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In search of a politesse du chant: Rediscovering salon vocal performance practice through the lens of the airs sérieux in the Recueils d'airs sérieux et à boire de différents auteurs, 1695-1699

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Chapter 5

Giving voice to the passions

5.1 Introduction

Having now submitted to the process of decoding the passions, the singer's task becomes more practical: armed with the insights and understanding produced by such an inquiry, how does the singer give full voice to these passions? As discussed in chapter 1, at this stage of the study, I seek to re-examine the historical sources in order to gather evidence as to what was considered good and correct singing. This evidence is not yet context specific. Rather, I seek to define the elements which made up the ideal model of singing, and this will be used to paint a picture of the background from which the salon style of singing emerged.

There is evidence of cross-pollination of activities; of opera singers such as Hilaire Dupuis and Anne de La Barre performing as invitees at salon gatherings,³⁷³ and at the Jesuit church of Saint Louis.³⁷⁴ Undoubtedly, too, the opera-going amateur singer of a certain class would have had exposure to the operatic conventions of the *Académie Royale* and, given their ready availability in the *Recueils* and in other publications, would have turned their hand to singing the airs from popular stage works of the day at home or in salon gatherings. Whatever the physical context, occasion, or professional status of the singer, what these acts of performance had in common was that the protagonists were all engaged at an elemental level in some form of vocal practice. This vocal practice may well have been modified by the social conventions of the salon, but the musical upper classes who took the cultivation of singing skills seriously and professional singers alike were all working within broad musical conventions.

Those musical conventions were defined by the theorists who set out their views on ideal vocal practices and the ingredients of singing well. Any inquiry into how the singer should deliver the affective message encoded in the text and music necessitates a review of the writings of the relevant theorists, and it is this matter which will form the focus of the present chapter.

5.2 Theoretical works consulted and rationale

This chapter does not purport to be a general guide for the singer who is embarking on his or her first foray into French music. As described in chapter 1, excellent general information on French vocal music in performance has already been incorporated into various works by musicologists. Therefore it is not the purpose of this chapter to produce yet another introduction to matters such as *inégalité*, ornamentation, historical pronunciation, syllabic quantity, and choice of accompanying instruments. These concepts are complex and certainly not immune from scholarly debate, but for the purposes of the present study, the reader is simply requested to take an introductory knowledge of these elements "as read".

Three principal categories of theoretical writings were reviewed in preparing this chapter. In the first category lie primers and handbooks aimed at teaching the musical novice the rudiments: how to read music, how to transpose, and a description of ornaments. Works falling into this category include Étienne Loulié's *Éléments ou principes de musique*, Jean

³⁷³ Gordon-Seifert, *Music and the Language of Love*, 339, note 79.

³⁷⁴ Lowe, *Marc-Antoine Charpentier*, 25.

Rousseau's *Méthode claire, certaine et facile pour apprendre à chanter la musique*, Pierre Berthet's *Leçons de musique*, Michel L'Affilard's *Principes très faciles pour bien apprendre la musique*, and Michel Pignolet de Montéclair's *Nouvelles méthode pour apprendre la musique*.

The second category of treatises reviewed constituted a more fertile source. These are works which are either aimed at singers (or singers and other musicians) or which address singing, music and aesthetics in a greater level of detail than the first category. Bénigne de Bacilly, leading pedagogue and commentator of his day, was the principal theorist whose work was considered. His 1668 *Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter* went through three subsequent editions in 1671, 1679, and 1681 (this edition has been lost), attesting to its importance, with the preface to the 1679 edition containing a reply to criticisms of his treatise. Marin Mersenne's 1636 *Harmonie universelle*, and to a lesser extent, his earlier *Traité de l'harmonie universelle* of 1627, although written decades before the publication of the *Recueils*, links singing with declamation and the spoken arts and focuses on the *actio* of the singer. For him, the singer had to use vehement, expressive pronunciation to incarnate the passions contained in the music, and this view is so fundamental to the approach of the theorists writing later that his work can, in many ways, be considered a backdrop to Bacilly's. Neither of these sources were specifically targeting performance in the salon, but both were engaging in earnest attempts to define the qualities of good singing.

Later commentary by Michel Pignolet de Montéclair in his 1736 *Principes de musique*, Jean-Antoine Bérard's *L'art du chant* of 1755, Albert Auguste Raparlier's *Principes de musique*, and François-Joseph Lécuyer's *Principes de l'art du chant* was also reviewed for this chapter for comparative purposes and is referenced as such.

The third category consists of works on poetics, oratory, pronunciation, and rhetoric, and includes Michel Le Faucheur's *Traité de l'action de l'orateur*, Claude-François Ménéstrier's *Des représentations en musique anciennes et modernes*, René Bary's *La rhétorique Française*, Bernard Lamy's *La Rhétorique Ou l'Art de Parler*, Jean Hindret's *L'art de bien prononcer et de bien parler la langue française*, Étienne Dubois de Bretteville's *L'éloquence de la chaire*, Antoine Phérotée de La Croix's *L'art de la poésie française et latine avec une idée de la musique sous une nouvelle méthode*, and Jean Léonor Le Gallois de Grimarest's 1707 treatise, *Traité du récitatif dans la lecture, dans l'action publique, dans la déclamation, et dans le chant*. The primary target of the treatises in this third category is not necessarily the singer (although La Croix and Grimarest do consider music in detail, with Grimarest addressing himself specifically to actors who sing, or *acteurs qui chantent*). However, as will be demonstrated below, the singer was considered an orator and as such, writings aimed at those engaged in speaking in public are essential reading.

As has been shown, salon and stage performance practices and conventions collided in the salon on several levels: with *airs sérieux* from dramatic works crossing over into that refined atmosphere via their publication in the *Recueils*, with that same stage repertoire then being sung by salon amateurs, and with members of polite society witnessing the singing of such repertoire by professionals either on stage or as invited salon performers. It has been demonstrated that professional stage singers (or *acteurs qui chantent*) were aware of and, in turn, influenced by treatises such as Grimarest's. Written in 1707 and therefore post-dating the repertoire studied, Grimarest's *Traité du récitatif* has nevertheless been shown to

rely significantly on the methods of René Bary (*Méthode pour bien prononcer un discours et pour bien l'animer*), which was in turn inspired by Michel Le Faucheur's work, both dating from earlier in the previous century.³⁷⁵ It was by that time already a commonplace to compare acting to oratory, and while Grimarest's work contains no notated music, the information which he expressly addresses to the actor who sings adds information to the picture I seek to build up of what was considered good and correct singing. Although at first glance Grimarest's work (and the speech-based manuals which he mined to formulate his method) may not seem strictly relevant to the salon singer, the work contributed to creating a stage practice which inevitably influenced non-professionals who witnessed it.

Seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century dictionaries³⁷⁶ and other writings in support of these three principal categories of works have been considered where necessary, and are referenced as appropriate.

From reading the theorists, certain common and inter-related themes emerge. For this reason, rather than simply reiterating or translating the writing of each theorist on a treatise-by-treatise basis, a thematic approach has been adopted. The themes are presented in summary form in the section immediately below.

5.3 Presentation and summary of the themes

One of the most striking and consistently-referenced themes to emerge from the theoretical writings is the connection between singing and the oratorical arts. Singers were orators, and as such, they had to call on the art of rhetoric to fulfil the three ends of oratorical delivery, which were to move, to persuade, and to please the listener. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French writings, the profound importance of the singer fulfilling these ends cannot be emphasised enough.

As with speech-based orators, singing orators had to give primacy to the words. Distinct pronunciation of the lyric texts was paramount, and the theorists clearly view the "singing of notes" as a weaker rhetorical choice than "singing the words". Distinct pronunciation entailed a number of sub-factors. These included a thorough knowledge of syllabic quantity and the correct pronunciation of words in accordance with the conventions of declamation. Declamation was the heightened mode of speaking in which words were given more weight or gravity than in normal conversational speech,³⁷⁷ adding force and energy to the delivery.³⁷⁸ Declamation was a central tool of rhetoric and was prescribed for use, as shall be seen below, in delivering vocal music as well as in public speech and on the dramatic stage. Good declamation was thought to lead to good singing, and vice versa.³⁷⁹ The singer who does not follow the rules given for declamation is not actually singing the words, it was said, merely the notes.³⁸⁰ So crucial was its role in singing that it was thought that it could

³⁷⁵ See further France and McGowan, 'Autour du "Traité du récitatif"', 303–4.

³⁷⁶ The following dictionaries were the principal ones consulted: Brossard, *Dictionnaire de Musique*; Académie Française, *Dictionnaire*; Furetière, *Dictionnaire Universel*, 1690.

³⁷⁷ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 248.

³⁷⁸ See further formulations of the distinction in Bacilly, 253–54, 265, 328.

³⁷⁹ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 222–23.

³⁸⁰ Grimarest, 226.

provide the antidote to the “damage” which the constraints of notated music could cause to expression.³⁸¹

In addition, in order to move, persuade, and please their listeners in the most effective manner, singing orators (and speech-based orators) had to know the passions. They had to be able to discern the emotional message encoded in the lyric text and music and express it. Entire sections of the treatises are devoted to how the orator (and therefore the singer) should portray the passions; tone of voice, gesture, proper delivery of figurative language, ornamentation, pitch, and the speed of delivery of the words were essential parts of their oratorical tool kit. Importantly, more than simply relying on these tools of depiction, however, the singer ideally had to feel that emotional state within him- or herself in order to arouse that same emotion in the listener.

Grimarest’s treatise provides some of the most comprehensive advice to singers (*acteurs qui chantent*). As his advice uniquely bridges the related disciplines of declamation and vocalisation, it is useful to use it as a broad structural framework for exploring the themes of this chapter. Grimarest presents the following instructions:

*L’Acteur doit se faire une étude particuliere de prononcer distinctement chaque silabe, à quelque élévation, ou à quelque profondeur que le Compositeur l’ait portée. Il y a des voix si confuses, quoique belles, que l’Auditeur perd tout ce qu’elles prononcent, le Spectateur alors n’étant frappé que des tons de la Musique, c’est là bien souvent ce qui lui fait dire que les paroles ne valent rien, sans les avoir lues: & peu s’en faut qu’il ne dise aussi qu’elles sont mauvaises; parcequ’elles ne se font pas bien entendre dans la bouche de l’Acteur. Ainsi avant que de chanter un morceau de Musique, on doit bien consulter l’étenduë de sa voix, pour ne point dérober à l’Auditeur le plaisir d’être touché par le sentiment exprimé par les paroles; en même tems que la mélodie du chant, & l’harmonie de toutes les parties de Musique frappent agréablement son organe.*³⁸²

Each of these themes will now be explored in turn.

5.3.1 Singing as an oratorical art

The age-old alliance between music and oratory can be traced back at least as far as Aristotle,³⁸³ Cicero,³⁸⁴ and Quintilian.³⁸⁵ Song could be likened to an oratorical discourse or

³⁸¹ Grimarest, 223.

³⁸² Grimarest, 217. ‘The actor must make a special study of pronouncing each syllable distinctly, at whatever height or depth the composer has notated it. There are some voices which, although beautiful, are so unclear, that the listener loses everything that they are saying, and the spectator is then only struck by the pitches of the music. This very often incites the spectator to say that, without reading them, the words are worthless. And he as good as says that the words are bad, too, because they are not understandable in the mouth of the actor. Therefore, before singing a piece of music, one must check the range of one’s voice, such that the listener is never denied the pleasure of being touched by the sentiment which is expressed by the words, at the same time that the melody, the harmony, and all the parts of the music agreeably strike the ears of the listener’.

³⁸³ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*.

³⁸⁴ Cicero, *De Inventione and De Optimo Genere Oratorum*; Cicero, *De Oratore*.

³⁸⁵ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*.

speech, and to engage in the act of singing was to engage in an act which demanded many of the same skills as those required of speech-based orators, such as priests giving a sermon in church, advocates in court, and actors declaiming theatrical texts on stage.

Monsieur de Saint-Lambert, although writing about the art of harpsichord playing, famously compares a piece of music to an oration.³⁸⁶ Not only were the skilful orator and the composer engaging in a similar activity in ordering, arranging, and reasoning through the elements of their speech or song, but for Saint-Lambert, the component parts of an oration corresponded to the musical elements of a composition: the musical notes were the letters which made up words, measures were the words themselves, cadences were the full-stops, and the reprises were the parts.

Throughout the treatises from at least Mersenne to the eighteenth century, the language is peppered with words that are often more suggestive of discourse than song. Mersenne, for example, uses the word “*réciter*” rather than “*chanter*”.³⁸⁷ This is significant, as according to various contemporaneous dictionary entries for “*réciter*”, this word denotes the pronunciation or recitation of a discourse.³⁸⁸ In his 1709 primer, Montéclair refers to repeat signs in the following way: “*Les deux barres pointées...marquent qu’il faut dire deux fois la première partie*”.³⁸⁹

Bacilly goes beyond merely analogising speech with song and asserts that song is actually “*une espèce de déclamation*”.³⁹⁰ In a similar vein, Grimarest states that a song consists of “*paroles mises en musique*”,³⁹¹ and instructs the singer to “pronounce” rather than “sing” each syllable at whatever pitch the composer has stipulated.³⁹² Text-centric conceptions of song continued well into the eighteenth century, with Raparlier, a singing teacher in Lille, commenting in 1772 that good singing need be no more than a more energetic and pleasant way of marking prosody and accents.³⁹³

5.3.2 Singers and speech-based orators

Mersenne unambiguously equates the demands of oratory and singing, stating that a singer’s *récits* should have the same effect as a well-enunciated harangue.³⁹⁴ He later states that vocal music should be performed such that it has at least as much force on the listeners as if it had been recited by an excellent orator.³⁹⁵ Grimarest, too, by addressing the title of

³⁸⁶ Saint-Lambert, *Les principes du clavecin*, 14. More precisely, Saint-Lambert states that it is a speech which resembles a piece of music.

³⁸⁷ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 353, 365.

³⁸⁸ See for example Furetière, *Dictionnaire Universel*, 1690, 326 which defines ‘*réciter*’ as recounting, saying, relating something, reading aloud a work, or declaiming. Académie Française, *Dictionnaire*, 380 defines ‘*réciter*’ as pronouncing a speech which one knows by heart.

³⁸⁹ Montéclair, *Nouvelle Méthode*, 34. ‘The repeats signs indicate that the first section should be said twice.’

³⁹⁰ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 328. ‘A type of declamation.’

³⁹¹ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 73. ‘Words put into music.’ Opera, similarly, was referred to as “*tragédie mise en musique*”.

³⁹² Grimarest, 217.

³⁹³ See Raparlier, *Principes de musique*, 4.

³⁹⁴ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 356.

³⁹⁵ Mersenne, IV, vi, part 2, 365.

his treatise to those engaged in reading, public speech, declamation, and singing,³⁹⁶ draws an immediate link between these disciplines. He explains his choice of title as being based on his wish to emphasise that he was dealing with the *actio* of the orator, the person who declaims and the person who sings,³⁹⁷ thereby bundling these roles together. In the preface to his work, he states that the advice he will impart is necessary for those who read, sing, declaim, or give a public discourse, implying that there is a common set of demands which spans these disciplines.

As the deliverer of a type of oratorical discourse, the singer had the same role to fulfil as a speech-based orator. The categories of speech-based orator most frequently cited by the theorists and with whom singers of the time, as vocal orators, shared a required skill-set, were priests, barristers, and actors. In a conception of oratorical art inherited from antiquity and in common with their counterparts whose domain was the church, the court room, and the theatrical or lyric stage respectively, the role of the singer as vocal orator was to move, persuade and please. The ability to persuade and inspire the listener was in fact considered the very definition of excellence in singing.³⁹⁸

As with other orators engaged in public speaking, the singer was expected to call upon the rhetorical arts in order to persuade and move the passions of the audience. The imperative of working on the listener's emotions is evoked by Grimarest's reference to *expressing* (*exprimer*), rather than *singing*, a song.³⁹⁹ It is also embedded within the very definition which Furetière assigns to the word, "*air*", being:

*...une conduite de la voix, ou des autres sons par de certains intervalles naturels ou artificiels qui frappent agréablement l'oreille, & qui témoignent de la joye, de la tristesse, ou quelque autre passion.*⁴⁰⁰

In his or her musical oration, the singer had to excite his or her listeners to whatever end was desired.⁴⁰¹ Mersenne in his criticism of "hard" voices by implication sets out what he considers desirable in singers:

*...les voix qui sont dures ne plaisent pas, quoy qu'elles soient iustes, & qu'elles ayent les autres qualitez, don't l'ay parlé, parce qu'elles ont trop d'aigreur, & d'esclat, qui blessent les oreilles delicates, & qui empeschent qu'elles ne se glissent assez agreablement dans l'esprit des auditeurs pour s'en rendre les maitresses, & pour le conduire par tout où l'on veut.*⁴⁰²

³⁹⁶ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*.

³⁹⁷ Grimarest, 3, 73.

³⁹⁸ Formulations of the classic role of the orator are numerous in the treatises considered in this study. The following are some examples La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 625; Méneestrier, *Représentations*, 94; Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 2, 120, 155, 202, 220.

³⁹⁹ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 198.

⁴⁰⁰ Furetière, 'Dictionnaire Universel', 1690. '... a moving of the voice or other sounds by certain natural or artificial intervals which agreeably strike the ear and which evidence joy, sorrow, or some other passion'.

⁴⁰¹ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 365.

⁴⁰² Mersenne, IV, vi, part 2, 354. 'Although they may sing with good intonation and have other qualities of which I have spoken, hard voices are not pleasing, because they have too much sourness and brilliance, which are injurious to delicate ears, and which prevent those voices from pleasantly gliding into the spirit of the listeners in order to master them and lead them wherever the singer desires'.

What was required, therefore, was for the speaker or singer to use the art of rhetoric to depict or portray the passion in the text or music so that it could be clearly recognised by the listener, then stimulating the appropriate response in him or her. A mere rendition of the notes on the page was not enough, and in what was a system of shared responsibility between the composer, performer, and listener, it was thought that the science of music itself would not have any effect on the hearts of the listeners.⁴⁰³ In the words of Mersenne, the voice had to carry “*une grande intention*”.⁴⁰⁴ Armed with the rhetorical tools typically associated with speech, it was believed that a sort of mimesis should be striven for, such that the listener would then feel the same emotional fluctuations experienced by the singer. The orator’s words were considered to be the signs which represented these emotional fluctuations,⁴⁰⁵ and therefore the way the words were delivered was, and remains, crucial.

For Grimarest, the spectator must be able to recognise the passions depicted by the speaker in order to be touched by them.⁴⁰⁶ Before attempting to give a convincing portrayal of a passion,⁴⁰⁷ the singer first had to be able to identify the emotional content which the author or composer was seeking to represent. For the singer or speaker to be able to discern the spirit of what they had to perform, Grimarest states that study, education, taste, and interaction with others (*commerce*) were required.⁴⁰⁸ During the process of setting the poet’s text, the composer had to be equipped with knowledge of how to use melodic, harmonic and rhythmic devices in order to represent the passions conveyed in the poetry.⁴⁰⁹ Importantly, it was thought that the singer had to be instructed in these same rules to which the composer had submitted.⁴¹⁰ A vague idea of these rules was not sufficient: for Grimarest, the singer had to be “equally knowledgeable” about these matters in order to first discern and then depict the passion.⁴¹¹ At times he is uncompromising in this respect: those who do not undertake the inquiry of discerning the “*véritable sens d’un Auteur*”⁴¹² should not display themselves. More than three-hundred years after writing his treatise, Grimarest is, in effect, revealing himself to be the champion of the analytical approach adopted in chapter 4.

The singer therefore had to stand as an educated interpreter, or translator⁴¹³ of the message of the poet and composer. Learning how to decode the hidden affective message of the composer or poet seemingly pervaded the entire process of forming the singer. Bacilly discusses at length vocal tuition and the qualities of a good singing teacher and says that the earlier in childhood that vocal training can start, the better.⁴¹⁴ One of the qualities

⁴⁰³ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 205.

⁴⁰⁴ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 1, 342. ‘A big intention.’

⁴⁰⁵ Lamy, *La rhétorique*, 1678, 4.

⁴⁰⁶ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 155.

⁴⁰⁷ Or to give voice to several passions contained within the one expression, a possibility noted by Grimarest at 155.

⁴⁰⁸ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 124.

⁴⁰⁹ Mersenne, *Traité de l’harmonie universelle*, 1:191.

⁴¹⁰ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 202. Note that Grimarest specifies that the singer should also study the rules required of the poet.

⁴¹¹ Grimarest, 199.

⁴¹² Grimarest, 188–89. ‘The true sense of the author’.

⁴¹³ Grimarest uses the term ‘*traducteur*’ in *Traité du récitatif*, 196.

⁴¹⁴ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 80.

he deems as key in a teacher is that he or she show care for the musical intentions of the composer, otherwise they will be teaching at cross purposes to the ideals of music.⁴¹⁵ He further states that it is the responsibility of teachers to be able to demonstrate a stock of good airs *according to the intentions of reputable composers*.⁴¹⁶ For Mersenne, too, the ability to decode the affective message and give voice to the intentions of the composer was not something that was only required or conceived as something to be saved for maturity. It was, rather, apparently instilled at a young age. He stipulates that:

*Mais ceux qui enseignent à chanter doivent montrer tous ces differens degrez des passions aux enfans, comme ils leur enseignent les cadences, les divers passages & les tremblements, afin qu'ils ne manquent point d'accentuer toutes les syllables, & les notes marquées par le compositeur...*⁴¹⁷

5.3.3 The central role of the text

The performance of a vocal piece was akin to an orator giving a public address. As an oration, the lyric text was the element which served the role as the enhancer of the affective message of the text. There are numerous references to this concept in the treatises, and the material which follows provides but a few examples. Of course, the fact that these rules existed does not mean to say that they were adhered to in all circumstances. Sung texts were no doubt sometimes incomprehensible to the audience. Here I present, however, the view that the theorists unanimously espoused. Such was the volume of writing on this matter in the seventeenth century that its importance is hard to ignore.

Ménéstrier speaks of music as the element which must accommodate all the *inégalités* of the measures of a composition, the nature of the words, the long and short syllables, the vowels which must be sounded, and other elements of prosody.⁴¹⁸ He states:

*Il faut assujettir le chant...aux paroles, & aux vers dont les recits & les sentimens doivent être entendus dans ces actions de Theatre...*⁴¹⁹

The beauties of music and the rules of singing are in fact in servitude to the words and poetry.⁴²⁰

In Grimarest's work, the musical pitches are described as an element of constraint on the singer, who must follow the composer's prescriptions. Elsewhere, he asserts that music can

⁴¹⁵ Bacilly, 64.

⁴¹⁶ Bacilly, 70. Emphasis added.

⁴¹⁷ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 372. 'Those who teach singing must show all these different degrees of passions to children, just as they might teach them cadences, various passages, and *tremblements*, such that they do not neglect to accentuate all the syllables and notes marked by the composer...'

⁴¹⁸ Ménéstrier, *Représentations*, 147.

⁴¹⁹ Ménéstrier, 135. 'The upper voice must be subordinated to the words and poetry whose sentiments and the telling of such must be heard in theatrical performances'

⁴²⁰ Ménéstrier, 140.

in fact damage expression.⁴²¹ Nevertheless, Grimarest clearly believes that the singer must follow his instructions as to the tones of voice and *accens* which the words express:

...l'Acteur qui chante, quoiqu'assujetti aux tons du Compositeur, doit cependant suivre les accens que j'ai prescrits pour tous les mouvemens que les paroles expriment...⁴²²

That is, the singer can remedy the damage which music can potentially inflict on expression by following his rules of declamation.⁴²³

This is a view with which Bacilly, writing earlier, would certainly have agreed. He frequently counsels that where the composer's scansion of the text does not reflect the correct syllabic quantity, the singer should amend the fault by modifying the length of the note.⁴²⁴

5.3.4 The “chain of rhetoric” and the role of the poet, composer, singer, and listener

As we have seen above, the singer had to mimic, depict, or represent the emotions conveyed in the text and music. This was the *actio* or fifth canon of rhetoric, and the final step in the process in which poet, composer, speaker/singer, and audience all conspired to play a role.

Mersenne, among others, equated the elements of musical composition with the elements of rhetoric. At the very start of the process, the poet conceived and then gave voice to his or her thoughts and ideas through diction, syntax, figurative language, and other poetic tools. The composer setting a lyric text had to discern from the text the meaning and ideas of the poet, thus engaging in *inventio*, or the act of discovering or inventing resources for persuasion. The composer then had to arrange and order the musical materials to best underline the expressive and affective qualities of the text (just as the poet before him or her had done), engaging, whether or not consciously, in the second pillar of rhetoric, *dispositio*. The part of the compositional process relating to *elocutio* (or the choice of style) involved the composer formulating a general style to match the demands of the text. Mersenne relates this third pillar of rhetoric to the compositional process, likening the effect of various cadences to punctuation.⁴²⁵

Throughout the creative process, a composer setting lyric poetry (as with the poet who created the text in the first place) had to keep in mind the need to move the passions of the audience. The composition methods of Charles Masson,⁴²⁶ Marc-Antoine Charpentier,⁴²⁷

⁴²¹ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 223.

⁴²² Grimarest, 222. ‘The actor who sings, although subject to the pitches of the composer, must nevertheless follow the tones of voice that I have prescribed for all the energies that the words express’.

⁴²³ Grimarest, 222–23.

⁴²⁴ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 123, 214, 331; Writing a century later, Raparlier echoes Bacilly's view. See *Principes de musique*, 42.

⁴²⁵ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, v, [216] (original page misnumbered as 316). As with *actio*, the fourth pillar of rhetoric (*memoria* or memory) relates to performance and is thus not part of the compositional process.

⁴²⁶ Masson, *Nouveau traité*.

⁴²⁷ Charpentier, *Règles de composition par M. Charpentier*.

and Étienne Loulié⁴²⁸ among others provide some examples of the then-prevailing teachings on the art of composition, and chapter 4 has explored the devices which composers typically used to represent the affects of the poetic text. The musical notes set out on paper by the composer provided a link which spanned the compositional, performance, and listening process; the composer in effect stood “behind” the singer, playing the role of “invisible” orator to the audience. The composer’s role was to interpret the affect of the poetic text and by the means of his or her musical notation, give voice to the passions encoded therein. In performing the composition, the singer also had to interpret the affect of the text and music and depict that affect, generating an emotional response which moved or persuaded the listeners.⁴²⁹

Mersenne provides some detail as to the skills required by a composer in order to touch the soul of the listener. He discusses elements of melody and text⁴³⁰ and he also states that composers have to study to gain a knowledge of the expressive energies or *mouvements* and the degrees of each passion in order to be able to represent them in the most simple and sincere form.⁴³¹ To be most effective, composers should themselves be struck by the sentiment which they want to imprint on the soul of the listener:

*...on doit bien considerer, comprendre, & exprimer le sens, & l'intention des paroles, & du sujet, afin de l'accentuer & de l'animer en telle sorte, que chaque partie face tout l'effect dont elle est capable; ce qui arrive particulièrement lors que le Compositeur est luy mesme frappé du sentiment qu'il desire imprimer dans l'esprit de ses auditeurs en faisant & en chantant ses Airs.*⁴³²

Ménestrier, touching on composition, notes that musicians have to be excellent *grammairiens* in order to compose well.⁴³³ Grimarest goes even further, and states that the composer must enter into the meaning of the poem as if he or she had composed the poem him- or herself.⁴³⁴ He berates those composers who only have sight of the music and pay no attention to the “*mouvements qui lui sont prescrits par les paroles*”.⁴³⁵

It is no surprise that the extent to which a composition goes to the heart of the listener was considered to be a sign of its excellence. Writing in 1681 in relation to recitative in dramatic music, Ménestrier expressly acknowledges this, saying that the passing of the music from the ear to the soul is what constitutes excellence in dramatic music.⁴³⁶ *Le Cerf de la Viéville*

⁴²⁸ See Ranum, ‘Étienne Loulié’.

⁴²⁹ Grimarest notes, however, that the performer, rather than the composer, is the one who owes most to the listener, as the performer is the one with the voice, gesture, and sentiment to express the passion of the music. Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 216.

⁴³⁰ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, [360-361] (original pages misnumbered as 364-365).

⁴³¹ Mersenne, IV, vi, part 2, 372.

⁴³² Mersenne, IV, vi, part 2, 363. ‘...one must carefully consider, understand, and express the sense and intention of the words and of the subject, in order to accentuate and animate them such that each part has all of the effect of which it is capable. This arises especially when the composer is himself struck by the sentiment that he desires to imprint on the spirit of his listeners’.

⁴³³ Ménestrier, *Représentations*, 92–93.

⁴³⁴ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 203.

⁴³⁵ Grimarest, 201–2. ‘The energies which are prescribed by the words’.

⁴³⁶ Ménestrier, *Représentations*, 104.

echoes this view.⁴³⁷ Masson, writing a year later, expresses a similar opinion and says that it is the ability of the expression of a composition to make the soul pass from one passion to another that is the natural proof of the perfection of a work.⁴³⁸

The listener, too, had a significant role to play in the rhetorical chain. As the final recipient of the material which had started life in the hand of the poet, been shaped into music by the composer, and transferred via the expressive conduit of the performer, he or she had a role which went beyond the passive receptor of affective clues. For Grimarest, listeners, along with singers, had to be instructed in the rules which the composer had to observe in setting words to music.⁴³⁹ The necessity of having a discerning set of ears was a matter about which he felt strongly.⁴⁴⁰ He states that the listener's education had to go beyond mere acquaintance with the rules and knowledge of "*un peu de Musique*".⁴⁴¹ He says that the spectator should not imagine that just because he or she has not been affected by the music that the expression of the music or the music itself is of no value.⁴⁴² Rather, Grimarest advocates that the spectator should contemplate and assess his or her own abilities as a listener, ensuring that the fault does not lie with their lack of receptivity or insentience. In short, listeners had to self-question to ensure that they do not have a dull or dense spirit, which was unable to fathom the sense of the expression and unable to be moved by a passion which had been skilfully conveyed.⁴⁴³ Méneestrier also addresses the issue of the cognisant listener by describing its antithesis:

*...ils ont des oreilles pour entendre le chant, & comme ils ont d'ailleurs l'ame pesante, les accords ne les touchent point, ni les mouvemens de la Musique ne font point d'impression sur leur ame, & ils entendent les Concerts les plus sçavans, comme ils entendent le chant de plusieurs oiseaux, qui n'est qu'un gazoüillement qui n'a rien de concerté.*⁴⁴⁴

According to him, discerning listeners, on the other hand, who have a knowledge of music are full of a purely spiritual harmony, even when they are not singing. The reason for this, which allies with Grimarest's emphasis on this point, comes down to education; in their memory and imagination they have a full knowledge of chords and consonances.⁴⁴⁵ The listener, as the final cog in the wheel, had to be equipped with openness and a spirit of receptivity that would allow affective clues to take full hold of his or her senses. But first, they had to have the knowledge which would allow them to recognise the passions in order to be touched by them.

⁴³⁷ Le Cerf de La Viéville de Fresneuse, *Comparaison*, 2:160-161.

⁴³⁸ Masson, *Nouveau traité*, 28.

⁴³⁹ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 202.

⁴⁴⁰ Later, Grimarest is critical of undiscerning listeners who applaud public-speakers who mistake one tone of voice for another and merely elevate their voice. See Grimarest, 157.

⁴⁴¹ Grimarest, 229.

⁴⁴² Grimarest, 229.

⁴⁴³ Grimarest, 229.

⁴⁴⁴ Méneestrier, *Représentations*, 103–4. 'They have ears for understanding song, but as they also have a dense soul, chords do not touch them at all, neither do the movements of music make any impression on their soul. They hear the most skilful harmony in the way they hear the song of a group of birds, which is only a warble and does not have any harmony to it'.

⁴⁴⁵ Méneestrier, 104.

Perhaps the skill-set necessary to cement the bond which should ideally ally creators of music, performers, and listeners is best summarised by Grimarest in this way:

*Il faut considerer la Musique vocale dans le Musicien, qui la compose; dans l'acteur, qui la chante; & dans la personne, qui l'écoute. La science, & le gout sont nécessaires à celui qui compose: Celui qui chante a besoin d'art, de science, & de discernement; Et celui qui écoute, doit avoir toutes ces parties pour juger seurement.*⁴⁴⁶

5.3.5 The singer must pronounce the words clearly at whatever height or depth the composer has set them.

In Grimarest's treatise, after addressing comments to those engaged in other forms of public speech, he finally turns his attention to actors who engage in singing. Grimarest instructs them to take great care to pronounce distinctly each syllable at whatever pitch the composer has set it.⁴⁴⁷ Transposition was, of course, allowed and was an important subject in basso continuo manuals, and what Grimarest is addressing here is the quality and approach to phonation and singing.

In a chapter which is highly significant for the present study, he draws together all commentary on rhetoric and declamation from the earlier parts of his treatise (directed at barristers, priests, and other public speakers), and categorically states that actors who sing must also observe these same rules of declamation.⁴⁴⁸ Crucially, singing orators must say the words on the pitches. This conception of song as words spoken (rather than sung) on pitches is fundamental to the approach which is experimented with in the case-study air and to the exploration of the sub-elements of Grimarest's edict, which follows.

5.3.5.1 Distinct pronunciation and volume

Fundamental to the advice delivered not only by Grimarest but by the other theorists is the need for good pronunciation, in which the speaker or singer delivers his or her text both distinctly but also at an appropriate volume. The need for the singer or speaker to have his or her words understood by the audience is so central a requirement that but a few examples from the theorists will suffice as illustration. Le Faucheur devotes a whole chapter to volume and the care that speakers must take to make themselves easily heard, a requirement which he expresses to be the public speaker's "*premier soin*" or first priority.⁴⁴⁹ Ménestrier, too, applauds the good pronunciation prevalent amongst Greek poets,⁴⁵⁰ their first concern being to make their words heard, and he speaks critically of singers who do not make this same effort. The requirement of distinct pronunciation is equally important for Mersenne:

⁴⁴⁶ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 198. 'One must consider vocal music in terms of the musician who composes it, the actor who sings it, and the person who listens to it. Science and taste are required by those who compose. The singer requires art, science, and discernment. And the listener requires all of these things to judge them with a sure hand'.

⁴⁴⁷ Grimarest, 217.

⁴⁴⁸ Grimarest, 222.

⁴⁴⁹ Le Faucheur, *Traité*, 58.

⁴⁵⁰ Ménestrier, *Représentations*, 93.

*Une des grandes perfections du chant consiste à bien prononcer les paroles, & les rendre si distinctes, que les auditeurs n'en perdent pas une seule syllabe...*⁴⁵¹

Again, drawing together the related disciplines of speech and song, Mersenne says that in singing, the pronunciation has to be as good as it is in delivering a speech.⁴⁵² La Croix describes it as disagreeable and leading to “disgust” when texts are delivered in a manner which obscures and confuses the words.⁴⁵³ For Bacilly, the listener only tastes half the pleasure of music when the speaker is not heard or understood.⁴⁵⁴ According to Le Faucheur, unclear pronunciation will not only be unpleasant for the listeners, but will distract their attention away from what is being said.⁴⁵⁵

Distinct pronunciation was not merely a tool to afford a more pleasant experience to the listener, however. Rather, it was fundamental to the art of persuasion itself, and an essential pathway towards the delivery of the passions. The ears were thought to be the doors to the spirit and the heart. Listeners, it was logically asserted, lend their ears more readily to a speech or sound which is easier to understand, and it was thought that this ease or pleasure should be capitalized on to more easily move, agitate, or excite humans in whatever direction was desired by the singing orator.⁴⁵⁶

What then are the practical steps which the singer should follow in order to achieve distinct pronunciation?

5.3.5.2 Clarity and strength

Firstly, the speaker or singer should be reminded that as orators, the pronunciation for which Grimarest is striving is the heightened pronunciation of declamation, in which the speaker delivers the words with a weight, force, and energy that is greater than in simple, familiar conversation.⁴⁵⁷ The voice must be loud enough to be heard,⁴⁵⁸ and also sonorous and flexible.⁴⁵⁹ For Le Faucheur, the voice must be clear and strong.⁴⁶⁰ Some people naturally possess the gift of a clear and strong voice, while for others, it must be acquired through practice. Le Faucheur’s approval of the extreme regime of self-improvement undertaken by the Greek orator, Demosthenes, to cure his weak voice⁴⁶¹ emphasizes the great importance placed on clarity and strength.

⁴⁵¹ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 356. ‘One of the great perfections of singing consists in pronouncing the words well and making them distinct, such that the listeners do not lose a single syllable’.

⁴⁵² Mersenne, IV, vi, part 2, 356.

⁴⁵³ La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 646.

⁴⁵⁴ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 290.

⁴⁵⁵ Le Faucheur, *Traité*, 58.

⁴⁵⁶ La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 645.

⁴⁵⁷ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 248–49.

⁴⁵⁸ La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 646.

⁴⁵⁹ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 2.

⁴⁶⁰ Le Faucheur, *Traité*, 59.

⁴⁶¹ Le Faucheur, 65. To overcome his weak voice, Le Faucheur recounts that Demosthenes built himself an underground bunker to which he would retreat, often for two or three months in succession, in order to work on gesture and declaim “à haute voix”, shaving half of his head so that he wasn’t tempted to go out, chewing on pebbles to overcome a “fat tongue”, and strengthening his voice by practising at the seaside above the roar of the sea.

5.3.5.3 Proportionality

Strength of voice must be tempered with a sense of proportionality, however, and the volume of the voice must be in proportion to the place in which the speaker (and, by extension, the singer) is delivering his or her (musical) address.⁴⁶² No doubt this is primarily a caution against speaking or singing too softly, with the concern most prevalent in the mind of the theorists being the need to project in order to be sufficiently heard. By extension, the inverse is equally pertinent, however; just as inaudibility was a negative feature, so too the singer delivering one of the *airs sérieux*, typically performed in very small confines, had to be mindful of moderating the volume according to the dimensions of the room, with a performance that was too loud marring the enjoyment of the listener and distracting them from the delivery of the affect.

5.3.5.4 “Proper” pronunciation

Armed with a clear and strong voice which is projected in proportion to the size of the room, the speaker or singing orator who seeks to achieve the distinct pronunciation espoused by the theorists must then make a choice as to the actual sound of the vowels and consonants which either individually or in digraph form make up the words in the lyric text. Not just clear, but proper or correct pronunciation was considered essential,⁴⁶³ and ignoring this aspect was described by Bacilly as a serious error.⁴⁶⁴ Moreover, when speaking in public, reading aloud, or engaging in the heightened, declamatory speech required for singing, different rules as to pronunciation sometimes applied from those of ordinary conversation.⁴⁶⁵ Just as an unclear voice was undesirable, so too, incorrect pronunciation was considered a threat to the delivery of affect.⁴⁶⁶ Pleasing pronunciation, on the other hand, was considered by Bacilly to be a sort of vocal ornament⁴⁶⁷ which existed for the purpose of giving expression or finesse to the vocal line.⁴⁶⁸

According to Bacilly, in order to achieve this “proper pronunciation” and instil the correct habits in his or her pupil, the singing teacher must not only know the French language well, but must know it in a form unlike the “common herd”.⁴⁶⁹ With their Paris-centric mindset, both Bacilly and Grimarest are scornful of the speech found in the provinces, particularly Normandy. Jean Hindret, in the preface to his 1687 work which is devoted to proper pronunciation, spelling, and the French language, also rails against incorrect speech but is more sweeping in his criticism, finding fault even with those at court and in Paris.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶² Le Faucheur, 59; Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 108, 131–32; Raparlier, *Principes de musique*, 34.

⁴⁶³ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 62, 66, 92.

⁴⁶⁴ Bacilly, 67.

⁴⁶⁵ This was particularly the case with the final ‘r’ or verbs ending in ‘-er’, and the ‘l’ in ‘ils’. See Hindret, *L’art de Bien Prononcer*, 205, 209.

⁴⁶⁶ See Bacilly, 67. Speaking in the context of singing teachers, Bacilly says that poor pronunciation betrays a lack of understanding of the text, which implies that the singing teacher does not know how to express the word meanings.

⁴⁶⁷ Bacilly, 137.

⁴⁶⁸ Bacilly, 270.

⁴⁶⁹ Bacilly, 66.

⁴⁷⁰ Hindret, *L’art de Bien Prononcer*, n.p.

In what amounts to a third of his treatise, Bacilly devotes himself to instructing the reader on the correct pronunciation of French as it relates to vocal music and declamation. His expansive and technical remarks on pronunciation in part two of the treatise set out in detail the correct way of pronouncing each vowel and consonant, including such matters as when to sound final consonants to enhance clarity or make a rhyme.⁴⁷¹ These rules are also to be found in other writings of the period, such as those by Antoine Lartigaut,⁴⁷² Gabriel de Foigny,⁴⁷³ and Jean d'Aisy.⁴⁷⁴

5.3.5.5 “Gronder” - the modification of pronunciation

As distinct from the important role played by the orator's or singer's general tone of voice in representing the passions,⁴⁷⁵ affect also influenced pronunciation on a more micro level, and could modify or determine how individual words or even syllables were to be pronounced. Bacilly and Bretteville both address this concept.

Bacilly asserts, for example, that if the “a” vowel is sung on a long note and there is a passion or sentiment attached to it, greater vigour and less sweetness may be required. In illustration of this, Bacilly gives the example of the exclamatory “a” in “*Ah! qu'il est malaisé!*” and the *a* in the word “*ingrante*” of “*Si l'ingrante ne m'aime pas*”. In both of these cases, the mouth must be open very wide, whereas in expressions of joy such as in the exclamatory “a” in “*Ah! qu'il est doux d'aimer!*” and “*Ha! Que le plaisir est extrême*”, the emphasis should be on width and the opening must be similar to a smile.⁴⁷⁶ Whether or not the song was familiar or public, serious or gallant also impacted on vowel formation, also. If the song was what Bacilly describes as a “mere trifle” in its words and music, then the singer should pronounce the “oi” and “oy” as if they were “ay”, such that words such as “*croyez*”, “*soyez*” and “*soit*” sound like the word “*sayez*”.⁴⁷⁷

Writing later and in nearly identical terms, Bérard and Raparlier also describe ways in which pronunciation will vary according to the character of the words themselves. The character is determined by the nature of the object which the words represent and according to both writers, words can be signs of serious, terrible or sad, frivolous, amiable, happy, indifferent, or tender objects.⁴⁷⁸ When speaking of the *terrible*, pronunciation must be hard and obscure. When speaking of tearful, pathetic things, the words must be obscure and muffled. When speaking of birdsong, a babbling brook, or expressing tranquil, tender or amiable passions, it should be sweet and clear.⁴⁷⁹

Bretteville's treatise, although targeted at priests and barristers, nevertheless provides rules which are applicable to all orators seeking to persuade or move the passions. He identifies certain words which require specific expressive pronunciation. For example, affirmative

⁴⁷¹ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 296–97.

⁴⁷² Lartigaut, *Progrès de la véritable l'ortografe*.

⁴⁷³ Foigny, *L'Usage du Jeu Royal*.

⁴⁷⁴ d'Aisy, *Suite Du Génie de La Langue Française*.

⁴⁷⁵ The orator's or singer's tone of voice (*accens*) is examined below at section 5.4.2.

⁴⁷⁶ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 259.

⁴⁷⁷ Bacilly, 287. In a similar vein, Bacilly says at 299 that the “l” in “il” can be omitted if the song is in the style of a gavotte. The more serious the air, the more attention is required to expressive pronunciation.

⁴⁷⁸ Raparlier, *Principes de musique*, 32; Bérard, *L'art du chant*, 68.

⁴⁷⁹ Raparlier, *Principes de musique*, 33; Bérard, *L'art du chant*, 69ff.

words such as “*certainement*”, “*assurément*”, “*absolument*” required a firm tone. Words showing blame or horror, such as “*atroce*” and “*détestable*” required a high and moved voice. Words indicating misfortune or plaintive words, such as “*malheureux*” and “*déplorable*” should be pronounced in a sad way. Words expressing quantity, such as “*grand*”, “*haut*”, and “*profond*” need a certain weight in their pronunciation, and words indicating weakness or baseness such as “*bas*”, “*petit*”, “*vain*” should be delivered in a lowered voice with disdain.⁴⁸⁰

Bacilly further specifies that some consonants should be pronounced such that the sounding of the vowel which follows them is postponed for some time. He names this concept “*gronder*” (from the verb “to growl”),⁴⁸¹ and he states that it is principally practised on the “m”, “n”, “j”, “s” and “v” when those consonants appear at the start, rather than in the middle, of a word.⁴⁸² All these consonants are, in modern phonetic terminology, considered voiced consonants owing to the fact that the vocal cords vibrate when they are sounded. The fact that they are voiced allows the singer or speaker to sustain these consonants over a period that is slightly more prolonged than usual in familiar speech before moving to the vowel, and this gives weight and intensity to the consonant in question and equally raises anticipation of the vowel that follows. Another consonant that may be subject to this practice is the unvoiced consonant “f” in the words “*infidelle*” and “*enfin*”. The singer should note that good judgement and taste must be used to assess whether or not the expression can support a suspended consonant. An actual emotion must be expressed by this device, Bacilly states. Words such as “*mourir*”, “*malheureux*”, “*misérable*”, “*volage*”, “*jamais*”, and “*non*” can support suspended first consonants, but when these words are used in a negative, their expression is diluted, such that it would be inappropriate to suspend the “m” on “*Je ne veux mourir ny changer*”, for example.⁴⁸³

Bacilly’s rules as to pronunciation of the “r” consonant are also subject to this mutable approach, depending on affect. Generally, Bacilly stipulates that the “r”, if between two vowels should be pronounced simply and in an unaffected manner.⁴⁸⁴ But if an “r” precedes or follows another consonant, it must be pronounced with a greater degree of force as if it were a double “r” or with even more intensity according to whether the word required “greater or less expression”.⁴⁸⁵ Further, generally speaking, an “r” which follows a consonant would be given less force than one which precedes another consonant, but this again depends on the affective connotation of the word. Bacilly cites the word “*cruelle*” as an instance in which the affective demand of the word would override this general rule.⁴⁸⁶ Bacilly’s general rules can also be overridden when the context and meaning of certain words require it. For example, because the expression in the following phrase is one of urgent questioning, the “r” must be given greater emphasis: “*Pourquoy faut-il, belle inhumaine?/ injure, invective, reproche*”.⁴⁸⁷ However, when an “r” that would receive

⁴⁸⁰ For the full list of words, see Bretteville, *L'éloquence de la chaire*, 479.

⁴⁸¹ *Gronder* is akin to the doubling of consonants which is described by Bérard and Raparlier. See Bérard, *L'art du chant*, 94; Raparlier, *Principes de musique*, 34. Lécuyer also refers to doubling of consonants. See Lécuyer, *Principes*.

⁴⁸² Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 307.

⁴⁸³ Bacilly, 308.

⁴⁸⁴ Bacilly, 291.

⁴⁸⁵ Bacilly, 292.

⁴⁸⁶ Bacilly, 292.

⁴⁸⁷ Bacilly, 293.

emphasis under the foregoing rules is used in a negative, the opposite is required, as in its negative form it connotes something less pernicious: “*Mon coeur ne sent plus de tourment*”, or “*Phylis n’est plus ingrate à mes desirs*”, or “*Elle a banny la cruauté*”.⁴⁸⁸ Other examples of when the affective meaning of a word is a more significant determinant of distinct pronunciation than grammatical rules is in the case of the “r” at the start of a word: words such as “*rigueur*” and “*revolte*” require more strength than words such as the more neutral words, “*réciter*”, “*ranger*”, “*rappeller*”, etc.⁴⁸⁹

5.3.5.6 Observance of rules of syllabic quantity

Another essential ingredient of distinct pronunciation was the need to observe the rules of syllabic quantity, as promoted by Antoine de Baïf in the sixteenth century. Baïf based his concept of *vers mesurés* or measured verse (and by extension, *musique mesurée*) on the distinction that exists in French prosody between distinctly long and short syllables. Bacilly, Mersenne, Le Faucheur, Jean Hindret, and Grimarest all built on this legacy, devoting considerable time in their treatises as to how to determine syllable length.⁴⁹⁰ Although there are subtle differences in terminology and some points of disagreement, there are basic concepts on which the theorists agree.

In brief, in French, syllables receive emphasis not through vocal accents or stresses, but through elongation. The accent is quantitative. There is a distinction in declaimed French between long, short, and in-between (and doubtful) syllables. Some syllables are by nature long, and their length cannot be changed. Although two or more adjacent long syllables were permitted, two or more adjacent short syllables were not allowed.⁴⁹¹ In some instances when necessary, therefore, whenever there were two or more short syllables placed consecutively, short monosyllables (as opposed to short syllables within polysyllabic words) could be converted into long ones.⁴⁹² Bacilly describes this process of converting short monosyllables into long ones through the principle of retrograde symmetry.⁴⁹³ The subtle adjustment of syllabic length which is achieved by applying this principle was thought to add clarity to the diction, forcing the orator to pause and lengthen syllables which may otherwise be jumbled together in rapid succession. The long syllables resulting from invoking symmetry would, along with other long syllables, be appropriate syllables on which to ornament.

⁴⁸⁸ Bacilly, 293.

⁴⁸⁹ Bacilly, 294–95.

⁴⁹⁰ The importance of observing syllabic quantity was referred to at least as late as 1772. See Raparlier, *Principes de musique*, 42. However, note that Raparlier, in contrast to Bacilly, devotes but one page to this topic.

⁴⁹¹ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 338–39, 351.

⁴⁹² Bacilly, 344.

⁴⁹³ In order to test if such conversion of a short monosyllable into a long syllable is required, the singer should start at the rhyme at the end of the poetic line and work backwards. Using the information as to syllabic length in part 3 of Bacilly’s treatise, the singer should identify the long syllables and ensure that there are no adjacent short syllables. If two adjacent short syllables are identified, the singer must convert the first short monosyllable encountered (always still working in reverse order) of any cluster of adjacent short syllables into a long syllable. See Bacilly, 338–55.

The proper observance of syllabic length was seen as essential by the theorists. Early on in the treatise, Bacilly describes this as the principal aim of his work,⁴⁹⁴ and there are numerous other examples throughout his volume attesting to the pedestal on which he placed the ability to discern and differentiate syllabic quantity.⁴⁹⁵ This attitude is echoed by other theorists, too.⁴⁹⁶

The idea was that the distinction between short and long syllables according to Bacilly's rules (including the rule of symmetry) should be observed by composers in setting lyric texts to music. In this way, short syllables should be assigned notes of short value, and long syllables (whether naturally long or whether converted into long syllables by the demands of symmetry) should be translated into notes, which, relative to the notes assigned to short syllables, are of longer duration.⁴⁹⁷

For Bacilly in particular, knowledge and observation of syllabic length was not only fundamental for composers in scanning and setting texts, but also for teachers and singers as well. Where composers have not set syllables in a manner which appropriately reflects their relative length, or equally, where the set, rhythmic patterns of a dance-form result in a short syllable falling on a beat which the form dictates should be a note of long value or vice versa, then Bacilly and Grimarest advise that the singer was obliged to "correct" these faults.⁴⁹⁸ There were two principal means to do this, both of which reflect the priority given to the words over the music. Firstly, where a short syllable had been erroneously set to a long note, that long note should be abridged by placing a rest either before it, or after it.⁴⁹⁹ Secondly, in the opposite case, where a long syllable has been incorrectly set to a short syllable, because of Bacilly's strict requirement that all long syllables should receive a long ornament (which is dealt with immediately below), it can be deduced that the singer should, in principle, place a long ornament on that note to indicate length in refutation of the short note value "wrongly" assigned to it by the composer. Such a strategy impacts on the rhythmic movement of the piece. When faced with the dilemma of choosing between the respecting of syllable length or notated rhythm, Bacilly is clear: at least in the case of an *air sérieux*,⁵⁰⁰ the rules for syllable length must take precedence.⁵⁰¹ Grimarest, too, echoes this sentiment in no uncertain terms. Using an example from Lully's *Atys*, he advocates that where a shorter syllable has been incorrectly set to a long note and the next note is a short note which has been assigned a longer syllable, the performer should in effect steal from the length of the first note and bestow some of that length on the second note.⁵⁰²

5.3.5.7 Ornamentation as a pathway to distinct pronunciation

⁴⁹⁴ Bacilly, 6.

⁴⁹⁵ See, for example, Bacilly, 90, 137, 244.

⁴⁹⁶ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 377; La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 346; Ménéstrier, *Représentations*, 146–47; Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 220–21; Bérard, *L'art du chant*, 49; Lécuyer, *Principes*, 23; Raparlier, *Principes de musique*, 42.

⁴⁹⁷ Masson, *Nouveau traité*, 26; Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 205; Ménéstrier, *Représentations*, 146; Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 415; Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 336–37.

⁴⁹⁸ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 331; Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 217.

⁴⁹⁹ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 123; This is to be compared with Mersenne, who, in *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 395, only refers to adding a rest before the long note which has been wrongly set to a short syllable.

⁵⁰⁰ Bacilly, by implication, defines an *air sérieux* as an air which is not based on a dance form. See 354.

⁵⁰¹ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 354.

⁵⁰² Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 218–19.

Vocal ornamentation and syllabic quantity were inextricably linked. For Bacilly, vocal ornaments did not simply relate to melody, but existed for the purposes of emphasizing the length of syllables.⁵⁰³ Since an ornament was an indicator of length, its absence or presence sent an important subconscious message to the listener, helping the listener untangle and make sense of the succession of words in a poetic line. Ornamentation, when applied based on the rules of syllabic quantity, was therefore an important tool in achieving clarity of pronunciation.

During the process of considering and applying Bacilly's long list of technical rules as to correct syllabic quantity and pronunciation, the singer or orator should not forget that the rules promoting distinct pronunciation ultimately existed for the purpose of delivering the affect of the composition. Syllabic quantity, as one of the determinants of when and how ornamentation was to be applied, was no exception; pronunciation which was made more distinct by the application of suitable ornaments on appropriate syllables enhanced affective representation by increasing the chances that the listener could readily understand those words. The easier it was for the listener to hear and understand the words or text, the more likely it was that he or she would be moved or persuaded by those words.

Rather than as a means of simply decorating a melody, vocal ornamentation was therefore a function of the declaimed, spoken word. According to Bacilly, if a syllable (either a monosyllable or a syllable in a polysyllabic word) is long (or converted into a long syllable by the principle of symmetry), it should be ornamented with an embellishment that appropriately signifies its length.⁵⁰⁴ If the syllable in question is a short syllable which is treated as a short syllable, it must not be ornamented at all.⁵⁰⁵ According to this view, ornamentation is an aid to achieving the brand of distinct pronunciation which Bacilly, Grimarest, and the other theorists under consideration advocate.

As has been shown in chapter 3, it was not common practice to print all the ornaments in a piece of music, and this is certainly the case in the airs of the *Recueils*, where a minimalistic approach in this regard is in evidence. The theorists can aid the singing orator in filling in these gaps, however; where no ornaments are marked, the singer can use the length of syllable in the word in question as one determinant⁵⁰⁶ of the ornament to apply.

Bacilly's rules as to which length of syllables can support certain ornaments are summarized below, and the reader should consult the third part of Bacilly's treatise which investigates syllable-length in great detail. All bracketed numbers refer to page numbers in Bacilly's *Remarques curieuses*.

⁵⁰³ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 101.

⁵⁰⁴ Bacilly, 335. At 362, Bacilly refers to this as an *obligation* to perform a long ornament, without any option or omission. This obligation exists even if the singer is obliged to slow down and break the metrical structure of the air. See further Bacilly, 106-108. Long syllables can also support the diminutions that would have been inserted into *doubles*. See further Bacilly at 219.

⁵⁰⁵ Bacilly, 353-54.

⁵⁰⁶ As will be demonstrated in section 5.4.1, choice of ornamentation should also be driven by affect.

Table 5.1: Ornaments appropriate to the various length of syllables

Length of syllable	Ornaments which may be used
Long syllables	<i>Accents</i> (189, 335, 361, 366, 371, 372, 379, 384, 408), <i>plaintes</i> (361, 372), long <i>tremblements</i> (170, 194, 335, 366, 371, 379, 384, 387, 408), <i>doublement de gosier</i> (366, 379), simply elongating the syllable will sometimes suffice for an ornament if there is no time to perform an actual ornament (379)
Semi-long syllables	<i>Tremblements</i> if performed as short as possible (384, 406, 408), <i>tremblements</i> (362), throat repetition (195, 337, 368, 406, 408), <i>doublement de gosier</i> (195), <i>accent</i> (362, 406), or repetition of the note (406)
Short syllables	No lengthening device should be added (353-354)

In the florid writing of the twenty-two *doubles* found in the repertoire studied, the above rules are somewhat different. In common with the tradition best represented by the *doubles* in the 1660 engraved collection of Michel Lambert, the elaborate *passages* for second and subsequent verses in the early *Recueils* often disregard the natural verbal rhythm of the text in favour of the music. The underlying harmonic framework may remain similar or the same, but the melody consists of written-out diminutions which dramatically increase the rate of rhythmic activity. Moreover, the writing is so florid that there seems to be little time or space in the music for the singer to add in further ornaments to demonstrate syllabic length and no latitude to “correct” the composer if he or she has written a long melisma on a short syllable. As had been Lully’s complaint with the convention, the poet is dominated by the musician in the case of the *double*.

Given this lack of real opportunity for the singer to make adjustments, he or she is reliant on the quality of the textual/musical setting ordained by the composer. Bacilly provides some rules, stating that the composer should observe syllabic quantity and write diminutions on long syllables, and avoid writing ornaments on the “u”, “i”, “o” and “ou” sounds.⁵⁰⁷

The singer attempting to improvise a *double* for him- or herself is faced with a challenging task. Not only would he or she have to take account of Bacilly’s compositional rules, avoiding the embellishment of certain syllables, but the performance of the *double* is in itself a highly-skilled affair. The natural inclination of the singer is to place “strong” words on “strong” beats, and when this sense of rhythmic and textual organisation is obscured by melismas or displacements of “strong” words to “weak” beats, good training and long practice is required – precisely what Bacilly prescribed.⁵⁰⁸

5.4 The singing orator’s affective tool kit: ornamentation, *accens*, breathing, and gesture as expressive tools for depicting a passion

The question at this stage of the process then becomes one of expression: how does the singing orator, using pronunciation which is proper and distinct, and observing syllabic quantity, represent or portray the passions, arousing these same passions in the listener?

⁵⁰⁷ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 226–28.

⁵⁰⁸ Bacilly, 26.

5.4.1 Ornamentation as a vehicle of affect

By subtly underlining different syllabic lengths, we have seen above that vocal ornaments, when correctly applied, constituted an aid to comprehension of the lyric text. Comprehension on the part of the listener was one of the factors considered essential for delivery of the affect of a piece.

The expressive timbre or sound of the ornaments themselves also played a significant role. Vocal ornaments were in fact considered to be mimetic of the emotional states which are represented or depicted during an oration, whether spoken or sung. The rapid alternation of pitches in a *tremblement*, for example, produces an effect which is redolent of trembling in the voice, which was considered a manifestation of the emotional state of desire.⁵⁰⁹ The slight elevation of the voice in the *accent* and the *plainte* is similar to the doleful, expressive sighing which characterizes the plaintive tones that one makes when experiencing suffering because of love or experiencing sorrow.⁵¹⁰ According to Mersenne,⁵¹¹ when the speaking voice is languishing, it produces a semi-tone, and this could be considered to be mirrored in the *port de voix*, which not uncoincidentally was identified as being suitable for the doleful expression of sadness and grief.⁵¹² Particularly in combination with the *accent* or *chûte*,⁵¹³ a properly executed *sanglot* with its “*aspiration violente*” produces an expressive sob which likewise evokes the plaintive tones which Grimarest specifies as appropriate to express love-sick suffering and sorrow.⁵¹⁴ By contrast, the *coulé* produces an easy, lilting musical effect, which mirrors the flattering and tender tone evocative of the sweetness of love and the soft, full, and easy tone which was thought to occur in the emotional state of joy.⁵¹⁵ The mimetic characteristic of sung ornaments is also evident in many of their names (such as “*tremblement*”, “*plainte*”, and “*sanglot*”), and the role of ornamentation in depicting an inner emotional state is experimented with and described further in chapter 7.

The theorists reviewed adopted a variety of approaches to vocal ornamentation. Bacilly’s discussion of ornamentation represents the most detailed and comprehensive exploration of this subject among the theorists and constitutes the first codification of this subject using French nomenclature. As well as a detailed description of each *agrément*, Bacilly attempts to elaborate on the aesthetic choices as to when certain ornaments should be used. Bacilly’s persistence in relating ornamentation to syllabic quantity accords him the pre-eminent position as promoter *par excellence* of the distinct pronunciation about which Grimarest and the other theorists were so uncompromising.

At the minimalist end of the scale, Pierre Berthet, a significant contributor to the *Recueils*, devotes but one page to this subject, setting out the symbols for a select number of vocal ornaments, and notating the pitches of the ornaments long-hand.⁵¹⁶ Montéclair’s primer, the *Nouvelle Méthode* of 1709, sets out in brief the name of the principal ornaments, and

⁵⁰⁹ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 147.

⁵¹⁰ Grimarest, 136 and 142.

⁵¹¹ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 371.

⁵¹² Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 201.

⁵¹³ Montéclair, *Principes*, 89.

⁵¹⁴ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 136 and 142.

⁵¹⁵ Grimarest, 142.

⁵¹⁶ Berthet, *Leçons de musique*, 47.

his 1736 treatise takes up this subject in greater detail, describing and notating examples,⁵¹⁷ affording the singer a visual demonstration alongside his narrative instructions. However, he does not define some of the sub-categories of ornaments as Bacilly does for the *port de voix*, for example. Although his writings make occasional reference to the affect which some of the ornaments portray, he does not elaborate on aesthetic choices or discuss syllabic quantity. His description of the ornaments also lacks detail as to how they should be timed, a fault which is not present in Bacilly.

In a treatise written many decades after the publication of the collection under study, Jean-Antoine Bérard's *L'Art du chant* presents yet another approach entirely⁵¹⁸ - a physiological description of the vocal ornaments and a mechanical description of the way in which the larynx and vocal cords should be manipulated to execute these ornaments. Bérard also includes extracts from operas, including Lully's *Armide*, with annotated ornaments,⁵¹⁹ which provide a direct glimpse of the likely practice of the time. In common with earlier writings, he states generally that the *agrémens* are the means of moving the passions, yet his treatise does not give details as to which ornaments are appropriate for representing the various affects.⁵²⁰ He does, however, state that the character of the words should determine the duration, energy, sweetness, and speed with which ornaments are sung.⁵²¹

The information in appendix 5 illustrates the ornaments which the theorists expressly refer to as being suitable for the depiction of various states of mind or for airs with specific characters.⁵²² Just how the performer can capitalize on the close bond between ornamentation and affect is explored in the case-study and practical analysis in chapter 7.

5.4.2 Accens

In addition to proper pronunciation and a knowledge of syllabic quantity, singers were required to have a knowledge of the *accens* and their effect in order to move their audience.⁵²³ Grimarest required all orators to have a "*parfaite connaissance*" of these matters,⁵²⁴ which for Mersenne gave an air a certain grace and animation.⁵²⁵ Knowing how to make appropriate use of *accens* was considered a skill required of every good orator for

⁵¹⁷ Montéclair, *Principes*.

⁵¹⁸ Controversy has surrounded the authorship of this treatise almost since its first publication in 1755, with Joseph Blanchet publishing a nearly identical book the following year. For the sake of brevity, references in this study to Bérard will be to the 1755 work purporting to be by Bérard.

⁵¹⁹ Annexure to Bérard, *L'art du chant*.

⁵²⁰ However, those sections of Bérard's work in which he annotates ornaments in operatic extracts of the time do provide some limited clues: Bérard provides a heading for each extract, such as "*Pour les sons étouffés*" or "*Pour les sons majestueux*", which may allow the singer to make general, basic connections between sounds and suitable ornaments.

⁵²¹ Bérard, *L'art du chant*, 136.

⁵²² As such, appendix 5 does not refer to all the ornaments examined by the theorists. Further, some of the information in the table may be useful for the de-coding exercise carried out in chapter 4. For example, if an *accent* has been noted by the composer, the singer may deduce that the composer was making a doleful expression of sadness or grief, or one of the other affects associated with that ornament, which may inform other aspects of his or her performance.

⁵²³ Preface to Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*.

⁵²⁴ Grimarest, 3.

⁵²⁵ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 372.

the purposes of persuasion – for priests as the “*ambassadeurs du ciel*”⁵²⁶ and for others who spoke in public.

The theorists trace the persuasive importance of the voice’s varying inflections back at least as far as ancient Greek theatre⁵²⁷ and Saint Augustine.⁵²⁸ According to Mersenne, the listener’s spirit and ears have a certain rapport with the speaker’s *accens*, which are capable of shaking or weakening the listeners, and which strike them in such a powerful way that the orator can take the listener exactly where he wants to.⁵²⁹ La Croix and Lamy write in the same terms, speaking of the different movements of the soul responding to different tones of voice.⁵³⁰ Sounds are highly evocative such that even animals understand and flee at the sound of a gruff tone, they explain. Similarly, animals can be tamed when spoken to sweetly⁵³¹ and trumpets and drums can make us think of war.⁵³² Le Faucheur also considers *accent* as a major persuasive tool, and says that without the inflections suitable to the subject and the passions,⁵³³ the effect that a speech should produce is compromised.

As for the definition of *accent*, Furetière suggests that it is:

*un certain ton de voix qui est souvent une marque de ce qu’on veut dire, qui en fait faire une bonne ou une mauvaise interpretation.*⁵³⁴

Mersenne defines *accent* generally as the orator’s manner of speaking⁵³⁵ or the inflection or modification of the voice of the words by which one expresses the passions and the affections.⁵³⁶ He states that the speaking and singing voice are subject to these inflections.⁵³⁷ Later he describes *accens* as a certain vigour and vehemence of the voice which carries the strength of a discourse into the mind of the listener.⁵³⁸

Accent therefore was a concept which corresponds loosely to the modern concept of “tone of voice”.⁵³⁹ Every sentiment, it was thought, had a tone of voice which was fitting to it.⁵⁴⁰ Words were considered to be the interpreters of the orator’s thoughts and the mirrors of the passions of the soul.⁵⁴¹ The inflection or the tone of the voice with which words were

⁵²⁶ Mersenne, IV, vi, part 2, 373.

⁵²⁷ Ménestrier, *Représentations*, 78.

⁵²⁸ La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 102.

⁵²⁹ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 373.

⁵³⁰ La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 102; Lamy, *La rhétorique*, 1678, 173.

⁵³¹ La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 103; Lamy, *La rhétorique*, 1678, 174.

⁵³² La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 459.

⁵³³ Le Faucheur, *Traité*, 83.

⁵³⁴ Furetière, ‘Dictionnaire Universel’, 1690. ‘A certain tone of voice which is often the mark of what one wants to say, which makes a good or bad interpretation of it’.

⁵³⁵ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 365, 366.

⁵³⁶ Mersenne, IV, vi, part 2, 366.

⁵³⁷ Mersenne, IV, vi, part 2, 366.

⁵³⁸ Mersenne, V, viii, 9.

⁵³⁹ *Accent* will be used interchangeably with “tone of voice” in this chapter, and is not to be confused with the concept of “*ton*”.

⁵⁴⁰ Lamy, *La rhétorique*, 1678, 289.

⁵⁴¹ Bretteville, *L’éloquence de la chaire*, 467.

uttered was an expressive tool which was called on to vivify the meaning of words and better depict the passion that the speaker was feeling or trying to move in his listeners.⁵⁴²

Knowing how to vary the voice according to subject matter was something that was considered to come naturally to humans. Many of the theorists make the observation that humans naturally speak one way when recounting joyful and pleasant events, for example, and another way when describing sad and doleful ones. Pronunciation, it was considered, should follow this natural inclination and the voice should be varied accordingly.⁵⁴³

Theoretical writings devoted much time to defining the passions and many writers examined the *accens* associated with the various passions. While there are many general overlaps in the thinking of the theorists, there is no absolute or neat unanimity to be discerned in their categorization of the passions and the various *accens* with which they were associated. Information drawn from the treatises dealing with the *accens* appropriate for representing the passions is set out in appendix 6 and includes a wide ambit of references, from Mersenne to Bérard.

As this chapter primarily deals with the practical question of how the singer, as an orator, should give voice to the affects embedded within the text and music, the most important information to be imparted on *accens* is of a practical nature: to what use can the spoken tones of voice be put when singing? Are the tones of voice described by the theorists an analytical tool or something to be used in performing? What tone of voice should the singer use when pronouncing these words on the pitches set by the composer?

From a theoretical point of view, Mersenne suggests that it should be possible to apply *accens* to whatever pitches are notated by the composer in the music (at least in relation to expressing anger), as Italian singers manage to express this passion with their vehemence and *accens*.⁵⁴⁴ Grimarest addresses the issue of the possibility of singing with *accens* expressly, and asserts that although one is duty-bound to the musical notations of the composer, the singer should nevertheless follow the *accens* prescribed.⁵⁴⁵ In the case of Grimarest, although his instructions as to tones of voice are to be found in the section of his treatise directed at spoken declamation and actors, he later clarifies that for actors who sing, all these same rules of declamation must equally be followed, notwithstanding that the performer is subject to the pitches pre-ordained by the composer.⁵⁴⁶ Singers must therefore respect the *accens* associated with the passion that they are evoking, and this advice is experimented with in chapter 7.

5.4.3 Expressing several passions together

According to Bacilly, rather than seeking to depict isolated words, when considering which *accent* is suitable for the depiction of the passion in a portion of texted music, the singer should generally consider the whole phrase or line.⁵⁴⁷ Grimarest is of a similar view, and

⁵⁴² Bretteville, 470.

⁵⁴³ See, for example, Bretteville, 466.

⁵⁴⁴ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 371.

⁵⁴⁵ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 221.

⁵⁴⁶ Grimarest, 222.

⁵⁴⁷ Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 121.

says that words by themselves do not express a sentiment. Rather it is the entire expression which counts.⁵⁴⁸

This may lead to the situation described by Grimarest, where one expression will evoke several passions together.⁵⁴⁹ In this instance, Grimarest gives no more detailed instruction than that the speaker must join up several *accens* so that the spectators can recognize the passions conveyed and be touched by them. He admits that few good actors are able to achieve such a subtle mingling of *accens*.

5.4.4 The natural and the artificial

There is room for confusion in the way the theorists write about *accens*. Are the theorists requiring the orator to simply select an appropriate tone of voice in order to produce a representation of a passion or should the orator, as a prerequisite, feel the passion within him- or herself, which will in turn naturally, inevitably, and without further prompting generate the appropriate tone of voice? This ambiguity between the natural and the artificial is reflected within Mersenne's very definition of *accent*, as:

*une inflexion ou modification de la voix, ou de la parole, par laquelle l'on exprime les passions & les affections naturellement, ou par l'artifice.*⁵⁵⁰

On the one hand, the language which dominates much of the writings on *accens* is prescriptive and suggest that the speaker seeking to express a particular passion can simply select the corresponding tone of voice "off-the-shelf" and speak with it, rather than the tone of voice being generated as a natural consequence of the passion felt by the orator.⁵⁵¹

There is a strong competing view. Le Faucheur asserts that the various tones of voice which the orator presents in order to move or persuade the listener should be reflective of the movements that the orator him- or herself feels inside. He states that words were given to us to be the interpreters of our thoughts and the mirror of our passions.⁵⁵² Therefore the speaker, according to Le Faucheur, must feel the passion him- or herself, as this then creates a physical reaction in the speaker which he or she can then pass more easily to the audience.⁵⁵³ As soon as it is genuinely shown in the eyes of the orator, it will pass to the eyes and souls of others.⁵⁵⁴ He states that nature is the best teacher in these matters and will produce the correct effect in the speaker when he or she truly feels similar passions. As with strings on an instrument which sound according to how they are touched, he explains that so too with the voice, if a speech proceeds from a vehement affection, it produces vehement pronunciation.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁴⁸ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 210.

⁵⁴⁹ Grimarest, 155.

⁵⁵⁰ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 366. 'An inflexion or modification of the voice or of the word, by which one expresses the passions and the affections naturally or artificially'. Emphasis added.

⁵⁵¹ See, for example, Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 136, 139, 142; Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 370.

⁵⁵² Le Faucheur, *Traité*, 90.

⁵⁵³ Le Faucheur, 203–4.

⁵⁵⁴ Le Faucheur, 209.

⁵⁵⁵ Le Faucheur, 113.

For Lamy and La Croix, between whose writings there is substantial overlap, speeches should not have too much artifice and affectation, as such speeches will never touch the audience. Both assert that sounds can excite the passions - each passion responds to a certain sound, which is capable of exciting in the animal spirits the movement with which that passion is connected.⁵⁵⁶ To paraphrase La Croix, speeches with too much artifice and affectation will not bear a resemblance to the animal spirits and therefore will never be touching.⁵⁵⁷ This impliedly refutes the notion that the speaker can simply select a tone of voice and hope to convincingly portray an affect.

Even much of Grimarest's and Mersenne's writings, despite elsewhere suggesting that the orator or singer can simply select a tone of voice, seem to ally with Lamy and La Croix. Mersenne says that *accens* come from nature but admits that they can either be natural or artificial (when the speaker is required to use an *accent* which is not natural to him or her).⁵⁵⁸

Grimarest does at one point seem to agree: simply elevating the voice is not enough.⁵⁵⁹ The speaker should show by the various tones of his or her voice the diversity of movements that are felt inside, in order to be able to excite the same in his or her auditors.⁵⁶⁰ Both Grimarest and Mersenne provide a description of how the passions manifest themselves in a speaker and the way that a particular passion will inevitably affect and colour the voice.

Finally, Grimarest confirms his preference for the natural over the artificial when he acknowledges that his critics might ask why he has to specify things like tone of voice, which should come from nature. Grimarest answers that it is exactly nature that his critics are ignoring.⁵⁶¹

5.4.5 Affect, *accens*, and the imagination

More than a mere elevation or lowering of the voice, *accent* was therefore a tone of voice which should be generated from within, from the passion which is experienced by the speaker at the moment of utterance. This is the ideal. How then should the speaker or singer deal with the situation when he or she does not necessarily experience simultaneously with the utterance the passion which is demanded by the text and/or the music? When the text and/or music demand the articulation or expression of a certain passion and the speaker or singer does not necessarily identify with that particular passion at that moment, how does the speaker or singer avoid falling into the trap of simply elevating or lowering the voice to mimic the physical manifestations of a certain emotional state?

The answer relies on an engagement with the imagination. According to Le Faucheur, in order for the speaker to feel the passion encoded in the text, he or she should follow the suit of actors in former times, who worked assiduously on developing and moving their

⁵⁵⁶ Lamy, *La rhétorique*, 1678, 174; La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 104.

⁵⁵⁷ La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 114.

⁵⁵⁸ Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle*, IV, vi, part 2, 367.

⁵⁵⁹ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 158.

⁵⁶⁰ Grimarest, 90.

⁵⁶¹ Grimarest, 157.

imaginings such that they could conjure up emotions and produce, for example, profuse tears on demand.⁵⁶² The most efficacious method of developing this skill, it was thought, was for actors to focus on real subjects in their own hearts, rather than the fictional subjects which they were representing on stage. One notable example of this approach which Le Faucheur cites relates to the great actor, Polus. In real life, having suffered the bereavement of his own son, Polus returns to the theatre playing the (female) role of Sophocles' Electra, for which he was required to carry the funeral urn and bones of his (her) stage-brother, Orestes. In order to make the stage portrayal more powerful, rather than carrying a mere prop, he decided to carry the very funeral urn and bones of his own deceased son on stage. This moved the actor to such an extent that he emitted cries and shed genuine tears, which engendered the same emotional reaction from the audience, who similarly wept with sorrow.

5.4.6 Breathing as an element of the depiction of a passion

A breath produces a hiatus in the sound, and the speed at which the orator or singer breathes and the location of these breaths within the poetic and musical line therefore help to create the rhythmic pace which was a highly potent tool in depicting and provoking different emotional states.

As well as contributing to expression, breathing was in fact an essential element of distinct pronunciation. According to Grimarest, the pauses generated by the singer taking a breath promoted clarity and he asserts that if they are not observed, the words will be barely intelligible.⁵⁶³ This view was echoed by Le Faucheur, who noted amongst other things that if there are lots of members, they should be distinguished by a small pause after each small period and a long pause after a long period.⁵⁶⁴ For La Croix, listeners experience several other things in pronunciation other than the sound of each letter, syllable, word, and expression – they hear silence or the repose of the voice at the end of words or sentences.⁵⁶⁵ The importance of silence to a piece of music was also recognized at the compositional level, with Charles Masson expressly articulating that silence was essential to give beauty and perfection to a piece.⁵⁶⁶ As with the other elements of affective delivery, the skill of knowing where to place and how to judge the length of repose at the points of respiration was said to be one which required study and practice.⁵⁶⁷

According to the theorists, primarily two factors are of importance in determining where the orator or singer should breathe and the permissible length of the hiatus which the breath produces: the grammatical accents at the caesura and rhyme, and punctuation. In the introduction to his first book of airs published by Ballard in 1691, Sébastien de Brossard addresses the question of where the singer should breathe, and specifies that this can occur wherever there is a rest, where the end of a word coincides with a dotted note, at the end of a poetic line or at the caesura. Breaths should never be taken in the middle of a word or during a cadence, unless performing a long *roulade* on that syllable. Brossard's airs in the

⁵⁶² Le Faucheur, *Traitté*, 205.

⁵⁶³ Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 44.

⁵⁶⁴ Le Faucheur, *Traitté*, 176.

⁵⁶⁵ La Croix, *Nouvelle méthode*, 649.

⁵⁶⁶ Masson, *Nouveau traité*, 119–20.

⁵⁶⁷ Le Faucheur, *Traitté*, 165.

1691 Ballard series are annotated throughout with a small “d”, which indicates where the singer should breathe.⁵⁶⁸ This breath indication reliably bears out Brossard’s written instructions in the introduction, with the “d” annotation appearing at the end of each poetic line, and also at the caesura within the line.

Michel L’Affilard undertook a similar exercise in the fifth edition of his *Principes très-faciles pour bien apprendre la musique*. This work redacts a number of L’Affilard’s airs (both serious airs and drinking songs) and, as explained in its Preface, L’Affilard has inserted a small “c” throughout these pieces to indicate where the breath should be taken.⁵⁶⁹ A review of the placement of the small “c” reveals the same logic at work in both L’Affilard and Brossard: the “c” indication specified by L’Affilard again reliably appears at the caesura and at the end of the poetic line.

In practice, although there may be exceptional cases depending on texts and musical settings, certain general assumptions can therefore be made from the above principles. Adopting the terminology relating to syllable count, the orator or singer can safely assume, for example, that the likely place for them to breathe will be after syllable six and after syllable twelve in an *alexandrine*. In a ten-syllable line or *commun*, the orator can expect to breathe after syllable four as well as at the end of the poetic line, and in an eight-syllable line, the breath would come either after syllable five or four (coinciding with the caesura) as well as at the end of the poetic line. As no caesuras usually occur in lines with fewer syllables than this, the orator or singer will ideally not breathe in these shorter lines.⁵⁷⁰ In effect, this emphasis on breathing at the hemistich and the end of the line accords with Raparlier’s more general advice written much later, which is that the singer should consult the sense of the words, paying the utmost importance to the construction of the phrases; one should only breathe when the sense of the words comes to a repose, as it naturally does at the end of the line and the half-line.⁵⁷¹

Brossard also sanctions breaths at rests and where the end of a word coincides with a dotted note. As is evident in the video examples, a poetic or vocal line which is broken up not merely at the hemistich and end of the line but also by further hiatuses caused by breathing will have a more hurried and less tranquil expression than a segment of text not broken up in this way.

Punctuation is the second factor which impacts on breathing, and by extension, expression. There was a hierarchy pertaining to the length of repose associated with the punctuation marks: the full-stop marks the longest pause, the colon requires a lesser repose, the semi-colon is greater than the comma but less than the colon, and the pause at the comma is almost imperceptible.⁵⁷² In the *airs sérieux* under study in the *Recueils*, as is typical of the genre, commas sometimes but not always occur at the end of each poetic line. At the end of

⁵⁶⁸ Brossard, *1er Livre d’Airs*, n.p.

⁵⁶⁹ L’Affilard, *Principes*, 6.

⁵⁷⁰ Despite his or her best intentions, the orator or singer may simply run out of breath, however. L’Affilard cautions that when one is short of breath, the pitch can lower and poor intonation can result. At page 6 of the Preface, he advises the singer to artfully avoid this.

⁵⁷¹ Raparlier, *Principes de musique*, 42.

⁵⁷² Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 44ff. Note that Grimarest’s discussion of punctuation also covers the exclamation mark and question mark, but these will not be examined insofar as they relate to the length of the repose caused by breathing.

the first half of the text, there is typically a colon, and certainly at the very end of the text there is either a full-stop, or, less frequently, a question mark. Further points of repose delineating the poetic feet within a line sometimes, but not always, coincide with a comma.

The orator who is practising aloud his or her declamation of the lyric texts in accordance with the teachings of the theorists, should be mindful of observing the differentiation in length between the various pauses produced by potentially pausing for breath at punctuation marks.

5.4.7 Gesture

Just as the *accens* were audible signs of the passions, gesture and facial expressions were the visual indicators of the commotions of the soul. However, French treatises which address gesture and the artful use of the hands, face, and body to incarnate the relevant passion are directed to the preacher and barrister⁵⁷³ or people who have to speak in public,⁵⁷⁴ rather than to the singer. Although one treatise is indeed written by a retired actor, Jean Poisson, it is nevertheless directed generally to the orator rather than actors or singers.⁵⁷⁵ As such, the question of how lyric and dramatic artists used their hands and bodies, and particularly as to how they moved on stage, remains a grey area.

The existing French handbooks addressing bodily comportment do provide detailed instructions to the preacher and barrister as to how to animate their speeches. Insofar as the function of gesture for these orators was to enhance the affective semiotic of their discourses, the common general themes which emerge from these works can equally be applied to singing and acting as a starting point from which to think about an approach to the visual portrayal of the passions: gesture must have a connection with the subject of the discourse, the passions expressed, and the figures in the discourse. It must not be affected or too studied, but natural and proportionate. The face is the part of the body most exposed to the listeners, and it must vary in accordance with the subject and passions.

Specific information on how stage and lyric actors used their bodies can be gleaned by examining frontispieces to operas and dramatic works, as has been carried out by John S. Powell.⁵⁷⁶ Le Brun's 1668 lecture⁵⁷⁷ on depicting the passions in the visual arts, although intended for the painter and sculptor, is also instructive to the singer and actor in reconstructing facial and eye expressions that would have communicated a direct affective signal to their audiences. In her book on *actio* and persuasion, Angelica Gooden demonstrates that actors in eighteenth-century France were encouraged to take paintings as their models for performance. Le Brun's doctrines thus found their way into the theory and practice of acting, too.⁵⁷⁸ Moreover, she notes that eighteenth-century acting treatises stated that their material was applicable to both the operatic and theatrical stage.⁵⁷⁹ For

⁵⁷³ Bretteville, *L'éloquence de la chaire*; Bary, *Méthode*.

⁵⁷⁴ Le Faucheur, *Traitté*.

⁵⁷⁵ Chaouche, 'Réflexions'.

⁵⁷⁶ Powell, 'Music and French Baroque Gesture'.

⁵⁷⁷ Le Brun, 'Conférence'.

⁵⁷⁸ Gooden, *Actio and Persuasion*, 9.

⁵⁷⁹ Gooden, 33.

these reasons, the descriptions and accompanying illustrations in Le Brun's *Conférence* were consulted extensively in my practical experiments in this study.

5.5 Conclusion

Mersenne's work and the first edition of Bacilly's treatise, two of the earliest sources reviewed in this chapter, do not specifically address the stage singer. Their instructions as to fully-affective vocal performance are aimed at a wider singing public. Later theorists continued their teachings and, in a similar fashion, did not seek to define their readership to one particular class of singer. Well may Bacilly's instructions have been considered best applied in practice by stage professionals and therefore have been associated with their mode of performance, but, put simply, Bacilly's views, the principal elements of which were taken up by singing, acting, and general music theorists well into the eighteenth century, were not intended only as something for the professional to embrace, but for anyone who wanted to learn the art of singing well.

The theorists reviewed in this chapter therefore form an apt starting point for anyone seeking to recreate this elusive art, from which we will later explore the salon modifications. The instructions set out above represent these ideal aesthetic and technical conceptions of singing as defined by seventeenth-century theoretical thought. In this conception, which has the singer as orator at its heart, the performer must know the passions, and must be able to incarnate them in his or her body and voice in order to be able to transmit them to his or her listeners. Given the abundantly-evident imperative for passionate representation and holistic portrayal of the affects in the text and music, the fact that the first singers of French opera were, famously, *comédiens*, is no idiosyncratic, historical coincidence. Well-developed acting skills were essential, and, as demonstrated both in this chapter and from a practical point of view in the challenges associated with the case-study in chapter 7, elements of performance (ornamentation, expressive pronunciation, tone colour, facial position, timing) are all interrelated and generated from the thoughts and imagination within. Emphasis was placed on declamation and "speaking" the pitches, not just by Grimarest, but by theorists as far back as at least Mersenne, and there were many tools at the singer's disposal.