violating the protocols due various gods in the story and explained the odd pacing of the fourth and fifth acts. (In the 1733 version, Hippolyte dies in the fourth act while battling a monster, leaving for the fifth only Thésée's remorse, along with Hippolyte's revival and reunion with Aricie.) And finally, Pellegrin justified his use of Diane (who renounced love) to reunite the two lovers, citing Theocritus and recalling at the end of the opera Jupiter's injunction to Diane from the prologue: "En faveur de Hymen, faites grace à l'amour" ("On behalf of marriage, spare love"). The poet's efforts to instill a high literary quality in his work extended even to a subtle appropriation of Racine: the trope of the monster, which he often based on Racine's verses. A brief look at Racine's play is therefore in order.⁴⁰

As Roland Barthes noted some years ago, Racine's *Phèdre* is redolent with monstrous imagery: "At first, the monstrous threatens all the characters; they are all monsters to each other, and all monster-seekers as well. But above all, it

39. On the declining number of successful tragedies in comparison to other, newer genres, see Robert Fajon, *L'Opéra à Paris du Roi soleil à Louis le Bien-aimé* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1984), esp. 70–71.

40. On the relationships between Racine's play and Pellegrin's livret, see Jacques Morel, "Hippolyte et Aricie de Rameau et Pellegrin dans l'histoire du mythe de Phèdre," in Jean-Philippe Rameau: *Colloque international organisé par la Société Rameau, Dijon—21–24 septembre 1983*, ed. Jérôme de La Gorce (Paris: Champion, 1987), 89–99, reprinted in idem, *Agréables men-songes: Essais sur le théâtre français du xvii^e siècle* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1991); Edith Kern, "Tragedy into Opera: *Phèdre* and *Hippolyte et Aricie*," in *Aesthetics and the Literature of Ideas: Essays in Honor of A. Owen Aldridge*, ed. François Jost (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 122–33; Peter Low, "Credulity and Credibility: Pellegrin's Critique of Racine's Thésée," *A.U.M.L.A.: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 80 (1993): 81–92; Downing Thomas, "Racine Redux? The Operatic Afterlife of *Phèdre*," *L'esprit créateur* 38, no. 2 (1998): 82–94; and Buford Norman, "Remaking a Cultural Icon: *Phèdre* and the Operatic Stage," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10 (1998): 225–45. The appendix to Norman's article, a comparison of verses in the play and livret that share at least three important words, indicates those instances where the word *monstre* is similarly used.

is a monster, this time a real one, which intervenes to resolve the tragedy.”⁴¹ The motif takes several forms in the play. Notably, we find it in Hippolyte’s relationship with Thésée. Already in the very first scene, the son recalls his father’s exploits—“Monsters crushed and pirates punished, Procrustes, Cercyon, Scirron, and Sinnis, the bones of the giant of Epidaurus scattered, and Crete reeking with the blood of the minotaur”—and, as a result, he questions his own worth—“Having to this day tamed no monsters, I haven’t acquired the right to fail as he does.”⁴² And this same anxiety returns in act 3, scene 3, when confronting his father. These monsters, like the one that kills Hippolyte in the fifth act, are real within the context of the story, but as Barthes pointed out, there are other monsters as well. In act 2, scene 2, when Aricie assumes that Hippolyte hates her, he in turn suggests that doing so would make him a monster: “I hate you, Madame? Whatever the colors that have painted my arrogance, am I believed to be born of a monster’s womb?”⁴³ Phèdre echoes this theme when, in conversation with Thésée in act 2, scene 5, she calls Hippolyte a monster; then, when her plans have failed in act 4, scene 6, she likewise refers to her confidante Oenone in this manner. As the characters circle about the evil affecting their lives, Phèdre’s largely unspoken desire for Hippolyte, they identify this unnamed—and in this sense, empty—space with monstrosity.

Similarly, Pellegrin’s livret contains a number of monstrous figures. Crucial scenes in the prologue and act 5 refer to the authority of *Le Destin*, who, absent from the stage, serves as a legalistic figure, demanding that characters live out the lives predestined to them. In his preface, Pellegrin explains that this allows Hippolyte to be brought back to life for a happy ending; without this intervention, the plot would have let a subaltern god, Diane, overrule a superior one, Neptune. The second act takes place in the underworld, the first entire act in a tragedy to do so. Here, too, Pellegrin felt compelled to defend his intervention: “I realize that unity of place has not been scrupulously observed in this tragédie, but my subject was of such a nature that one could not dispense with a privilege that ought to be undisputed in the lyric genre and for which the creator of this genre in France [Lully] has given me more than one example.”⁴⁴ This setting necessitated a number of strange creatures, the best

41. Roland Barthes, *On Racine*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 122–23. Barthes’s note 26 lists only five of the sixteen references to monsters occurring in the play.

42. “Les monstres étouffés et les brigands punis, / Procruste, Cercyon, et Scirron, et Sinnis, / Et les os dispersés du géant d’Epidaure, / Et la Crète fumant du sang du Minotaure. / . . . / Qu’aucuns monstres par moi domptés jusqu’aujourd’hui / Ne m’ont acquis le droit de faillir comme lui” (Jean Racine, *Oeuvres de Racine*, ed. Paul Mesnard [Paris: L. Hachette, 1865–73], 3:309–10).

43. “Moi, vous haïr, Madame? / Avec quelques couleurs qu’on ait peint ma fierté, / Croit-on que dans ses flancs un monstre m’ait porté?” (ibid., 3:335).

44. “Je sçais que l’Unité de lieu n’est pas scrupuleusement observée dans cette Tragedie, mais mon sujet étoit d’une nature à ne pouvoir se passer d’un privilege dont on ne doit pas contester la

known of which is the *trio des parques*, three female Fates whose prophecy Rameau famously set for tenor voices as a chain of enharmonic modulations. (As we will see, the setting involving the modulations was never performed publicly.) And, finally, there is the creature Hippolyte must battle, to which we will return shortly.

Textual references to monsters in the opera are more easily overlooked, for only eight are explicit. Nevertheless, this has more to do with the necessary compression of text and plot in livrets than with Pellegrin's indifference to Racine's motif; as sources from the period frequently pointed out, when it was a question of musical performance one simply could not use a text as long or complex as that of spoken tragedy.⁴⁵ Despite their relative scarcity, Pellegrin's references to monstrosity articulate dramatically the concerns of the four principal characters in the manner described by Barthes: Aricie must choose between Hippolyte and religious service, Thésée must demonstrate his leadership by choosing whom to believe, Phèdre must confront incestuous desire, and Hippolyte must emulate his father's bravery without adopting his flawed character. We may therefore separate out appearances of the trope in Pellegrin's text by character.

Its first appearance belongs to Aricie, though she herself does not utter it. During the first act of Pellegrin's livret, she has confronted her commitment to become a priestess of Diane and revealed her love to Hippolyte. When the moment comes for her to pledge herself to the goddess, requiring her to renounce love, she balks. (Diane's priestesses offer little aid, arguing first that one shouldn't be forced to serve the goddess, but that neither should one challenge her.) When Phèdre expresses outrage at Aricie's hesitation, threatening to destroy Diane's altar and temple, the goddess herself appears and remonstrates the queen. At this point, in scene 6, Diane then turns to Aricie:

Et toy, triste Victime, à me suivre fidelle,
Fais toûjours expirer les Monstres sous tes traits;
On peut servir Diane avec le même zele,
Dans son Temple & dans les Forests.⁴⁶

(And you, sad victim, in following me faithfully, may monsters ever fall beneath your arrows. Diane can be served with the same zeal in the forest as in her temple.)

possession au genre Lyrique; & le Créateur de ce genre en France, m'en a donné plus d'un exemple" ([Simon-Joseph Pellegrin], *Hippolyte et Aricie; tragedie, représentée pour la premiere fois par l'Academie royale de musique le jeudy premier octobre 1733* [n.p.: J. B. C. Ballard, 1733], v [hereafter abbreviated *H livret 1733*]).

45. See, for example, Mably, *Lettres sur l'opera*, 44–49; and [Toussaint Rémond de Saint-Mard], *Reflexions sur l'opera* (The Hague: Jean Neaulme, 1741; facsimile ed., Geneva: Minkoff, 1972), 25.

46. *H livret 1733*, 10.

This monster may well carry a pointed reference to Phèdre, a momentary ventriloquism in which Diane again warns Phèdre through Aricie, but it also demonstrates the goddess's benevolence. Given the importance of the scene within the story as a whole, one might expect Rameau, who was so firmly convinced of music's expressive power, to highlight the text in some manner, but instead he italicizes the word *monstres* with a simple cadential suspension, the conventional dissonance (in an accompanimental inner voice) highlighting the word in a one-to-one correlation that suggests *galanterie* rather than danger (see Ex. 1).⁴⁷

This interpretation makes Diane's blending of strength, wisdom, and kindness a foil for Thésée's violent temper. The majority of references to monsters, a total of four, belong to the king, no surprise given that the second act revolves around his sojourn in the underworld:

Dieux! n'est-ce pas assez des maux que j'ay soufferts?
 J'ay vû Pyrithous dechiré par Cerbere;
 J'ay vû ce monstre affreux trancher des jours si chers,
 Sans daigner dans mon sang assouvir sa colere.

(Gods! Have I not suffered enough evil? I have seen Pirithoüs torn to pieces by Cerbère; I have seen this frightful monster cut short [Pirithoüs's] precious days without deigning to satisfy his rage with my blood.)⁴⁸

Thésée's speeches allude to several Racinian themes. In his dialogue with Pluton in act 2, scene 2, he mentions the monsters he has slain in his adventures, and in act 3, scene 8, he states that "dans un Fils si coupable, Je ne vois qu'un Monstre effroyable" ("in so guilty a son, I see only a frightful monster").⁴⁹ Pellegrin takes texts from Racine's *Hippolyte* and then his *Phèdre*, giving them both to Thésée, so that Thésée now dwells on monstrosity more than the other characters. In this way Pellegrin separates the king from the others, perhaps in preparation for his reversal in act 5, scene 1 of the opera, when he offers to return to the underworld: "D'un Monstre tel que moi delivrons la nature" ("Let us deliver the world from a monster such as I").⁵⁰ Rameau's setting indicates that he had turned his attention to the monster trope; Thésée's statements referring to it employ expansive, plunging melodic contours of the kind shown in Example 2.

47. All musical examples are drawn from Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Hippolite et Aricie; tragédie mise en musique par Mr. Rameau, représentée par l'Académie royale de musique le jeudi premier octobre 1733, partition in folio gravé par De Gland* (Paris: L'Hauteur, [1733]).

48. *H livret 1733*, 15. Cf. entry 24 in Norman's appendix ("Remaking a Cultural Icon," 240).

49. *H livret 1733*, 35. See also entries 25, 26, 43, and 51 in Norman's appendix ("Remaking a Cultural Icon," 241–42).

50. *H livret 1733*, 47. Cf. entry 75 in Norman's appendix ("Remaking a Cultural Icon," 244).

Example 1 Rameau, *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733), act 1, scene 6

Fais tou-jours ex - pi - rer les Mons - tres sous tes traits;

Since Hippolyte does not utter the word *monstre* in Pellegrin's livret, we may leave him aside momentarily to consider Phèdre. Here again we find evidence of the compressed imagery of livret poetry. Where Racine's character can scarcely let go of the word *monstre*, Pellegrin's saves it for a single important speech, her confrontation with Hippolyte in act 3, scene 3:

Eclatte; éveille-toy; sors d'un honteux repos;
 Rends-toy digne-Fils d'un Heros,
 Qui des monstres sans nombre a délivré la terre;
 Il n'en est échappé qu'un seul à sa fureur;
 Frappe; ce Monstre est dans mon coeur.

(Act! Wake up! Leave this shameful stupor. Render yourself the worthy son of a hero who has delivered the earth from monsters without number. Only a single one has escaped his fury. Strike! This monster is in my heart.)⁵¹

Once again the rebuke is taken from Racine's Hippolyte and now delivered to him by another character. When next Phèdre hears of Hippolyte, he will have been slain while defeating a monster. And once again Rameau's music suggests the emotional content of the scene, here setting the entire speech to an overdotted accompaniment, without calling attention to the particular trope of monstrosity in some more self-consciously denotative way. Monstrosity thus carries in Pellegrin the echo of Racine's theme, but what is most striking thus far is that Rameau, a composer known for overplaying his musical hand, seems oblivious to its potential as an overarching musical motif.

Indeed, Rameau would seem unaware of the monster trope and its role as master signifier in both Racine's and Pellegrin's texts were it not for the creature appearing at the end of act 4 in Pellegrin's story. If Hippolyte himself no longer contemplates monsters in this version, Thésée and Phèdre have both questioned whether he is a worthy successor to his father in precisely these

51. *H livret* 1733, 29. Cf. entry 44 in Norman's appendix ("Remaking a Cultural Icon," 242).

Example 2 *Hippolyte et Aricie*, act 2, scene 1

J'ay vû ce monstre af - freux tran - cher des jours si chers,

6 4

terms, and now he must confront a monster that is dramatically and musically tangible. In Racine's story, Thérémène, Hippolyte's tutor, famously reports the monster to Thésée in the conventional manner of the seventeenth-century tragedy:

Cependant sur le dos de la plaine liquide
 S'élève à gros bouillons une montagne humide;
 L'onde approche, se brise, et vomit à nos yeux,
 Parmi des flots d'écume, un monstre furieux.
 Son front large est armé de cornes menaçantes;
 Tout son corps est couvert d'écailles jaunissantes;
 Indomptable taureau, dragon impétueux,
 Sa croupe se recourbe en replis tortueux.
 Ses longs mugissements font trembler le rivage.
 Le ciel avec horreur voit ce monstre sauvage;
 La terre s'en émeut, l'air en est infecté;
 Le flot, qui l'apporta, recule épouvante.⁵²

(Meanwhile, an enormous wave mounts and disturbs the surface of the liquid plain. The wave approaches, breaks, and vomits before our eyes a furious monster. His large brow is armed with menacing horns, his entire body covered with jaundiced scales. Untameable bull, violent dragon, his croup twists into tortuous coils. His long roars make the shoreline tremble. Heaven sees this savage monster with horror. The earth stirs; the air is infected by it. The flood it brings with it recoils frightfully.)

In Pellegrin's livret, the monster is no longer merely described, but physically present and visible to the audience. The gist of Thérémène's speech is transposed to a chorus, where it loses its literary moorings, becoming instead a brief series of terrified ejaculations:

Quel bruit! quels vents! quelle Montagne humide!
 Quel Monstre elle enfante à nos yeux!
 O Diane, accourez; volez du haut des Cieux.

52. Racine, *Oeuvres de Racine* 3:389–90.

(What noise! What winds! What a mountainous wave! What a monster [this wave] bears before us! Diane, hurry! Fly [to us] from the height of heaven.)⁵³

We could find no example that more aptly illustrates how poets worked to streamline their livrets for the sake of operatic convention. Thérèse's terrified speech is stripped of rhetorical artifice and reduced to a combination of action, emotion, and visual shock. But by shifting the center of gravity away from the rational world of language and toward the *merveilleux*, Pellegrin also underscores the irrational nature of monstrosity. Unlike spoken tragedy, where shocking events were narrated from a safe distance, in opera they provided a pretext for much-anticipated special effects, both musical and mechanical. Indeed, as Mably noted in the passage cited earlier, the incredible events depicted in opera justified music's irrational presence.

The nature of the dramatic moment led Rameau—this time—to a striking musical effect. As we see in Example 3, he sets the chorus's exclamations against a flurry of orchestral activity, suggesting the noise, wind, and mountainous wave mentioned in the text, though in this respect the musical setting is a conventional operatic depiction of a *tempête*. The extraordinary event occurs when the waves vomit forth their contents, a stage monster accompanied by an equally monstrous musical progression modulating from the tonal region of E \flat major to A \flat major. As we see in measure 4, at the words "Quel Monstre elle enfante à nos yeux" ("What monster does [this mountainous wave] give birth to before our eyes?"), both chorus and orchestra lurch in fear, yanking the music chromatically from its B \flat -major harmony (serving as the dominant of E \flat major) up to a harmony on D \flat major, a wholly audible gesture that would still surprise audiences when Beethoven used it at the beginning of the next century. This music is disruptive in a way the previously cited examples are not, and the composer employs it to signify the unnatural force that brings about the story's calamity. Through this musical effect, Rameau's monster becomes a unary figure in a way it never could have been for Racine. Music per se, through the same irrational intrusiveness audiences found disquieting, sutures together text, action, and visual impact to create the defining moment in the story, an act of overdetermination that necessarily refines the shifting meanings accrued in the course of the opera. As Phèdre and Thésée have, in Pellegrin's telling, projected their guilts and anxieties onto Hippolyte, leaving him no room to speak or explain, so too they have left to him this single, suicidal act of battling a monster, which wins him the qualities denied.

Yet even with this assertion of music's power to convey information, an assertion of musical authority that was new and potentially threatening to its audiences, Rameau had not completed his symbolic task. In the very next

53. *H livret 1733*, 43. Cf. entries 64 and 65 in Norman's appendix ("Remaking a Cultural Icon," 243).

Example 3 *Hippolyte et Aricie*, act 4, scene 3

Ciel!

Ciel!

quel - le mon - ta - gne hu -

quel - le mon - ta - gne hu -

-mi - de! Quel

-mi - de! Quel

Example 3 continued

The image displays a musical score for a vocal piece, continuing from Example 3. It consists of two systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a basso continuo line (bass clef). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The lyrics are: "Mons - tre elle en - -fan - te à nos yeux!". The vocal line features a chromatic progression in the upper voice, moving from F to F# in the second system. The basso continuo line provides a steady accompaniment with a similar chromatic texture.

scene, Phèdre approaches the chorus, now mourning Hippolyte's demise, and inquires what has happened. "Un Monstre furieux sorti du sein des flots," they reply, "Vient de nous ravir ce Heros" ("A furious monster, from out of the flood, has just torn this hero from us") (see Ex. 4).⁵⁴ The mood is quieter here, devoid of the orchestra's noisy *tempête*, but even so a similar chromatic shudder ripples through the chorus on the word *monstre*. Moreover, this version of the chromatic progression recalls similar progressions in earlier tragic laments, notably the final scenes of Lully's *Atys* (1675) and Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Actéon* (1683–85), suggesting a topical link as well. The music, at this point, is in B \flat major, but the move from F to F \sharp in the upper voices nudges it toward the G minor of the preceding number by suggesting a

54. *H livret* 1733, 45. Cf. entries 64 and 65 in Norman's appendix ("Remaking a Cultural Icon," 243).

Example 4 *Hippolyte et Aricie*, act 4, scene 4

Un mon - stre fu - ri - eux sor - ti du sein des flots

Un mon - stre fu - ri - eux sor - ti du sein des flots

[V₂⁴]

dominant harmony on D.⁵⁵ The *tempête* has disappeared. The memory of the beast lingers, but Hippolyte has vanquished it as a physical presence on stage.

Rameau's Chromaticism in Practice

My initial point—that Rameau produced and practiced forms of musical knowledge—appears a small one. But Rameau's publications, correspondence, and polemics, notably with the Encyclopedists, point to an almost painful concern that his music-theoretical efforts went unappreciated, along with a commensurate desire for acknowledgment. However successful his operas were with respect to numbers of performances—and they were successful by this measure, despite or because of controversy—he regarded himself foremost as a thinker. It stands to reason that such an individual would experience the familiar drive to put theory into practice, and in a field like music he possessed a laboratory unavailable to those plotting the course of human, social, and cultural interactions. He could inscribe his ideas in musical notes, have

55. The passage is unfigured in early sources, and, by the 1742 revival, the scene itself may have been removed. The harmony in question was interpreted in Vincent d'Indy's edition for the *Oeuvres complètes* as a fully diminished seventh harmony on F#, but this seems unlikely given Rameau's theories during the 1730s, as discussed below (see Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Hippolyte et Aricie*, vol. 6 of *Oeuvres complètes* [Paris: A. Durand et fils, 1900; reprint, New York: Broude Brothers, 1968], 321). On the importance of and problems in the early sources, see Graham Sadler, "Rameau, Pellegrin and the Opéra: The Revisions of 'Hippolyte et Aricie' During Its First Season," *The Musical Times* 124 (1983): 533–37; and on d'Indy's problematic status as editor of Rameau, see idem, "Vincent d'Indy and the Rameau *Oeuvres complètes*: A Case of Forgery?" *Early Music* 21 (1993): 415–21.

them performed, and observe the results. At the same time, however, this narrative by itself fails to account for Rameau's precarious position within the business of Enlightenment, his uncomfortable proximity within that discourse to the irrational and unsound by virtue of working with music. In his attempt to territorialize this space, to reveal music as possessing system and logic, the composer teetered at the very edge of reason as his audiences understood it. The results were not and never could have been what he hoped. As we have seen, this meant that while the individual portions of his theory made sense, he nevertheless moved restlessly through fashionable epistemologies, searching for something that would ultimately unite his observations into a coherent whole. It also meant that, even though his operas were profitable, audiences still did not necessarily respond to them in the ways he intended. The trope of the monster, especially as it played out in act 4 of *Hippolyte*, allows us to apprehend Rameau's thought, his music, and his relationship with audiences at the precise points where each is most permeable, succumbing to the inevitable intrusion of the other two.

In one respect, at least, Rameau realized what was necessary for his theories to succeed: they would be most effective when translated into language. This required more than jotting down his ideas into texts. Rather, it involved showing that music operated on the listener in a manner analogous to language. Already in the *Nouveau système de musique theorique* (1726) he had asserted for music a grammar and syntax: "Just as a discourse is ordinarily composed of several phrases, so too a piece of music is ordinarily composed of several *modulations*, which can be regarded as so many *phrases harmoniques*" (emphasis in original).⁵⁶ Later, in his *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique* (1754), he made this analogy with language an explicit feature of his thought: "Harmony is sounded . . . before melody, which is the product of [harmony], in order that it inspires in the singer the sentiment with which he ought to be affected *independently of the words*, a sentiment that will strike all unbiased [listeners] who willingly entrust themselves to the pure effects of nature" (emphasis added).⁵⁷ In remarks such as these, Rameau revealed his confidence in the Enlightenment task of bringing obscure matters to light through knowledge. He was at one with a project of not simply observing the irrational, but

56. "De même qu'un discours est ordinairement composé de plusieurs Phrases; de même aussi une Piece de Musique est ordinairement composée de plusieurs *Modulations*, qu'on peut regarder comme autant de *Phrases Harmoniques*" (Rameau, *Nouveau Système*, 40–41; *CTW* 2:50–51).

57. "On fait sonner ici l'Harmonie avant la Mélodie qui en est produite, pour qu'elle inspire au Chanteur le sentiment dont il doit être affecté indépendamment des paroles: sentiment qui frappera tout homme sans prévention, qui voudra bien se livrer aux purs effets de la Nature" (Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique, et sur son principe* [Paris: Prault, Lambert, Duchesne, 1754], 99; *CTW* 3:316). On this development in Rameau's thought, see Dill, "Rameau Reading Lully: Meaning and System in Rameau's Recitative Tradition," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 6 (1994): 1–17; and idem, *Monstrous Opera*, 57–105.

describing it—divesting it of its strangeness—that extended from Bacon through the *Discours préliminaire*.⁵⁸ Music, he argued, resembled language in its ability to signify or at least convey some form of meaning. For this same reason, he could describe in prosaic terms how chromatic progressions, such as those shown in Examples 3 and 4, operated as signifiers:

Perhaps one hasn't yet thought much about [chromatic progressions], and yet one recognizes them every day in this sense: when the sharp or natural is cited as a sign of force or joy, it is similar to the voice elevated in anger, etc.; and when the flat is cited as a sign of softness, feebleness, etc., the voice is lowered in the same way. Everyone already notices something of these differences, however little experience they have with music, when the major mode and minor mode succeed one another on a single tonic.⁵⁹

Elucidating music required not only explaining it in language, but indicating how it resembled language. The musical monster that Hippolyte battled in act 4 might not have been the equivalent of Pellegrin's poetry, but it did supplement Pellegrin's text. It added something lacking there, and what was

58. Indeed, Bacon had taken up the notion of the monster in his *Novum organum* with just this context in mind: "For if nature be once detected in her deviation, and the reason thereof made evident, there will be little difficulty in leading her back by art to the point whither she strayed by accident. . . . For we have to make a collection or particular natural history of all prodigies and monstrous births of nature; of everything in short that is in nature new, rare, and unusual. This must be done however with the strictest scrutiny, that fidelity may be ensured" (Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath [London: Longmans, 1857–74; reprint, New York: Garrett, 1968], 4:169). Similarly, at the end of his *Discours préliminaire*, d'Alembert called for a rational ordering of the monstrosity: "It is useless to expand on the advantages of the *history of uniform nature*. But if we are asked what purpose the *history of a monstrous nature* can serve, we will answer: to pass from the prodigies of nature's *deviations* to the marvels of *art*; to lead nature further astray or to put it back on the right road; and above all to temper the boldness of general propositions, *ut axiomatum corrigatur iniquitas*" (*Preliminary Discourse*, 146). (The original French reads: "Il est inutile de s'étendre sur les avantages de l'*Histoire de la Nature uniforme*. Mais si l'on nous demande à quoi peut servir l'*Histoire de la Nature monstrueuse*, nous répondrons, à passer des prodiges de ses écarts aux merveilles de l'*Art*; à l'égarer encore ou à la remettre dans son chemin; & sur-tout à corriger la témérité des Propositions générales, *ut axiomatum corrigatur iniquitas*" [*Encyclopédie* 1:20].) These observations are based on Curran and Graille, "The Faces of Eighteenth-Century Monstrosity," 1. For a discussion of the role of the monster in natural history as mediating figure in the creation of rational systems of classification, see Michel Foucault's discussion of natural history in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 125–65, esp. 150–57. See also Tort, "La logique du déviant"; and Canguihelm, "La monstruosité et le monstrueux," in *La connaissance de la vie*, 171–84.

59. "On n'y a peut-être pas encore bien pensé, & cependant on donne tous les jours dans ces sens, lorsqu'on cite le *Diéze*, ou le *Béquare* en signe de force, de joye, lorsqu'on éleve la voix dans les mêmes cas, dans la colere, &c. & lorsqu'on cite le *Bémol* en signe de mollesse, de foiblesse, &c. lors enfin qu'on rabaisse la voix dans les mêmes cas. Chacun s'apperçoit encore à peu-près de ces différences, pour peu d'expérience qu'on ait en Musique, lorsque le *Mode majeur*, & le *Mode mineur* se succèdent sur une même *Tonique*" (Rameau, *Observations sur notre instinct*, 54, emphasis in original; *CTW* 3:293).

missing was not emotion, but more text: Rameau's music effectively replaced the lengthy, hyperbolic speech uttered by Thérémène in Racine's *Phèdre* with *music*.

From a practical point of view, the position that music could engage as a semiotic relay with language was difficult for the composer to maintain, not least because the public claimed otherwise. Audiences were more than willing to agree that music dominated text in Rameau's operas, but this was not the same as receiving his message that music was rationally grounded or naturally expressive. (It is telling, in this context, that the abbé Pluche's above-cited remarks on critical judgment asserted autonomy for neither music nor composer, but for the audience member.) More to the point were the remarks of Jean-Baptiste Dubos, who reflected a common assumption when he claimed that music divested of words, drama, and situation meant nothing:

These symphonies [i.e., large-scale works of purely instrumental music] that seem to us so beautiful when they are employed to imitate certain sounds would appear insipid to us—they would appear downright bad to us—if employed to imitate other sounds. The symphony from the opera *Issé* . . . would seem ridiculous if it were placed in the tomb scene of *Amadis*. These pieces of music, which move us so sensibly when they form part of a dramatic action, give rather mediocre pleasure when heard as sonatas or detached symphonies by someone who has never heard them at the Opéra and consequently cannot judge them without knowing their greatest merit, that is, the connection they have with the action, where they play a role, so to speak.⁶⁰

Poetry and plot, in the public mind, determined musical meaning. And even Rameau had acknowledged that the rapport between music and words was not easily obtained: “If it is not absolutely impossible to determine the melodies, and consequently the harmonic progressions, that best agree with the most marked expressions [of poetry, then] it is, in other respects, an enterprise that demands more than the lifetime of a single individual.”⁶¹ His posi-

60. “Enfin ces symphonies qui nous semblent si belles, quand elles sont employées comme l'imitation d'un certain bruit, nous paroïtroient insipides, elles nous paroïtroient mauvaises, si l'on les employoit comme l'imitation d'un autre bruit. La symphonie de l'Opera d'Issé dont je viens de parler, sembleroit ridicule, si l'on la mettoit à la place de celle du tombeau d'Amadis. Ces morceaux de musique qui nous émeuvent si sensiblement, quand ils font une partie de l'action théâtrale, plairoient même médiocrement, si l'on les faisoit entendre comme des *Sonates*, ou des morceaux de symphonies détachés, à une personne qui ne les auroit jamais entendues à l'Opera, & qui en jugeroit par conséquent sans connoître leur plus grand mérite; c'est-à-dire, le rapport qu'elles ont avec l'action, ou, pour parler ainsi, elles jouent un rôle” (Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 7th ed. [Paris: Pissot, 1770; facsimile ed., Geneva: Slatkine, 1967], 1:483–84). See also the passage in Mably, *Lettres sur l'opéra*, cited in n. 32 above.

61. “S'il n'est pas absolument impossible de déterminer les Chants, & les *Modulations* en consequence, qui conviendroient le mieux aux expressions les plus marquées, c'est d'ailleurs une entreprise qui demanderoit peut-être plus que la vie d'un seul homme” (Rameau, *Nouveau système*, 43; *CTW* 2:53). Like Descartes, Rameau was unwilling to formulate a theory of musical

tion within contemporary discourse on occasion lent itself more openly to negotiation and equivocation than we are used to seeing in eighteenth-century thinkers.

For these reasons, Rameau's monstrous chromatic progression sent shudders through his theoretical system, just as Pellegrin's stage monster terrified and delighted audiences. On the one hand, the progression's musical and dramatic effect derived from its strangeness and unfamiliarity as a harmonic and tonal progression; on the other, a theoretical system would need to account fully for such progressions. How was the composer-theorist to argue that such a progression was sensible as music, that it possessed significance because of its place within a larger theoretical system? The disjuncture between Rameau and his audiences turned on music's ability to signify, and the monstrous chromatic progression of act 4 may be, and undoubtedly was, read in different ways. We could easily take it as a simple denotative gesture, painting the word *monstre* the same way this repertory painted flowing tears or a bird's flight with melismatic runs. As we can see from Dubos's comments, audiences regarded music per se as acceptable only when it labeled something that was first apprehensible in visual or linguistic terms. For this reason alone, the use of a chromatic modulation to designate a monster would have been uncontroversial, except as a surprise or perhaps for the violence of its utterance. Rameau, however, posed a more radical possibility. By asserting for music systematic properties locatable *in* nature, he argued as well that music itself bore some form of discursive meaning. This implied that music's signified was located as text or plot not only over and against the musical signifier—on the other side of Saussure's famed piece of paper—but also as a signifier relating to other musical signifiers—on the *same* side of the paper. It is thus difficult to delimit Hippolyte's musical monster as a denotative gesture, because the music participates in the dramatic moment as an independent text. If we were to maintain for music the metaphor of painting, we would have to do so in the rather different sense employed by Rameau's pupil, Michel-Paul-Guy de Chabanon. Commenting on the chorus "Brillant Soleil" from Rameau's opéra-ballet *Les Indes galantes* (1735), Chabanon recognized the denotative tradition, but regarded it as trivial with respect to his teacher's operas:

A descending diatonic series of notes no more paints the fall of winter than the fall of anything else. But a noble and simple melody, without difficulty traversing modulations dependent upon the key, like so many branches shooting out from the same trunk, opening up around it and crowning it—this is what speaks to the senses and the soul in the chorus *Brillant Soleil*, and this above all

expression not because he denied its existence, but because the sheer range of possibilities lay beyond rational comprehension. Cf. Charles Dill, "Music, Beauty, and the Paradox of Rationalism," in *French Musical Thought, 1600–1800*, ed. Georgia Cowart (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1989), 197–210.

is what must be felt. If one of these analogies called *peintures* must be found in it, the following will suffice: this chorus inspires a feeling of exaltation, a kind of ecstasy which accords with those who worship the sun. The music needed to paint nothing more.⁶²

Presumably, one aspect of Rameau's instruction emphasized the discursive situations motivating scenes rather than the representation of isolated words and phrases, and this, surely, is what Rameau had in mind in act 4 of *Hippolyte*. Nevertheless, this was a loud and striking musical event, one sure to attract an audience's attention, and here Rameau ran a risk. Moving music from its accepted role as ground to that of rhetorical figure called attention not to poetry or drama, but to music. Audiences were not capable of engaging the semiotic relay on which Rameau's musical effect depended, or, if they were, they were not necessarily prepared to accept it as a viable means of listening. To borrow again from Lacanian terminology, Rameau's opera addressed audiences not only through the Symbolic order (the region of codified knowledge and cultural practices) and the Real (the region of the unnamed and unsymbolized), but also through the Imaginary (that point at which the subject makes sense of the world). It asked audiences to reinvent their methods of listening and thus, in the process, themselves as audience members. As we will see, Rameau was uncomfortable with his ordering of the chromatic progression—his own Imaginary—and remained unable to determine whether it inhabited the Symbolic order or the Real.

Rameau's Chromaticism in Theory

To understand how Rameau's chromatic progressions operated and how they fit into his larger intellectual schemes, we must review his theoretical writings. In present-day music theory, a chromatic progression is often conceived unproblematically as a melodic inflection, one raising or lowering by half step an existing note within a melodic line. In the years following *Hippolyte et Aricie*, however, Rameau required a more subtle explanation.⁶³ Because his principal ideas comprehended music through an abstract succession of so-called root-position harmonies—its fundamental bass—even a chromatically inflected melodic line required consideration of the fundamental bass within a given harmonic progression. In the *Generation harmonique* (1737), he

62. Edward R. Reilly, "Chabanon's Éloge de M. Rameau," *Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario* 8 (1983): 1–24; see especially pp. 6–7.

63. For important discussions of Rameau's theorization of the chromatic and enharmonic genera, see E. Cynthia Verba, "The Development of Rameau's Thoughts on Modulation and Chromatics," this *Journal* 26 (1973): 69–91; idem, *Music and the French Enlightenment: Reconstruction of a Dialogue, 1750–1764* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 8–30; and Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, 199–208.

theorized that while ordinary diatonic progressions followed a geometrically derived progression of perfect fifths, in the chromatic “genus” (*genre*) the fundamental bass proceeded by a geometric progression in thirds:

Take a pitch fundamental to the third of another [pitch], either major or minor, above or below, and suppose there always the acute harmony drawn from the harmonic proportion, where the major third alone is direct, as ought naturally to be (since to have a direct minor third it would be necessary to add art to nature). You will always find between their harmonic sounds a new semitone unknown up to this point.⁶⁴

Leaving aside Rameau's elaborate and largely circumstantial justification for this procedure—the kind of justification d'Alembert rejected—his point was simple, and he had already put it into practice. To return to Example 3, the B \flat -major harmony on the final two syllables of “humide” gives way to the D \flat -major harmony on “quel monstre”; the distance between the two roots is a minor third, allowing for the rapid melodic shift from D \sharp to D \flat in the choral parts (although the succession of D \sharp and D \flat in two different choral parts constitutes a form of the “cross relation” ordinarily prohibited in eighteenth-century practice). Similarly, if my reading of Example 4 is correct (see n. 55), the B \flat -major harmony on “un” presumably passes to a second-inversion D-major harmony on “monstre.” Although the fundamental bass has changed, the principle remains the same; the root progression by major third creates the melodic progression from F \sharp to F \sharp , a “new semitone unknown up to this point.” In its musical effect, then, the chromatic progression was never simply a melodic inflection, but also a harmonically and tonally disruptive one well suited for depicting a monstrous presence.

At the same time, however, we find evidence among Rameau's ideas of complications attending this musical practice. He observed in his *Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie* (1750) that “the [chromatic semitone] never occurs without changing the mode [of the music], and this is precisely what prevents inexperienced persons from apprehending its sentiment.”⁶⁵ In hearing Examples 3 and 4, the listener does not and cannot immediately comprehend what has happened tonally. The chromatic semitone articulates a musical space that is extramodal, a place from which nonmusical expression emanates, and only in retrospect does one locate it with respect to a key. Thus,

64. “Prenez un Son fondamental à la Tierce d'un autre, soit majeure, soit mineure, soit au-dessus, soit au-dessous, & supposez-y toujours l'Harmonie sensible tirée de la proportion Harmonique, où la seule Tierce majeure est directe, comme cela se doit naturellement, puisque pour avoir la mineure directe, il nous a fallu joindre l'Art à la Nature; vous trouverez toujours entre quelques-uns de leurs Sons Harmoniques un nouveau Demi-ton inconnu jusqu'ici. Voïez l'Exemple XIX” (Rameau, *Generation harmonique*, 146; CTW 3:87).

65. “Il n'arrive jamais que pour changer de *Mode*; & c'est justement ce qui empêche les personnes peu expérimentées, d'en avoir le sentiment présent à l'oreille” (Rameau, *Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie* [Paris: Durand, Pissot, 1750], 91; CTW 3:212).

Rameau appears to be arguing that chromatic progressions can be obtrusive under certain circumstances, distracting the listener from the situations they are meant to project; the chromatic progressions in act 4 of *Hippolyte* might have raised just this kind of issue for some listeners. Nevertheless, it is an odd argument, because it contradicts his case for the simplicity and naturalness of his theoretical system: he assumed his audience could perceive that such a progression would not be suitable for a goddess's benediction or even a father's curse. Moreover, he asserted that audiences had a responsibility to familiarize themselves with chromatic progressions, yet this familiarity would have reduced the surprising effects in act 4; worse, it was just the sort of intrusive demand that the public found overbearing. In effect, by arguing for music's basis in nature, Rameau had placed himself in a double bind. He assumed that audiences could simultaneously experience the necessary dramatic jolt while rationalizing and accepting its musical source as a commonplace. This was asking too much of them. While some commentators earnestly suggested that audiences grew to love Rameau's operas through repeated performances, others offered this same observation as criticism of his complicated music.⁶⁶

There is evidence suggesting that Rameau's own attitude toward the chromatic progression changed as his theories evolved, both from the standpoint of explanation or justification and from that of its quality and value in practice. In its earliest form, as presented in the *Traité de l'harmonie* (1722), the chromatic progression was more or less synonymous with the melodic inflection we know today, occurring within standard harmonic progressions of the fundamental bass by fifths:

Chromaticism occurs in melody when a melodic line proceeds by semitones, ascending or descending. This produces a marvelous effect in harmony, because most of these semitones, not in the diatonic order themselves, constantly produce dissonances which postpone or interrupt conclusions and make it easy

66. For example, in his article on "expression" for the *Encyclopédie*, Louis de Cahusac wrote: "Les Indes galantes, en 1735, paroisoient d'une difficulté insurmontable; le gros des spectateurs sortoit en déclamant contre une musique surchargée de doubles croches, dont on ne pouvoit rien retenir. Six mois après, tous les airs depuis l'ouverture jusqu'à la dernière gavotte, furent parodiées & sùs de tout le monde" ("In 1735, *Les Indes galantes* appeared insurmountably difficult; the majority of spectators departed [the theater] declaiming against a music overly charged with sixteenth notes, from which one can retain nothing. Six months later, all the airs from the overture to the last gavotte were parodied and known by everyone") (*Encyclopédie* 6:318). Rameau was unable to escape this critique even in his obituaries. See, for example, the "Essai d'eloge historique de feu M. Rameau . . .": "Il est encore à remarquer que le zèle des partis [pour et contre Rameau] est moins officieux qu'on ne pense, puisqu'il est de fait qu[e] . . . tous les Ouvrages que mit au Théâtre notre illustre Musicien, n'ont jamais eu dans leur nouveauté une affluence de Spectateurs aussi soutenue & aussi continuelle que dans les reprises subséquentes & surtout dans les dernières" ("It is yet to be remarked that the zeal of the parties for and against Rameau is less officious than is thought, since all the works placed in the theater by our illustrious musician never had, when new, an abundance of spectators as sustained and continuous as in their subsequent reprises and, above all, in the most recent ones") (pp. 189–90).

to fill the chords with all their constituent sounds without upsetting the diatonic order of the [other] parts.⁶⁷

Moreover, as Cynthia Verba has noted, Rameau's musical examples in the *Traité* occasionally employ semitones, but pass by without commentary from the author.⁶⁸ These cases indicate that chromaticism inflected harmony as well as melody, though without necessitating a larger, more disruptive tonal shift. By this measure the passage shown in Example 3 should have been largely without shock value. But only four years later, in the *Nouveau système* (1726), Rameau first characterized the chromatic progression as a disruption of the diatonic system's standard progression.⁶⁹ Although he did not explain fully how this disruption could occur, he had evidently moved beyond the explanation offered in the *Traité*.

When chromaticism formally entered Rameau's writings with the *Generation harmonique* (1737), cited above, he paired it with the even more shocking enharmonic genus, a strategy he would hold to from this point on in his theoretical writings. In this context, however, Rameau's messages regarding the status of the chromatic progression were decidedly mixed; indeed, if *genre* conveyed a category linking family and species, it also carried the connotation of a fashion, taste, or even gender apart from the ordinary. While referring to chromatic progressions as a "nouveau genre d'harmonie," presumably because they derived geometrically from the third progressions noted above, he deemed them sufficiently clear not to include illustrations drawn from repertory. The enharmonic genus, by contrast, employed fully diminished seventh harmonies to create common-chord links between distantly related keys, and Rameau characterized it as an abrupt, surprising progression. A composer using it intended for it to shock, but, according to Rameau, "the moment of surprise passes like a lightning bolt, and quickly this surprise transforms into admiration at finding oneself transported from one hemisphere to the other, so to speak, without having had time to think about it."⁷⁰ While at an earlier time, the chromatic progression might have characterized the decisive entrance of Pellegrin's monster, such was no longer the case. Whereas

67. Rameau, *Treatise on Harmony*, 304. "Dans la Mélodie, le *Chromatique* consiste en une suite de Chant qui procède par semi-Tons, tant en montant qu'en descendant; ce qui produit un effet merveilleux dans l'Harmonie, parce que la plupart de ces semi-Tons, qui ne sont pas dans l'ordre diatonique, causent à tout moment des Dissonances qui suspendent ou qui interrompent les conclusions, & donnent même de la facilité à remplir les Accords de tous les Sons qui les composent, sans déranger l'ordre diatonique des parties supérieures [*sic*]" (idem, *Traité de l'harmonie*, 286; *CTW* 1:316).

68. Verba, "Development of Rameau's Thoughts," 29.

69. See Rameau, *Traité de l'harmonie*, 286–90; *CTW* 1:316–20; Rameau, *Nouveau système*, 35–36; *CTW* 2:45–46. On the importance of this shift in Rameau's thought, see Verba, "Development of Rameau's Thoughts."

70. "Le moment de la surprise passe comme un éclair, & bien-tôt cette surprise se tourne en admiration, de se voir ainsi transporté d'un Hémisphère à l'autre, pour ainsi dire, sans qu'on ait eu le tems d'y penser" (Rameau, *Generation harmonique*, 153; *CTW* 3:91).

audience members could familiarize themselves with the chromatic genus, so that they could appreciate its meaning in a dramatic context, the enharmonic genus could only be experienced. Its source existed in nature, and knowledge could prepare a listener for its effect, but ultimately the surprising qualities determining its use lay outside the rational order. To drive home its strangeness, a list of examples followed: the aria “O iniqui marmi” from the Italian opera *Coriolano*, which Rameau used to show how much more accepting Italian audiences were than French, and two examples from Rameau’s own *Nouvelles suites de pieces de clavecin* published in the late 1720s, “L’*enharmonique*” and “La *trionphante*.”⁷¹ Significantly, he treated the examples as foreign to standard French musical practices.

Rameau’s final illustration listed in the *Generation harmonique* was in many ways his most important; he returned to it several times in his later writings. In the second act of *Hippolyte et Aricie*, when Thésée ventures into the underworld, the *trio des parques*, singing “Quelle soudaine horreur” (“what unexpected horror”), warns of the hell that awaits him at home. At this suitably monstrous moment, revealing a future too hideous to articulate, the composer introduced the enharmonic genus. The music begins on the dominant of G minor and sinks through the keys of F# minor, F minor, E minor, Eb minor, and finally D minor. It is a grotesque musical event, and one of which Rameau was inordinately proud, perhaps intending to depict the creatures recoiling in horror from the future they perceive, to illustrate Thésée’s homeward journey into tragedy, or even to describe the uncanny process whereby predicted future becomes reality. Unfortunately, as Rameau could not help reminding readers, some singers were unwilling to learn this difficult music or to perform it to such plangent accompaniment. In the end, the composer was obliged to substitute a simpler, less offensive, and less demanding number for actual performances. The trio continued to exist as a ghost, silently haunting subsequent editions of the opera, but present only to edify the public.⁷² Like the unusual figure of *Le Destin* mentioned above, it spoke with a certain authority, in this case musical, but it did so from a point of enunciation outside the work proper, and like *Le Destin*, it required an explanation by its creator. Both remained monstrous.

71. The *Coriolano* in question appears to be the version attributed by Oscar Sonneck to the composer Giuseppe Fabbrini; it was composed for the Collegio Tolomei di Siena in 1706, and no music is extant (Library of Congress, Music Division, *Catalogue of Opera Librettos Printed Before 1800*, prepared by Oscar Sonneck [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914; reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1967], 1:321). For a facsimile of Rameau’s edition of “La triomphante” and “L’*enharmonique*,” see Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Nouvelles suites de pieces de clavecin* (Paris: L’auteur, Boivin, Leclerc, 1728; facsimile ed., New York: Broude, 1967), 11 and 26–27, respectively.

72. On the early history of this scene, see Sadler, “Rameau, Pellegrin and the Opéra” 533–34. For a transcription of the passage and commentary on it, see Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, 205–7.

Rameau's comparison of the chromatic and enharmonic genera in the *Generation harmonique* leaves the reader unsure. Although this was the first time he had laid out his theory of how the chromatic genus worked, and even though he did so in conjunction with the enharmonic genus, the weight of his argument was not evenly distributed. The chromatic genus now appears as a routine and unexceptional event, meriting a scant four pages to the enharmonic genus's seven. What had served as a signifier of brute, unnatural force in act 4 of *Hippolyte et Arice* has become in some sense rehabilitated, while its unperformed enharmonic counterpart in act 2, depicting a less significant dramatic event, grew still further in retrospect. Despite Rameau's attempts at explanation, the music-epistemological issues raised by the monster in act 4 of *Hippolyte et Arice* had deepened.

A telling discussion of the two genera in Rameau's next major treatise, the *Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie* (1750), resolves some of these issues by treating the enharmonic genus as less of a rarity. He mentions using versions of it in act 4, scene 1 of his tragedy *Dardanus* (presumably a reference to Venus's monologue in the 1739 version), the depiction of a volcanic eruption in the second entrée of his opéra-ballet *Les Indes galantes* (1735), and, of course, "Quelle soudaine horreur." The choices are interesting, because each suggests some form of *merveilleux* or spectacle. Now, however, Rameau also offers an illustration of the chromatic genus, the monologue "Tristes apprêts" from the tragedy *Castor et Pollux*. No form of *merveilleux* appears in this scene. The heroine Téléaire sings in despair of Castor's death. Nor are there shocking progressions to take into account: Rameau notes that the mode "changes at every instant," but, as Verba has observed, this refers to well-spaced secondary dominant progressions, which cause no interruption in the piece's overall diatonic arc.⁷³ Again, one wonders, what has happened to Hippolyte's monster? Rameau has introduced a hierarchy among his genera, and within it, he treats the chromatic progression as relatively ordinary:

The diatonic has its share of pleasantry; the chromatic varies it and, in the minor mode, possesses some tenderness and even more sadness; the enharmonic leads the ear astray, carrying the passions to excess, frightening, terrifying, and putting everything into disorder, when one composes it in connection with the diatonic and chromatic and sustains it through a movement suitable to expression.⁷⁴

The rehabilitation of disturbing genera continued four years later, in the *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique* (1754). Now contradicting his

73. Verba, "Development of Rameau's Thoughts," 86–87.

74. "Le *diatonique* a l'agréable en partage; le *Chromatique* le varie, & dans le *Mode mineur* il tient du tendre & plus encore du triste; l'*Enharmonique* dérouté l'oreille, porte l'excès dans toutes les passions, effraye, épouvante, & met partout le désordre, quand on sçait le composer à propos de *diatonique* & de *chromatique*, & le soutenir d'un mouvement convenable à l'expression" (Rameau, *Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie*, 99; CTW 3:216).

earlier remarks, Rameau noted that the enharmonic genus almost never occurs in Italian opera, and that, for the most part, “[the fundamental bass progression in fifths] is never interrupted except by a single chromatic or enharmonic interval, which then serves to pass from one mode to another.”⁷⁵ Citations have dwindled to three. Rameau serves up the monologue from *Dardanus* as the only example of the enharmonic genus in French opera—forgetting at least the performance of the second entrée of *Les Indes galantes*—while stressing that in “Tristes apprêts” it is not a manner of chromatic melodic intervals, but only of a fundamental bass progression involving thirds: “The sentiment of a gloomy sadness and lugubriousness that reign there possess [their effect] from the chromatic [genus] furnished by the [fundamental bass], while not a single interval of this genus [i.e., the chromatic semitone] occurs in the [other] parts.”⁷⁶ He adds, then, that chromatic semitones abound in the preceding chorus, “Que tous gémissent,” where the sentiment is different. There they paint the falling tears and groans of mourners, in the manner of a lament, a topos that in no way threatens the diatonic order. The situation has changed drastically. The chromatic genus now serves only the milder, denotative form of signification. It is difficult not to read a composer’s frustration into statements such as the following: “It ought necessarily be concluded that, whatever advantage is drawn from these intervals, all music can please without their aid, and this reflection ought always be present to the intellect so that grand words signifying nothing are not allowed to impose themselves.”⁷⁷ Perhaps Rameau meant only to warn against using the genera where they were not called for textually, but given his examples, it seems just as likely he was abandoning arguments for their natural occurrence and practical application.

Monstrosity and Reason

A disjuncture thus occurs between the early, confident chromatic progressions in *Hippolyte et Aricie* and the almost apologetic tone for discussing this category of progression in the later *Observations*. To acknowledge this simply as Rameau changing his mind overlooks how the chromatic genus became a different kind of musical object according to where he located and justified it in his system of thought: sometimes ordinary and sometimes spectacular, the

75. “Au reste, comme on ne peut jamais interrompre l’ordre Diatonique que par un seul intervalle *Chromatique* ou *Enharmonique*, qui sert pour lors au passage d’un *Mode* à un autre” (Rameau, *Observations sur notre instinct*, 65; CTW 3:299).

76. “Le sentiment d’une douleur morne, & du lugubre qui y règnent, tient tout du *Chromatique* fourni par la succession fondamentale, pendant qu’il ne se trouve pas un seul intervalle de ce genre dans toutes les parties” (Rameau, *Observations sur notre instinct*, 67; CTW 3:300).

77. “On en doit nécessairement conclure que quelque avantage qu’on puisse tirer de ces derniers intervalles, toute Musique peut plaire sans leur secours: & cette réflexion doit toujours être présente à l’esprit pour ne pas s’en laisser imposer par de grands mots qui ne signifient rien” (Rameau, *Observations sur notre instinct*, 65–66; CTW 3:299).

chromatic genus was one thing when heard from the standpoint of the diatonic genus, quite another when heard from that of the enharmonic genus, and something else again depending on which examples of it Rameau considered as illustrative. This had strong implications for his larger argument concerning music's natural systemic properties. Moving back and forth across the boundaries of rationalization, the chromatic genus never altogether lost its liminal status, and for anyone of the time evaluating Rameau's thought as philosophy, it would have been emblematic of flaws in his thought. In passing from root to trunk and from trunk to branch—from *racine* to *rameau*, as it were—the tree of knowledge had grown awry: the generic link between family and species faltered; the references to ancient Greek music theory lost their nerve. We cannot name this break in a convincing manner, but we can measure its phantasmatic tug on Rameau's structuring of knowledge. As a musical marker for the unnatural, the chromatic progressions in *Hippolyte* are, at least to modern ears, plausible, even thrilling. But there was no consistent location for them as signifiers within the theories that followed.

Within Rameau's own Imaginary register, the desire of the theorist to systematize became confused with and dominated by the desire of the composer to be listened to. As a result, the chromatic progression grew into a true eighteenth-century monster, something with no location, no place in the business of knowing. Whereas Rameau wished to convince his readers that music inhabited a scientifically accessible region of nature, a careful reading of his music and his theories suggests that at its limits his thought shaded off quickly into the mysterious and irrational, into areas that resisted learning. His resulting discomfort is present throughout his work. While the nearer reaches of musical understanding veered from the purely rational to the intuitive and empirical, those farthest reaches of the diatonic system likewise shifted from shock to pleasure and then on into matters of little theoretical import. In the same way, actual musical events that were at first rife with potential signification gradually came instead to represent dramatic moments in the traditionally denotative manner. When Rameau asserted the connections between theory and practice here at the limits of his theoretical system, he lost his grasp on both.

More interestingly, Rameau's double bind underscores the limits of Enlightenment thought. Throughout his career, he began each new observation, each new musical piece, with a profound faith in the logic of his work: to comprehend music was to experience it at its fullest; to reveal music's instrumental logic was to make it more widely available to audiences. But as is so often the case in history, it is not entirely a matter of a thinker or composer persuading. It is also a matter of a readership or audience accepting, and no amount of Enlightenment rhetoric could persuade a significant portion of either that music theory, as opposed to music per se, was a part of nature. For many, Rameau's music and his thought were the height of artifice, so that he became the embodiment of unreason, the monstrous presence that would not go away.

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Abstract

In recent years, historians have begun studying the compromises and semiotic slippages underlying Enlightenment thought, what writers of the time characterized as, among other things, monstrosities. Monsters failed to conform to a perceived natural order and as such became models for discussing everything from the limits of knowledge to departures from generic practices. Taking advantage of both this critical trope and the presence of monsters in Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733), the present essay describes Rameau's struggles with instrumental reason in his theorization of the chromatic genus. The composer marked the climactic moment in act 4 of the opera with what is surely the most striking progression in the performed version, a chromatic modulation that captures the characters' shock and registers the monster's supernatural presence. During the same period, he experimented theoretically with numerous descriptions of the chromatic progression, as both an ordinary and an extraordinary property of music. Working as composer and theorist, then, Rameau let chromaticism occupy varied epistemological positions in his work, which in turn allows us to observe him dealing with the limitations of his theoretical system and musical representation.