When the new year of 1777 broke upon Paris, the writer and Académie française member Jean-François Marmontel unexpectedly and repeatedly found himself the target of anonymous ridicule and sarcasm in the new *Journal de Paris*, the first daily newspaper to be established in France. This incited the quarrel between the Gluckists and the Piccinnists, in which the former used the power of a daily paper with no competitors to bar from the Paris Opéra any challenge to Gluck’s domination — an unusual episode to be treated in a Royal Musical Association Monograph. Its events inspired Marmontel’s epic poem *Polymnie*, most of which he declined to publish until after his death because it involved recognizable personalities. The first four cantos, published in 1787, concern only historical personages and aesthetic principles of opera. While modern reference works have labeled *Polymnie* a ‘satire’, it is instead an accurate rendering of events that can be documented.

As the librettist for the Italian composer Niccolò Piccinni’s first Paris opera *Roland*, Marmontel undoubtedly learned much about Italian opera and its leading figures, conveying it in two cantos of *Polymnie*. The work is named for one of the nine muses Polyhymnia, goddess of song and inventor of harmony, and relates her efforts on behalf of a natural, unaffected style of song and singing. When Marmontel contrasts Neapolitan composition with music having different traits, it is an oblique reference to Christoph Willibald Gluck’s operas for Paris. In 1773, another well-known figure, Charles Burney, also commented on the difference between the music of Johann Adolph Hasse, who composed in the Neapolitan manner, and that of Gluck’s new style:

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If the affected French expression of *le grand simple* can ever mean anything, it must be when applied to the productions of such a composer as Hasse, who succeeds better perhaps in expressing, with clearness and propriety, whatever is graceful, elegant, and tender, than what is boisterous and violent; whereas Gluck’s genius seems more calculated for exciting terror in painting difficult situations, occasioned by complicated misery, and the tempestuous fury of unbridled passions.

From many descriptions in Paris sources of the time, it is evident that Gluck’s operas depended upon stupendous effects, using astonishing volume and force for certain scenes. Accounts tell of singers spitting blood from the demands. The ‘harshness’ that Marmontel occasionally mentions refers to an overuse of what was literally screaming. While this was a great crowd attraction, informed connoisseurs reacted much as we would. In portions of the second canto, Polymnie conveys her artistic principles:

Dès ce moment, elle fit ses délices
D’habiter leurs voix encor novices
A ce beau son, qui de l’âme exhalé,
Egal et pur comme un trait de lumière,
Devient un chant dès qu’il est modulé,
Sans perdre rien de sa clarté première.
Jamais de cris, même dans les éclats;
Jamais d’effort, la grâce n’en veut pas.
Un naturel toujours simple et facile:
L’art nous déplait dès qu’il est indocile.
Peu d’ornements; la naïve beauté
Disparaîtrait sous un luxe affecté.
Jamais le chant n’est que l’accent de l’âme;
Si de l’amour il imite la flamme,
Il en aura la brûlante chaleur.
Vif et léger quand la gaieté l’anime,
Dans la colère éclatant et sublime,
En gémissant il peindra la douleur;
Ainsi, toujours, de nuance en nuance,
Du doux au fort passant avec aisance,
Des passions il prendra la couleur.

From this moment, she delighted
In accustoming their still inexperienced voices
To this beautiful tone, which, sent forth from the soul
Even and pure like a beam of light,
Becomes a song when varied in pitch,
Without losing any of its original clarity.
Never any screams, even in bursts of passion;
Never any exertion, for grace does not permit it.
A natural song, always simple and facile:
The art displeases us as soon as it is complex.
Few ornaments; the innocent beauty
Would disappear under an affected extravagance.
Never is song only the soul’s accent;
If it imitates the flame of love,
It will have its burning heat.
Quick and light when gaiety animates it,
In anger magnificent and exalted,
In lamentation portraying sorrow;
Always so, from nuance to nuance,
Passing from soft to loud with ease,
It will take on the hue of the passions.

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2. **Burney** 1959, p. 120.

3. **Kaplan** 1984, p. 66. The prose translation is my own.
Marmontel/Piccinni on Neapolitan Opera

Gluck’s reform operas centered around declamation, which is inimical to symmetrical structure and, consequently, to melody. Therefore, they conveyed nearly the impression of a continuous recitative. According to Gluck’s supporters, melody was appropriate in concerts, but not for the Opéra⁴. Today this element of musical structure is described as a musical statement terminated by a cadence or built of complementary members, each generally two to eight bars long and respectively called ‘antecedent’ and ‘consequent’. A musical period has been compared with a sentence, or period, in rhetoric. […] Symmetry provides another defining element in period structure. Complementary figures and phrases establish a regular pattern of movement that allows the listener to anticipate the final point of arrival in a self-contained unit⁵.

Beautiful melody, made possible by period structure, is the object when Polymnie pins her hopes for a new age in opera on the Italian composer Leonardo Vinci (c1696-1730), instructing him that her art can be compared to the workings of nature⁶:

Il en est un qu’a choisi Polymnie,  To animate it with his creative fire:
Pour l’animer de son feu créateur: ‘Come, she told him, and hear me in silence;
‘Viens, lui dit-elle, et m’écoute en silence;
‘Heureux Vinci: tu seras inventeur; ‘Blessed Vinci: you will be an inventor;
‘Et c’est par toi que mon règne commence.’ […]
‘Lorsqu’à tes yeux, la rose, ou l’anémone ‘And it is with you that my reign commences’ […]
‘S’épanouit; quand les dons de Pomone, ‘Opens, when the gifts of Pomona’,
‘Le doux raisin, la pêche au teint vermeil, ‘The sweet grape, the peach of rosy hue,
‘Sont colorés aux rayons du soleil, ‘Are colored by sunbeams,
‘Tu crois jouir de la simple nature? ‘Are you persuaded to delight in simple nature?
‘Apprends, mon fils, que la fleur, que le fruit, ‘Learn, my son, that the flower, the fruit
‘Tient sa beauté d’une lente culture; ‘Obtains its beauty from a slow culture;
‘Que la nature a d’abord tout produit, ‘That nature at first produced everything
‘Négligemment comme le fruit sauvage, ‘As if by chance, like the wild fruit,
‘Comme la fleur des champs et des buissons; ‘Like the flower of the fields and bushes;

⁴. Hence they ridiculed Marmontel’s brief treatment of period structure in his scholarly Essai sur les révolutions de la musique en France.
When addressing Vinci, Polymnie cites the need for a rhythmic pulse, which, from all reports, was scarce at the Paris Opéra:

‘Imite-moi; sous un orme où l’on danse,  
‘Tu vois souvent Philémon et Baucis  
‘Sauter ensemble! Un pas lourd, mais précis,  
‘Marque le nombre, et note la cadence.  
‘Ce mouvement, dans le son de la voix,  
‘A pour l’oreille un attrait qui l’enchante.  
‘Dans ses forêts le sauvage qui chante,  
‘Fidèle au rythme, en observe les lois.  
‘Tel est le chant, même dès sa naissance;  
‘Et garde-toi par l’erreur aveuglé,  
‘De lui donner un moment de licence;  
‘Comme un pendule, il doit être régé.  
‘Et la mesure en est l’âme et l’essence.  
‘Ce n’est pas tout: suspendus à-propos,  
‘Ses mouvements sont méles de repos.  
‘Ainsi les sons, liés en période,  
‘Auront leur cercle aussi bien que les mots;  

‘Imitate me; under an elm where they dance,  
‘You often see Philemon and Baucis’  
‘Leap together! A heavy step, but precise,  
‘Marks the number and observes the rhythm.  
‘This movement, in the sound of the voice,  
‘Has for the ear a charm that enchants it.  
‘In his forests, the native who sings  
‘Rhythmically true observes its laws.  
‘Such is song, even from its birth;  
‘And beware the blind error  
‘Of giving it a moment of license;  
‘Like a pendulum, it should be steady;  
‘And regularity is its soul and essence.  
‘That is not all: suitably interrupted,  
‘Its movements are mixed with repose.  
‘Thus the tones, linked together in a period,  
‘Will have their circle in the same way as words;

After Jupiter and Mercury had been refused hospitality everywhere, Philemon and Baucis entertained them. When the gods asked if they had a request, they replied that they would wish to die at the same time. In old age, Philemon became an oak tree and Baucis a linden. The ‘heavy’ step Marmontel attributes to them indicates great age, which, however, does not interfere with the intrinsic rhythm of the dance.

The desire for rhythmic regularity does not imply modern rhythmic steadiness, for it emanated from a context in which no musical pulse whatever could be detected. In a *Lettre à M. Diderot* (1767), Pascal Boyer critiques singers who took extra time to insert ornaments and various effects — embellishment that was called *goût de chant*:

Those who execute vocal music in what has succeeded in being called *goût de chant* do not need to know how many beats to make in each measure. The number of notes comprising the beats causes them no difficulty, for they proceed from one beat to another only when they have comfortably finished everything they wanted to say in one beat.

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8. *Boyer* 1767, 55f.: «Ceux qui exécutent la Musique vocale, dans ce qu’on est parvenu à appeler le *goût de chant*, n’ont besoin que de sçavoir à combien de tems il faut battre chaque mesure: le nombre des notes qui composent les tems ne fait pas une difficulté pour eux, puisqu’ils
To the modern musician trained with the metronome from an early age, it is difficult to imagine the rhythmic problems that occurred before this device existed and became widely adopted for training in rhythmic accuracy (toward the twentieth century). Early writers did not want a mechanical execution of the notes, but one in which a pulse can be felt even when bending the line.

According to Polynmie, beautiful melody, for which only a few composers have the gift, is the hallmark of the style to be prized:  

‘Et mon enfant, laisse dire les sots:  
‘Comme l’esprit, l’oreille a sa méthode.  
‘On préte qu’un style mutilé,  
‘Dur raboteux, dissonant, ampoulé,  
‘Au naturel est un chant qui ressemble.  
‘N’en crois jamais que l’oreille et l’instinct,  
‘Qui d’un chant pur, analogue et distinct,  
‘A préfére la rondeur et l’ensemble;  
‘Le grand problème et l’écueil de mon art,  
‘C’est le motif, c’est ce coup de lumière,  
‘Ce trait de feu, cette beauté première,  
‘Que le génie obtient seul du hasard:  
‘Un long travail peut donner tout le reste.  
‘Par des calculs on aura des accords;  
‘Avec du bruit, on remuera les corps;  
‘Mais la pensée est comme un don céleste,  
‘Je la réserve à mes vrais favoris;  
‘Je te la donne, à toi que je chéris.  
‘Un maladroit quelquefois la rencontre;  
‘Mais il la gâte ou la laisse échapper;  
‘L’esprit, le goût, l’habileté se montre  
‘Dans le talent de la développer.  
‘D’un dessin pur l’unité variée,  
‘Un tour facile, élégant, arrondi,  
‘Un essor libre et sagement hardi,  
‘Et la nature avec l’art mariée:  
‘Voilà le chant par les dieux applaudi.’  

‘And, my child, let the foolish say:  
‘Like the spirit, the ear has its method’.  
‘One will claim that a disfigured style,  
‘Harshly rough, dissonant, bombastic,  
‘Is a song resembling the natural.  
‘Never believe that the ear and instinct,  
‘For a pure, analogous and clear melody  
‘Has preferred fullness and mass;  
‘The great problem and stumbling block of my art,  
‘Is the motif [design or melody], this stroke of light,  
‘This dash of fire, this foremost beauty,  
‘That genius obtains only by chance:  
‘A long period of work can furnish all the rest.  
‘By calculations one will have some chords;  
‘With loud sounds, one will move the body;  
‘But conception is like a celestial gift,  
‘I reserve it for my true favorites;  
‘I give it to you, to you whom I cherish.  
‘Sometimes a clumsy person hits upon it;  
‘But he spoils it or lets it escape;  
‘Spirit, taste, skill appear  
‘In the talent to develop it.  
‘The unity varied by a pure design,  
‘A facile turn, elegant, rounded,  
‘A free flight and discreetly bold,  
‘And nature joined in wedlock with art:  
‘There you have the song the gods applaud.’

A reference to music that overwhelms the senses; it speaks to the ear, instead of the spirit.

Polynmie wants to avoid effects designed to capture audience attention by their high volume and bombast — characteristics of both traditional French
opera and Gluck’s operas for Paris. While the Baron Friedrich Melchior von Grimm, a German critic residing in Paris for many years, admired nearly all aspects of French culture, he found the tragédie lyrique disappointing (1764):

Rameau added orchestral accompaniments nearly everywhere in these récits. It is true that they are of poor enough taste, that they nearly always serve to suffocate the voice rather than support it, and that they have forced the singers at the Opéra to thrust out these screams and bellowings that are the torment of refined ears. One leaves a Rameau opera drunk with harmony and stunned by the noise of the voices and instruments.\(^{10}\)

In eighteenth-century performances of Rameau’s and Gluck’s music, audiences heard something quite different from today’s refined interpretation, which is made possible by our greatly advanced period instruments and technique. Connoisseurs at the time were aware of improvements that could be made by uniting the best features of both Italian and French opera.

In the third canto, Polymnie sees her hopes for a new age brought about by Vinci dashed by a man-made disaster.\(^{11}\)

Dans le délire où son âme est ravie,  
Vinci compose, et ses brillants essais  
Vont s’élevant de succès en succès.  
C’en fut assez pour désoler l’Envie:  
Car elle hait tous les biens de la vie.  
Tous les heureux le sont à ses dépens;  
Elle frémit, irrita ses serpents,  
Les fit siffler, parcourut l’Italie,  
De tous côtés souleva des Jongleurs,  
Des bateleurs et de vils cabaleurs;  
Mais en tout lieu rebutée, avilie,  
Et se lassant d’un inutile effort,  
Elle s’adresse à l’ange de la mort.  
Cet ange est sourd d’une oreille; et de l’autre  
Il n’entend rien que les voeux des méchants.  
Dur à la plainte, il méprise la vôtre,

In the frenzy with which his soul is carried away,  
Vinci composes, and his brilliant endeavors  
Are going to mount from success to success.  
That was sufficient to torment Envy:  
For she hates all good things of life.  
All the fortunate will have to pay;  
She trembles, provokes her serpents,  
Has them hiss, traverse Italy,  
On every side excites some tricksters,  
Some mountebanks and vile intriguers;  
But everywhere rebuffed, disgraced,  
And tired of useless effort,  
She appeals to the angel of death.  
This angel is deaf in one ear; and in the other  
Hears nothing but the desires of the wicked.  
Merciless to plaint, he scorns yours,

\(^{10}\) Grimm 1877-1882, vol. vi, p. 88 (October 1764): «Rameau ajouta presque partout à ces récits des accompagnements d’orchestre. Il est vrai qu’ils sont d’assez mauvais goût; qu’ils servent presque toujours à étouffer la voix plutôt qu’à la seconder, et que c’est là ce qui a forcé les acteurs de l’Opéra de pousser ces cris et ces hurlements qui font le supplice des oreilles délicates. On sort d’un opéra de Rameau ivre d’harmonie, et assommé par le bruit des voix et des instruments».

\(^{11}\) Kaplan 1984, p. 70f.
Something nefarious seems certain. As the Rome artist Pier Leone Ghezzi’s caricature of Vinci (1724) declares: «He died in Naples on 28 May 1730 on Sunday at the 17th hour, from a colic pain in an instant, without even being
able to confess. In his *Lettres familières* (1739/1740), Charles de Brosses reports hearing gossip during his travels that Vinci was poisoned because of an affair with a woman. Now Polynnie must choose Vinci’s successors:

Comme la muse, en montant sur sa nue,  
Allait chercher quelque rive inconnue,  
Où le talent ne fit point de jaloux,  
Deux écoliers embrassant ses genoux,  
L’un d’eux lui dit, d’une voix ingénue:  
‘Hasse et Léo, vont-ils être orphelins?’  
– ‘Ah! mes enfants, dit la muse attendrie,  
‘Si des talents c’est ici la patrie,  
‘Pour vos pareils je tremble et je vous plains.’

As the Muse climbed onto her cloud  
To search for some unknown shore  
Where talent creates no jealousy,  
One of two pupils falling at her feet  
Said to her in a guileless voice:  
‘Are Hasse and Leo to be orphans?’  
- ‘Ah! my children, said the muse tenderly,  
‘If this is the fatherland of the talents,  
‘I tremble for your equals and I pity you.’

A native of Hamburg, Hasse (1699-1783) studied composition with Alessandro Scarlatti and worked principally in Naples during the 1720s. Although he was appointed *Kapellmeister* at the Dresden court in 1731, he continued to return to Italy frequently, except for an extended stay in Dresden from 1740-1744. His operas achieved remarkable success among the Italians and he is frequently called *il Sassone* (the Saxon). As a teacher at one of the Naples conservatories, Leonardo Leo (1694-1744) excelled in oratorio and opera composition, and his reputation equaled that of Francesco Durante (below). Polynnie compares the gifted Hasse and Leo to nightingales whose rivalry remains friendly and untainted by envy. No cabal was necessary to ensure the success of one or the other, a reference to the events in Paris:

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Noble [nightingale] rivals, while one shines,  
The other, attentive and with beating heart,  
Thrills with pure pleasure on hearing it,  
To respond to the beautiful sound pleasing it,  
He plans a sound still more magnificent;  
Similarly, in the middle of an attentive crowd,  
Hasse and Leo, full of rivalry,  
Fire penetrating a young and ardent soul,  
Which would be taken for inspiration,  
Contended, carried off the praise,  
Yielded it by acclamation [of the other];  
And this rapid and glorious exchange,  
By both of them fulfilled ambition.  
Nowhere was seen a slavish troop  
Of charlatans, pamphlet scribblers,  
Less friends than servants of one of the two,  
Throwing at the other an uncivil war.

Now Marmontel’s poem introduces a subject that ultimately proved injurious to Italian opera — the desire of singers to win acclaim by vocal showmanship. While the Gluckists portrayed those favoring elements of the Italian style as wishing to import opera seria, they wanted only to apply its best aspects to French opera and considered Italian over-embellishment a defect to be avoided. Particularly in Italy, there were two quite different styles of composition for arias: in one, the composer furnished nearly all of the desirable embellishment, but in the other, the composer provided a bare, skeletal melodic outline to be filled in by the singer. Major composers almost always favored the first type to preserve their work from the disfigurement often inflicted by singers who were ill equipped for this task. In his satire, Il Teatro alla moda (Venice, c1720), the composer Benedetto Marcello tongue-in-cheek writes that the Virtuoso singer should completely change the repeat in the da capo aria any way desired, regardless of whether these changes fit with the accompaniment or completely distort the tempo. But this is really a trifling matter, for «the composer has become resigned to such things». Since there is no need to sing the composer’s notes, the Virtuosa should substitute something with a little more dash, which Marcello then describes in detail.\(^{15}\)  

Shortly after Marcello’s satire appeared, Hasse began work in Naples and later fell in love with the mezzo-soprano Faustina Bordoni (1700-1781), one

\(^{15}\) Marcello 1948, pp. 399ff.
of the most illustrious singers of her generation. According to Marmontel’s *Polynnie*, Hasse paid a price for marrying Faustina in 1730. Whether or not his version of events is apocryphal, it is true that Hasse, unlike most other major composers, did write skeletal arias for her. In fact, the Berlin Kapellmeister Johann Friedrich Reichardt drew a contrast between Hasse’s skeletal composition for Faustina and George Frideric Handel’s fully embellished writing. In *Polynnie*, Faustina pursues a fashion that threatens true art — particularly since her high standing encourages other singers to do the same:

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Un trouble, hélas! beaucoup plus dangereux
Que de vains bruits, que d'obscures cabales,
S'éleve au sein de ce repos heureux.
De sa Faustine Hasse était amoureux,
Et sur la scène elle avait des rivales.
Elle eût voulu, pour les mieux effacer,
Des airs légers, où voltigeant sans cesse,
Sa voix brillante égalât en vitesse
L'éclair que l'œil à peine a vu passer.
Hasse avait beau vanter la mélodie
D'un chant plus vrai, plus simple, et plus touchant,
'Et que me fait, lui disait-elle, un chant
'Où j'entendrai ma rivale applaudie?
'A m'affliger mon époux s'étudie;
'Il ne fait rien, jamais rien pour ma voix.
'Ecoutez-la cette voix qui défie
Le violon, la flûte, le hautbois:
'Voilà des sons; mais, hélas! je le vois,
'On me néglige et l'on me sacrifie.
'Doux rossignol, ton ramage léger
N'est-il donc plus notre brillant modèle?
'Ah! sur un son si je puis voltiger,
'Bien mieux que toi je chanterai, dit-elle.'
Et, comme lui gazouillant sa douleur,
Faustine alors déplora son malheur.

'Que faites-vous, ô ma chère Faustine?
'Lorsqu'on est triste est-ce ainsi qu'on badine?
'Ah dédaignez ce luxe ambitieux;
'Le pur accent de cette voix divine,
'L'accent de l'âme est bien plus précieux!
'– Va, lui dit-elle, ôte-toi de mes yeux:
'Je sais pourquoi ton lâche coeur s'obstine
'A me déplaire, à me contrarier.
'Hélas! aussi pourquoi se marier?'
Dans le ménage alors guerre intestine;
L'époux céda. Dans un chant brillanté
Il prodigua les trésors de son style.
Encore hélas! sut-il en homme habilé
A la richesse allier la beauté.
Mais le succès qu'obtint la nouveauté,
Des faux brillants fut la source fertile;
Vice applaudi n'est que trop imité:

Alas, a trouble much more dangerous
Than empty noises, than dark cabals,
Broke out in the midst of this happy tranquillity.
Hasse was in love with his Faustina,
And on the stage she had some rivals.
To eclipse them better, she wanted
Some nimble arias, where, ceaselessly fluttering,
Her brilliant voice compared in speed
To lightning the eye scarcely saw.
In vain, Hasse praised the melody
Of a truer, simpler, and more touching song,
'And should I have, she said to him, a song
'Where I shall hear my rival applauded?
'My husband makes a point of afflicting me;
'He writes nothing for my voice.
'Listen to this voice that challenges
'The violin, the flute, the oboe:
'These now are some sounds; but, alas, I see it,
'I shall be neglected and sacrificed.
'Sweet nightingale, is your airy warbling
'No longer our brilliant model?
'Ah! on such a sound I can fly,
'I shall sing much better than you, said she.'
And, like it, warbling her sorrow,
Faustina lamented her unhappiness.

'What are you doing, my dear Faustina?
'When one is sad, does one play like this?
'Ah, disdain this ambitious extravagance;
'The pure tone of this divine voice,
'The accent of the soul is much more precious!
'– Go, she told him, out of my sight:
'I know why your mean heart insists
In offending me, in thwarting me.
'Alas! and so, why marry?'
In the household, then, internal war;
The husband yielded. In a brilliant song
He squandered the treasures of his style.
Alas again! as a skillful man he knew how
To unite beauty to richness.
But the success obtained by the novelty
Of the false diamonds was a fertile well-spring;
A vice applauded is only too much imitated:

*. In other words, adding a great deal of embroidery turns a sad song into a playful one.
This implies that Faustina wanted skeletal melodic lines to embellish with her own creations, and her success increased the taste for ever greater vocal displays that Marmontel depicts as having a harmful effect on Italian opera. While her embellishment seems to have been relatively modest\textsuperscript{18}, abuses became increasingly pronounced during the second half of the eighteenth century. From certain early accounts, we have concluded that heavy embellishment was desirable, but many texts such as Marmontel’s indicate that it was instead a blight on Italian opera. Singers’ wish to outdo their rivals also often forced fine composers to write much more elaborate arias than otherwise. Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736), however, remained true to Polynmie’s precepts during his tragically short career, as she observes after lamenting Faustina’s decision\textsuperscript{19}:

\begin{quote}
De ce malheur la Muse se désole;  
Elle s’en va pleurer à son école,  
Elle aperçoit un de ses nourrissons,  
Sur le clavier méditant ses leçons:  
‘O toi, dit-elle, en qui l’esprit et l’âme  
Semblent si purs, aimable adolescent  
‘Qui du génie as respiré la flamme,  
‘Va te montrer comme un astre naissant;  
‘Et du faux goût détruisant l’imposture,  
‘Ramène l’art auprès de la nature.  
‘Elle permet quelques brillants éclats;  
‘Mais l’homme chante, et ne gazouille pas.  
‘–Rassurez-vous lui répond Pergolèse.  
‘La vanité, le caprice léger,  
‘Le goût du temps, ce tyrannical passerby,  
‘N’obtiendront rien de moi qui vous déplaise.’  
Il tint parole: et l’ingénuité  
Fut l’attribut de son rare génie.  
Vrai dans son chant, vrai dans son harmonie,  
Il fut sublime avec simplicité.
\end{quote}

Despite his brief life, Pergolesi’s music had a profound effect; perhaps no other composer is cited so often in the literature from this period. The scene now shifts to the master teacher Durante (1684-1755), a foremost composer of the Neapolitan school who taught at two Naples conservatories. After Pergolesi’s untimely death, he brings Polynmnie his pupils Niccolò Jommelli [Jomelli] (1714-

\textsuperscript{18} See BÜLOW 1977.  
\textsuperscript{19} KAPLAN 1984, p. 73.
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1774), Baldassare Galuppi (1706-1785), and Gian Francesco de Majo [Maio] (1732-1770)\textsuperscript{20}:

Weeping Muse, at this new misfortune,
You believed yourself pursued by Destiny;
You succumbed to your keen sorrow,
When an old man who, faithful to your creed,
Has ceaselessly accompanied your steps,
Came to calm the tumult of your senses.

In appearance like Nestor or Calchas’,
With white hair, in flowing tunic,
At your feet you saw Durante fall.

‘Muse, he said, do not grieve,
‘See the freshness of Jommelli,
‘The eagle of song, Galuppi takes flight,
‘Majo ascends, and, in spite of my great age,
‘I hope one day to give you still better:
‘For talent resembles a bough of gold;
‘Cultivated, it springs up again endlessly.’

\textsuperscript{20}. Ibidem, p. 73f.
\textsuperscript{21}. Ibidem, p. 74.

From their tentative beginnings, Polymnie’s artistic principles are bearing fruit\textsuperscript{21}:

The sorrows of [Polymnie] are finished.
Hope springs up, and tears cease;
On all sides her schools flourish;
On all sides twenty rival theaters
Crown the works of her children.

But it is not only by your plaints,
Muse of song, that hearts are moved.
You represent joy, and Thalia and Momus’ have
Often owed to you the success of their inventions.

How many times has your eloquent orchestra
Relieved the drama’s lowliness!

\textsuperscript{21}. Ibidem, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{1}. Nestor, King of Pylos in Greece, the oldest and most experienced chieftain at the siege of Troy, Calchas, a Greek soothsayer prominent at the same event. Both were highly respected advisers.
As Italian opera spread throughout Europe, the composer Nicola Antonio Porpora (1686-1768) and the alto castrato Antonio Bernacchi (1686-1756) trained singers in widely divergent manners — the former in a chaste style with few embellishments and the latter with a great many ornaments. According to a note in the posthumous 1818 Paris edition of Marmontel’s *Polymnie*: “A famous castrato, born in Bologna, Bernacchi established a school there around 1736. He is regarded as the originator of some abuses that slipped into the art of singing. Pistocchi, his teacher, exclaimed one day on hearing him: ‘I taught you to sing, and you want to play [show off]’”\(^{22}\).

Under Bernacchi a young crowd arises
Of new Atys’s who scatter everywhere.
The Ebro, the Rhine, the Neva await them.
The austere and pure taste of Porpora
Forms the voice of twenty young singers,
Who, from the dormitories of their humble refuge,
Go in a chariot to rush radiantly
To some brilliant palaces of gold and azure
To give some principles to submissive Europe,
And on the banks of the proud Thames,
To move the soul of the most unfeeling Englishman.

In Phrygian and Greek mythology, Atys, a beautiful youth beloved by the goddess Rhea, was transformed into a pine tree and violets sprang from his blood. Since he was a eunuch, the usage here symbolizes the Italian castrati whose voices were in demand in much of Europe.

At the end of his life, Durante brings Polymnie another three stellar pupils: Tommaso Traetta (1727-1779), Antonio Sacchini (1730-1786), and Niccolò Piccinni (1728-1800)\(^{23}\).

\(^{22}\) «Je t’avais appris à chanter, et tu veux jouer». Cited by *ibidem*, p. 74.

\(^{23}\) Kaplan 1984, p. 75.
Finally, Durante, burdened with age, comes to present to the chaste goddess three fine children whom he calls triplets; ‘Muse, he says, prepare three boughs of this laurel reserved for genius. ‘I know well the verve of these children; And, of all those whom you have pressed to your breast, none surpasses them. ‘I would hesitate to assign to them their place: ‘They are triplets, it is for you to decide. ‘–Ah! good old man, how I love to hear you! ‘Yes, dear children, spring up, grow more handsome: ‘I know them, she said: as a tender mother, ‘More than once I have caressed them. ‘Tell them clearly that the rarest gift is a pure melody, that it should be varied ‘Without ever becoming harsh or bizarre; ‘And, were they to be among uncivilized people, ‘That nothing would ever force them to screaming. ‘These three rivals, who have become so celebrated, were, I believe, Traetta, Sacchini, And you, sensitive and pleasing Piccinni, Swan, odious to mournful owls. At this moment the old man, moved, embraced them and smiled tenderly. ‘Adieu, he said, adieu, young immortal; ‘I have put my eaglets under your wing; ‘I am happy and shall die in peace. ‘Take, after me, the gift I make you, ‘To endear me to the new generation.’

Thus Marmontel traces the development of the Neapolitan school of composition as follows, citing Durante’s role in molding many strong composers:

Vinci
Hasse Leo
Pergolesi
Jommelli Galuppi
Majo Traetta Sacchini Piccinni

In his collaboration with Piccinni for the Paris Opéra, Marmontel sought to combine the best of both French and Italian opera. Each contained excellent
features, as well as elements needing the various reforms that had been in the air for more than twenty years. Most Italian composers of opera seria used one of the Imperial poet Pietro Metastasio’s librettos, whose format comprised a long series of scenes. In each, the drama’s action is set to simple recitative (which was slighted by singers and largely ignored by the audience), followed by an exit aria that singers used to gain acclaim through displays of virtuosity. While Gluck has today been granted major credit for reforming opera, chiefly on the basis of the reform manifesto accompanying the 1769 edition of Alceste (written by his librettist Ranieri de’ Calzabigi), reform efforts by certain Italian composers predated Gluck’s first reform opera Orfeo (1762). The earliest among these may be Jommelli, whose operas in collaboration with Mattia Verazi for Stuttgart in the 1750s reflect remarkable innovation, and in two instances combine obbligato recitative, aria, ensemble, chorus and programmatic orchestral music in dramatic scene complexes and spectacular, French-inspired finales. Traetta, too, adopted some of these features from the late 1750s onward. Majo was another whose work shows creative reforms. A major difference between these composers and Gluck is that the German concentrated on a ‘drama of declamation’ in which melody is subservient to text set in a speech-like manner.

In a charming fashion, Marmontel’s Polynnie outlines the primary figures of Italian opera and its strong characteristics, which include the pre-eminence of beautiful melody. Also treated is its chief defect — the emphasis on virtuosity by its prominent singers and the resulting adverse effect on composition.

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