Dramatizing Dido, Circe, and Griselda

GILLOT DE SAINCTONGE

Edited and translated by

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I came upon Mme de Sainctonge while looking for dramatizations of Boccaccio’s famous Griselda story (Decameron X, 10). Hers was so extraordinary that I became curious about who this woman was. I discovered that she was also the first woman to write opera libretti that were performed by the Paris opera company, known as the Royal Academy of Music. Besides that, she wrote the texts for music-and-dance entertainments for the courts of Paris, Lorraine, and Barcelona. From the first work of hers that we know was performed, in 1687, to the publication of her last play, the Griselda play, in 1714, her career spanned nearly three decades. Not only did she continue to write theatrical works for a longer time than other women of her era, she also started writing them at a mature age. The more famous Catherine Bernard began and ended her writing for the theater in her twenties; so too Catherine Desjardin. Marie-Anne Barbier was 32 when her first play was staged and continued writing into her forties. Mme de Sainctonge was 37 when her first piece was performed at court, in her forties when her Paris operas were performed, and in her sixties when her Diane and Endymion, written for the Duke and Duchess of Lorraine, played in Nancy and Lunéville and her Griselda appeared in print.

Very little has been written about her other than brief notices in some of the dictionaries of theater or of illustrious persons during the ancien régime. Without trying to claim undue greatness for her, I have found her writings and her career of sufficient interest to merit further attention, especially with regard to the work of women for performance in the early modern era. Moreover, anyone pursuing

versions of the Griselda story and curious about how a woman might treat this tale will find Sainctonge's play surprising and rewarding.

Readers may be struck by her independence of spirit. For example, she advises a widowed friend to avoid remarrying not on the grounds of piety, virtue, or reputation, but rather for the sake of enjoying one's liberty. She presents herself not as a writer of naturally tender self-expression nor merely an amateur writing for her own amusement and that of her friends, but explicitly as a detached and professional craftsman. All three of her major works for the stage—the two operas and the five-act drama—focus on women, whose names furnish the titles: Dido, Circe, and Griselda. These three women offer a strong and constant passion that contrasts sharply with the weak, vacillating, deceitful or self-deluded characters of their men. Males who normally appear as wise and virtuous heros—Aeneas, Ulysses, and Gualtieri—find their heroic status deeply undermined in her works. The plays are pervaded by a suspiciousness or cynicism about male attitudes and behaviors that makes even the villainous Circe ultimately win our sympathy. Finally, the Griselda drama offers also a positive community of mutually supportive women such as we seldom see in men's writing.2

The Context for Women's Theatrical Writing

“The seventeenth century produced eleven women dramatists,” writes Henry Carrington Lancaster; “None of them … wrote more than a modest number of plays, but they at least made it possible for women to have their productions accepted for performance at the Comédie Française.”3 We might say the same about Mme de Sainctonge's work with regard to the Paris Opéra, where she was the first woman to have

2. An exception that springs to mind is the medieval French Quinze joies de mariage, in which collusion among women is represented in negative terms, i.e. from the viewpoint of the bamboozled male.

her libretti performed. In her case, however, she seems to have remained unique for quite some time. Writing for the opera was apparently a harder field to break into than the theater of spoken drama.

The latter half of the seventeenth century was an especially good moment for women in theater, as it was for French theater in general. In the decade from 1655–64, Françoise Pascal in Lyons wrote half a dozen plays: three tragi-comedies and three farces; one of the tragi-comedies made use of the recently introduced possibilities for machine-based spectacle.1 1662 and 1665 saw the first female-authored dramas produced in Paris by professional actors: Catherine Desjardin’s Manlius and Le Favori. The success of this second play, performed by Molière’s company, caused it to become the first woman’s play given a command performance at the French court. In 1677, Anne de la Roche-Guilhen, a Huguenot who supported herself primarily by writing prose romances, composed a “comédie-ballet” for the birthday of the English King Charles II, who had been raised in France during the Puritan reign in England. Rare en Tout, a light play containing a number of songs in both French and English, is this woman’s only dramatic attempt.5

After the 1670s, when Molière was dead and Corneille and Racine had at least temporarily stopped writing plays, theater companies were looking for new writers. In 1680 Mme Deshoulier’s tragedy Genséric was a hit at the Hotel de Bourgogne; 1689 and 1690 saw the success of Catherine Bernard’s two tragedies, Laodamie and Brutus. Donneau de Visé, reviewing Brutus for the Mercure galant in December 1690, remarked, “Women today are capable of everything.”6

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6. “Les dames sont aujourd’hui capables de tout.” Cited from Mercure galant, December 1690, 287–89, by Nina Ekstein, “Appropriation and Gender: The Case of Catherine Bernard and Bernard de Fontenelle,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 30:1 (1996), 61. On the other hand, Marie-Anne Barbier, in the preface to her Arrie et Pétus, performed in 1702 and published in 1745, complains that men still consider women incapable of producing good work and therefore refuse to give women the credit they deserve. She cites contemporary examples to refute this lingering prejudice, including the theatrical writings of “Mme des Houlières”
So too with the death of both Lully and Quinault by 1688, the Royal Academy of Music was open to new talents. In 1694, the year of Mme de Sainctonge’s *Circe*, another woman, the musician and composer Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre, whose skill at playing the keyboard as a child of five had brought her to the attention of the court, composed the first French opera for which a woman had written the music; her *Céphale et Procris* was performed at the Académie Royale de Musique on March 15, between Mme de Sainctonge’s two operas. Both Jacquet de La Guerre and Gillot de Sainctonge had composed or written a pastoral entertainment for the king performed in 1687, early in their careers, and another pastoral for the Elector of Bavaria in 1712–1713. Moving in similar circles, and even living at times in the same neighborhood, with careers that spanned the same decades, they were undoubtedly aware of each other although there is no evidence of their interaction.

In the opening decade of the eighteenth century, Marie-Anne Barbier wrote four tragedies and a comedy; two of her plays were praised by the *Gazette de Rotterdam* as being on a par with those of Corneille and Racine. Her *Cornélie*, like Sainctonge’s earlier works, was dedicated to “Madame,” the Princess Palatine and Duchess of Orléans. Parfaict also attributes to Barbier three later ballets: *Les Fêtes de l’été* [Summer festivities] (1716), *Le Jugement de Pâris* [The Judgment of Paris] (1718), and *Les Plaisirs de la campagne* [Rural
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pleasures] (1719). Madeleine-Angélique Poisson Mme de Gomez wrote several tragedies, the first of which, Habis (1714), “was acted more frequently than any other tragedy of the period except for two by Crébillon and two by La Grange-Chancel.”

Mme de Sainctonge therefore did not need to feel that she was doing something bizarre or transgressive in offering and publishing her own contributions to court and city performances. Nonetheless, the variety and length of her career of theatrical writing—and its performance—exceeds that of previous French women and uniquely extends into the writing of libretti performed by the Paris opera.

In Noinville’s list of fifty-six librettists from the beginning of French opera into the mid-eighteenth century, she is the only female named.

While the seventeenth century saw a notable increase in publishing generally, and in writing and publishing by women as well, Seifert notes that the competition among writers for attention created “a backlash against women writers” during the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the very period when Mme de Sainctonge’s writing career began. And yet, “In the face of these concerted efforts to depprofessionalize and delegitimize them, women were publishing in numbers previously unknown.” As an increasing number of women entered the field of literary production in the last decades of the century, often writing for money, and sometimes even winning literary

12. Lancaster, Sunset, 80.
13. Other women named above, like Mme de Sainctonge, published volumes of prose narrative and poetry as well as drama.
prizes, the attacks against them became more strident. Writing too professionally, rather than merely for personal amusement, was seen as an unnatural overturning of clearly demarcated gender boundaries. “If we do not make order,” Chappuzeau protested anxiously in his *Académie des femmes*, “soon along with a book they will pick up the sword.” Boileau’s famous tenth satire, or “Satire on Women” (1694), berated women not only for the degeneration of literary taste but for the corruption of the entire social order. In his *Portraits* of 1699 Pierre-Jacques Brillon satirically represented the woman writer as a quarrelsome wife wanting to dominate her husband and ridiculed her for thinking her poetry to be good. Women not content to stick to the more feminine genres of lyric poetry and letters but daring to compete with men in the larger and more serious genre of tragedy—including the “tragédie lyrique,” as opera was called—would have been all the more threatening to the male sense of turf. The conflicted issue of women’s place in “public” and in the production of culture was difficult to ignore.

Nonetheless, the surprising thing about Mme de Sainctonge is precisely her sense of normality: her assumption that there is nothing problematic about her writing as a woman for the theater, that composers and choreographers will gladly work with her, that her pieces will be performed, and that the audience will be pleased. Obviously she had setbacks as well as successes and periods when her work was less in demand; however, her general tone of self-presentation is one of self-confidence. She feels no apparent need to defend or apologize for her writing nor to write merely for a theater

16. Catherine Bernard, Mlle L’Héritier, Mme Durand, Mme de Murat, all won prizes for eloquence or poetry in the last decades of the century, prizes which were celebrated in the *Mercure galant*. Bernard and L’Heritier each won three times.


of the mind. Rather, without being herself a part of the court, she had the satisfaction of knowing that over the course of many years choruses of singers, troupes of dancers, and stage machinery were realizing her work at the courts of France and Spain and in the opera house of Paris.

The Personal Context of Her Work

Family

Louise-Geneviève Gillot, Mme de Sainctonge (or Saintonge, or Xaintonge), was born and died in Paris (1650–March 24, 1718) to parents who prepared her way into a career of writing and publishing, and possibly provided connections to the theater. I have chosen to spell her name the way it appeared most often on her publications. She tended to publish as “Mme de Sainctonge” but to sign her dedications “Gillot de Saintonge” or “G. de Sainctonge.” Her mother, Louise-Geneviève de Gomès de Vasconcellos, was apparently born into a noble Portuguese family which, at the misfortunes of the Portuguese King Dom Antoine, had sought safety in France. In Histoire secrète de Dom Antoine, roi de Portugal, tirée des Mémoires de don Gomès Vasconcellos de Figueredo, Mme de Sainctonge claims that her maternal grandfather participated in the troubles of Dom Antoine, and that her history of this king is based on a manuscript found among her grandfather’s papers. She recounts how Dom Antoine, overwhelmed by the forces of Philip II, was forced to flee to France, and how her grandfather and

20. Margaret Cavendish, living on the continent with her husband during Cromwell’s regime, wrote and published two volumes of plays explicitly intended at best for reading aloud at home rather than for a performance on stage. Sophie Tomlinson emphasizes this quality of imagined performance in an article which takes its title from Cavendish’s own phrase: “My Brain the Stage: Margaret Cavendish and the Fantasy of Female Performance,” in Women, Texts and Histories 1575–1760, ed. Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (New York: Routledge, 1992), 134–63. In contrast, the printed volumes of Mme de Sainctonge proudly make explicit that many of her pieces were indeed performed.

21. So too Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre tended to sign her work “Jacquet de La Guerre,” using the same combination of maiden and married names (Cessac, 21).

his brothers joined him in Paris, hoping in vain to return some day to Portugal. Of her grandfather’s three children, all born and raised in Paris, only one girl survived, our writer’s mother, to whom her father was deeply attached. He saw her married before his death. Between 1678 and 1697, the mother wrote and published, sometimes under her maiden name and sometimes under her married name “dame Gillot de Beaucour,” half a dozen novels and, most famously, an abridged translation of Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso, L’Arioste moderne (Paris: Jean Guignard, 1685; reprinted 1720). Obviously she was fluent in Portuguese, French, and Italian; she made sure that her daughter received a good literary education.

The father of Mme de Sainctonge was Pierre Gillot, Sieur de Beaucour, a property which gave his wife her *nom de plume*. We know little about him, although Charles de Mouhy (3:272) comments that he was “well respected” [“fort estimé,”] whatever that might indicate. Several branches of the Gillot family could claim nobility; one of these came from Burgundy. In this line Jean Gillot, in the sixteenth century, had published a book on law. One of his sons, Jacques Gillot (d.1619) had become an intensely scholarly canon of the Sainte Chapelle in Paris, and a deacon to the members of Parliament; he published


24. Noinville’s *Histoire de l’Opéra*, 1.201, erroneously lists Pierre Gillot’s name as sieur de Beaumont. Parfait’s *Dictionnaire des théâtres de Paris* refers to him as Sieur de Dancourt or M. Dancourt, apparently confusing him with the theatrical family Dancourt (Paris: Rozet, 1767), vol. 5, “Sainctonge,” accessed online July 2007 at www.cesar.org.uk/cesar2/books/parfait_1767/display.php?volume=5&index=12); however, all other sources list him, under his wife’s biography, as M. Gillot de Beaucour, which accords with the name used by his wife.

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several books and corresponded with the humanist Joseph Scaliger. These might be the family of Pierre Gillot. Perhaps he or a son of his was the P. Gillot who published two odes, a sonnet, and a rather witty dialogue with the nymph of the Seine which comes close to the style of Mme de Sainctonge’s poetry. If so, she came from a thoroughly literary family with a tradition of education and publication.

Was her father related to Claude Gillot (1673–1722), famous for his pictures of and scenery for the theater and opera? Claude was drawing, printing, and painting images of actors and dancers in Paris during the same decades that Mme de Sainctonge was writing and publishing her operas, dramas, and ballets, i.e., the 1690s and early 1700s. However, he was not a native Parisian, and his involvement in designing for the Opera postdates Sainctonge’s operatic successes by nearly twenty years.

Was her father related in some way to the Gillot who is named in Soleinne’s Bibliothèque dramatique as the author of several Italian-influenced farces for the Fair of Saint Germain in 1695? Saintonge


27. Or perhaps it was her nephew. A Pierre Gillot, Sieur de la Fortiniere and Valet de Chambre of His Royal Highness Monsieur the Duke of Orleans, Regent of France, printed in 1723 an angry account of his fruitless efforts to obtain justice for his brother’s murder. Given Mme de Sainctonge’s connection to the mother of this Regent, her relative could have obtained a position in the same family.

28. La Seine, poème au sujet du feu d’artifice représenté devant le Louvre pour l’heureuse naissance de Mgr le Duc de Bretagne (Paris: D. Jollet, 1704) [The Seine, poem on the topic of the fireworks presented before the Louvre for the happy birth of my lord the Duke of Bretagne].


30. The Catalogue de la Bibliothèque dramatique de M. de Soleinne, ed. P. L. Jacob (Paris, 1844), 5.3, #3399: “Théâtre inédit de la Foire” includes: “L’Enlèvement de Proserpine par Pluton, roi des enfers,” “Polichinelle Colinmaillard,” “Polichinelle grand Turque,” and “Le Marchand ridicule,” all by Gillot and all dated 1695. The “List of Plays” at the end of Lancaster’s History includes these four unpublished works by Gillot (956–57); 934–36 discuss this manuscript and credit Paul Lacroix with the attribution. Polichinel, obviously derived from the Italian Pulcinella, is the main character in some of these farces; the “ridiculous merchant” and father was probably based on Pantalone. The manuscript of these plays is
refers to spending time at the home of a cousin in Saint Germain. Was this cousin the author? Or a family link to the painter, who lived not far from Saint Germain? There seem to have been several Gillots associated with theater during the lifetime of Pierre Gillot's daughter. This might help to explain Mme de Saintcounge's involvement in writing for the theater: opera libretti as well as dramas, “idilles” and ballets.

The daughter, confusingly named after her mother Louise-Geneviève, married Monsieur de Saintcounge, a lawyer in the parliament in Paris. Du Tillet describes him as a learned man who

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32. It seems impossible that she herself might have authored these farces. Her writing was aimed at the royal court and aristocracy. Moreover, the loose construction, primitive text, and crude nature of the farces is not at all like the careful construction and concern for proper good taste of Mme de Saintcounge's other theatrical writing. As the National Archives indicate, there were a number of different Gillot families in Paris at the time, ranging from aristocracy associated with the court and government to modest tailors and coal vendors.

encouraged his wife’s taste for “Belles-Lettres.” Like the Gillot family, the Saintonges had a claim to nobility, a link to Burgundy, and a long connection with law and the parliament. Several Saintonges had been members of the Parliament in Dijon from the time of Louis XII, and some continued to serve that Parliament during our writer’s lifetime. These Dijon connections became more patently important to Mme de Saintonge towards the end of her life, as we shall see.

Both the Gillot family and the Saintonge family had produced, over several generations, a number of notaries, lawyers, and counselors to the parliament or king. With its appreciation for the importance of education and writing skills, this is indeed the type of profession that had tended to support writing by women in their families since the late sixteenth century. Although both families included branches that had a claim to title of nobility, Mme de Saintonge offers no indication of her status. Nonetheless, it may be relevant to the tone of informal banter with which she addresses several marquises.

34. Titon du Tillet, Le Parnasse François, 563: “Mlle Gillot eut une excellente éducation, & fut élevée dans l’étude des belles Lettres, y étant portée par son goût naturel & par l’exemple de M. de Saintonge, Avocat au Parlement de Paris, homme de merite & d’érudition, avec qui elle fut mariée.” [Mademoiselle Gillot had an excellent education and was raised in the study of Belles-Lettres, being drawn to it by her natural inclination and by the example of M. de Saintonge, a lawyer for the Parliament of Paris, a man of merit and erudition, to whom she was married.] Noinville 1:201.

35. L’Abbé Jules Thomas, Un mot pour les Xaintonge (Dijon: Imprimerie Darantiere, 1912), 5. François Moureau, “Mme de Sainctonge,” 25, n32, cites from Philibert Papillon’s Bibliothèque des auteurs de Bourgogne (Dijon: Desventes, 1745), 2.359, the existence of a Pierre de Xaintonge active in the Burgundian parliament between 1615 and 1641. The manuscript collection of the BNF (Pièces orig. 2608, MF 20527) contains a certification of nobility for a Françoise de Xaintonge, son of Jean de Xaintonge, signed in Paris in 1600 but referring also to Dijon.

36. BNF manuscripts, Pièces orig. 2607, includes a Jacques Sainctonge, notary in 1599, a Girhosme de Sainctonge and a Jean de Saintonge, both counselors to the king in the seventeenth century. A Sainctonge, perhaps our writer’s husband, signed a printed legal document in 1682 (Factum pour messire François Galliot Gallard). BNF manuscripts, Dossiers Bleus 314 mentions several Gillots as counselors to parliament or lawyers.

37. For example, both the Des Roches, mother and daughter, and Moderata Fonte came from such families.
Mme de Sainctonge was buried in the church of St. Louis-en-l’Ile, on the Isle St. Louis. During the mid-seventeenth century this very small island in the Seine, next to the Ile-de-Cité in the heart of Paris, was newly developed into a few blocks of fashionable residences inhabited by a mix of nobility, lawyers, and bankers; presumably her family lived in one of those new residences. So too did Titon du Tillet, her earliest biographer, and Philippe Quinault, the chief opera librettist of the 1670s and 1680s, who is buried in the same church.

Apparently she had several children. As a result of the success of her opera *Dido*, the librettist was invited to dine at court, an event which she describes in a verse epistle. Since the epistle refers to “mes Filles” as having been invited with her, she had at least two daughters, whose ages were probably at that time close to twenty. She mentions in the same poem that her brother-in-law also accompanied her. However, as she does not mention her husband being included on this occasion, she may have been widowed by then (1693), which would explain the presence of her brother-in-law as the male protector of her family. On the other hand, she also does not mention her son being included, although Louis Ladvocat in a letter two years later (1695) refers to her having a son. Marriage and children may explain why she was mature—a woman in her forties—when her literary career began in earnest; and if her husband was dead, she may have begun writing because she needed money, like other women writing for the theater in France.

38. Unfortunately the old cemetery has been destroyed, and there is no marker in the church.
39. Poésies diverses 1.64. Mme de Sainctonge was then 43.
41. Both Marie-Catherine Desjardins de Villedieu, whose plays were performed during the 1660s, and Catherine Bernard, whose dramas of 1689 and 1691 are nearly contemporary with Sainctonge’s, were writing at least in part because of financial need. Claude Dulong, La vie quotidienne des Femmes au Grand Siècle ([Paris]: Hachette, 1984), 11–12, observes that “nothing prevented a woman of quality, if she had leisure and some education, from writing and publishing. But, again, it was at the risk of her reputation…The women writers, quite numerous, of the second half of the century…were almost all adventurers…whom sudden poverty compelled to earn their bread as best they could.” [“rien n’empêchait une femme de qualité, si elle avait des loisirs et de l’instruction, d’écrire et de publier. Mais, là encore, c’était...
The first work of hers which we can date is a pastoral “Idyll sung in the [royal] apartments for the King’s return to health” [“Idille chantée aux apartemens sur le Retour de la Santé du Roi”]. When King Louis recovered from a serious illness in 1686–87, a number of poets and musicians offered their expressions of joy. This is the first of Mme de Sainctonge’s texts to be performed at court. The composer is not named, but Michel Antoine suggests that this was already a collaboration with the Henry Desmarest with whom Mme de Sainctonge would have a long professional relationship. This may have been the beginning of their work together, but how they became connected remains uncertain. The work must have pleased the king, for she later reminded him of it. Obviously pursuing her connections with the court, she wrote in the following year an “Idyll for Monseigneur [the Dauphin] au risque de sa réputation. … Les auteures, assez nombreuses, de la deuxième moitié du siècle,…étaient presque toutes des aventurières…que leur soudane pauvreté contraignait à gagner leur pain comme elles pouvaient.” As a bourgeoise, Mme de Sainctonge had less to worry about with regard to losing social status, although she was still subject to the usual social anxieties about women turning unbecomingly professional.

42. Poésies diverses, 1.95–106.

43. The best work on Desmarest is the biography by Michel Antoine, Henry Desmarest (1661–1741) biographie critique (Paris: Éditions A. et J. Picard & Cie, 1965), which also contains the most extensive list of the composer’s works. Contemporary spellings of the composer’s name included: Desmarests, Desmarestz, Desmarets, Desmaretz, Desmarais, des Marets, Démarets, des Marais. For Antoine’s speculations that Desmarest set Mme de Sainctonge’s text for the king’s recovery, see p. 39.

The king’s recovery from a dangerous surgery in 1686–87 evoked many expressions of thanksgiving. Charpentier, a lifetime friend of Desmarest, similarly composed an “Idyll on the convalescence of the King” [“Idille sure la convalescence du Roi”]; and Charpentier’s “Idyl” similarly made use of a text by a woman, in this case a poem on the king’s health by Mme Deshoulières which had already appeared in the Mercure galant. Patricia Ranum, Portraits around Marc-Antoine Charpentier (Baltimore: Dux Femina Facti, 2004), 420, 569–70, observes that it is “highly unlikely” that Charpentier would have approached the poet “on his own initiative” as he was working in the service of the princess Mlle Marie de Guise, who requested this composition on behalf of Mme Isabelle de Guise for a party the latter was planning to celebrate her cousin the king’s recovery. This raises the question of who might have approached Mme de Sainctonge for a text on this occasion, a question which I cannot answer.
on the Capture of Philisbourg” (1688), but as she does not indicate that this one was performed, it probably was not.

Her first major success was the libretto for the opera Didon [Dido], composed by Desmarest and performed by the Royal Academy of Music, opening in September 1693. She followed this success swiftly with the Circé [Circe], first performed in October 1694, again with music by Desmarest. Temporarily thwarted in his hopes for a better post at court, Desmarest was in his early thirties when he composed Sainctonge’s two operas. The composer, who had been a musician for the court since boyhood, when he had sung in the royal chapel choir, and who had been composing for the court so far mostly religious music, was launching his opera career at the same time as the librettist. The death in 1687 of Jean-Baptiste Lully, who had held

44. “Idille pour Monseigneur [le Dauphin] sur la Prise de Philisbourg,” Poésies diverses, 1.137–45. The capture of Phillipsburg was part of a long French campaign against the Habsburg Emperor. As the Dauphin’s first involvement in military action, it was celebrated by writers and composers far beyond any real contribution of the prince to this event. For a description of some of the celebrations, see Robert Isherwood, Music in the Service of the King: France in the Seventeenth Century (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 264.


46. These two operas are his first two works recorded in Lavallière, Ballets, Opéra, et autres ouvrages lyriques, 30; and Donald Jay Grout. A Short History of Opera (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947, repr 1964), 144, names the Dido as the beginning of his career. However, David Mason Greene, Greene’s Biographical Encyclopedia of Composers (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 186–87, notes that he had tried his hand at opera once before, with an unsuccessful and now lost Endymion in 1682. Antoine’s thorough scholarship (Henry Desmarest, 36–37), indicates that the Endymion was given only private performances in the royal apartments at Versailles and never appeared on the opera stage. In this private manner, the Endymion was performed twice in a row in February-March 1686, according to the Journal du Marquis de Dangeau (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, Fils et Cie, 1854), I, 298, 300, 307; on at least the first occasion the performance was spread across several days, two acts at a time. See also W. S. Brooks and P. J. Yarrow, The Dramatic Criticism of Elizabeth Charlotte, Duchesse d’Orleans, With an Annotated Chronology of Performances of the Popular and Court
a tight monopoly on opera, had at last opened the field for other composers to try their hands.

Both the *Dido* and *Circe* were published in the year of their performance by the Parisian publisher Ballard, and a year later in the *Recueil général des opéra représentez par l’Academie royale de musique*, volumes 4 (1694) and 5 (1695).47 The *Dido* was successful enough to have another performance in 1696 in Lyon, a 1701 performance in Strasbourg, and a Paris revival in 1704.48 It even won Mme de Sainctonge an invitation to the palace to present a copy to the king, an event she described as the high point of her life.49

Parfaict’s *Dictionnaire* lists the singers and dancers for both the 1693 and 1704 performances of *Dido*.50 Guillaume-Louis Pecour was the choreographer for the Royal Academy of Music, after a long career as a dancer admired at court as well as in town; he would have been the choreographer for Sainctonge’s operas.51 Jean Berain was the costume and set designer for all the Academy’s operas from 1680 until his death in 1711.52

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47. They were reprinted in the 1703 volumes of the *Recueil général des opéra représentez par l’académie royale de musique, depuis son établissement* (Paris: Cristophe Ballard, 1703), vols. 4 and 5. The *Dido* was published also in Amsterdam: by Vuolfgang, 1699, and by A. Schelte, 1700; A. Schelte also printed the *Circé* in Amsterdam, 1695.


49. See the verse epistle published in her *Poésies diverses*, 1.61–65. In re the presentation copy, see the introduction to *Dido*.


52. Jerôme de la Gorce, *Berain Dessinateur du Roi Soleil* (Paris: Herscher, 1986). Many of Berain’s designs can be seen in the chapter on opera, 66–103; p. 75 shows the final set for
The librettist was not well known at the opening of her *Dido*, but the success of this opera provoked curiosity about her. Thus the Marquis de Dangeau in his journal on September 15, 1693, wrote:

Monseigneur [the Dauphin] went to dine in Paris at the home of Monsieur [the king’s brother] with my lady the Princess of Conty; afterwards he gambled, and then heard the opera *Dido*; the music is by the little Marais, and it is a woman who wrote the words.

Her gender deserved note as she was the first female librettist to have her work performed by the Paris opera. A year later, on November 11, 1694, the Marquis had learned more about her:

Monseigneur went to Paris to the opera *Circe*, a new opera for which the little Desmarets has made the music and for which the wife of a lawyer, named Mme de Sainctonge, has made the text.\(^53\)

The *Gazette d’Amsterdam* (or *Nouvelles extraordinaries de divers endroits*) of November 18, 1694, printed a letter from Paris dated November 12, which similarly observes:

The Dauphin came here yesterday to see a new opera called *Circe*, which was shown for the first time; the words are by Mademoiselle Saintonge, wife of a lawyer in this city, and the music is by Monsieur Desmarets.

We can see that the attendance by the crown prince attracted attention and made the opera newsworthy. According to a letter by Louis Ladvocat written on December 9, 1694, Monseigneur had within a month gone to see and hear *Circe* no less than five times. It was quite common for people to hear an opera repeatedly, and the Dauphin was an enthusiast for opera. Nonetheless, five times in one month suggests

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