

## Art and Culture

### Memories from the Past Royal Monarchy of France

Margareta KASTBERG SJÖBLOM

EA 4661 ELLIADD

University of Franche-Comté

#### Abstract

*This article focuses on the analysis of textual data and the extraction of lexical semantics. The techniques provided by different lexical statistics tools, such as Hyperbase (Brunet), today open the door to many avenues of research in the field of corpus linguistics, including reconstructing the major semantic themes of a textual corpus in a systematic way, thanks to a computer-assisted semantic extraction.*

*The object used as a testing ground is a corpus made up by a patrimonial corpus which includes the entire repertoire of the first generation of French Opera librettos performed at the Royal Music Academy at the Palais Royal.*

*The aim of the contribution is to show how an artistic genre can be a bearer of a political message and a vehicle for its propaganda.*

**Keywords:** Arts and Culture, baroque aesthetics, French opera, lexical statistics, thematic analysis, corpus linguistics

#### 要旨

本稿では原文のデータ分析および語彙の意味論の抽出について注目し、分析をすすめる。異なる語彙統計ツールから得られたハイパーベースなどの手法は、コーパス言語学（原文の集成による主要な意味的テーマを体系的な方法で再構成することを含む）の分野において、今日様々な研究の可能性を切り開きつつある。

テスト調査に使用されたデータは、フランス王室の王室音楽学校で実演された初代フランスオペラ歌詞のレパートリーより作成されたコーパスである。



本稿の目的は、いかなる芸術的ジャンルが政治的メッセージの発信の担い手となり、政治的プロパガンダの媒体となり得るのかを明らかにすることである。

キーワード：芸術と文化、バロック式美学、フランスオペラ、語彙の統計、主題の分析、コーパス言語学

## **Introduction**

In the current context of “Fragmentation and Divergence”, the power and impact of Art and Culture is a factor which is not always taken into account in today’s society, where financial and economic growth tend to be the main considerations of our politics. However, in today’s society, where liberal democracy is the dominant ideology, Art and Culture indeed has an important role to fill and has to be managed as such by the political leaders. As Seiichi Kondo states<sup>1</sup>, “liberal democracy as a neutral mechanism has to be run properly by society”. He also points out that this role of Art and Culture is in fact essential “to set a better life” in Eastern as well as in Western societies.

If in today’s modern liberal societies Art and Culture tend to be fragmented but relatively free and open for new impulses and tendencies, in non-democratic societies Art and Culture are often directed and controlled by the leading circles. If we look back in time, the communist states for instance, had a very clear idea about Art and Culture as an instrument serving a clear political purpose.

The aim of this article is to contribute, from a historical aspect, to the concept of the impact of Art and Culture on society from a European point of view with a look back in time to the era between the Middle Ages and Modernity known as the *Renaissance*.

From the XIV<sup>th</sup> to the XVII<sup>th</sup> century European societies gradually opened up after many centuries under the heavy weight of the omnipotent Roman-Catholic Church. The Europeans welcomed new influences in aesthetics, music, literature,



and painting - everything was new! Italy was the centre of Arts in Europe and the intellectual elite partly found its inspiration in Roman history, but mainly in the ancient Greeks myths.

France was of course inspired by the Italian Renaissance, and the renaissance aesthetic model has had a very strong impact on French Arts and Culture ever since. When Mazarin brought an Italian opera troupe to the Palais Royal in 1647 to perform in front of the king and the court, it was a great success. A new form of Art was born in France in this the first in a long line of illustrious performances. However, the aim of Mazarin was not only artistic and cultural; he clearly had a political aim. Indeed, beyond the artistic aspect it was a political manoeuvre: by importing the type of artistic performance he had known in Rome, the court of France set its mark of identity in the period directly preceding the *Fronde*.

Jean-Baptiste Lully, an Italian-born French composer, instrumentalist and dancer, considered the chief master of the French baroque style, introduced in the middle of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century the first French version of this new and modern form of 'absolute art' (*art absolu*), which included music, dance, theatre and scenery, to Louis XIV's court, becoming a complete success. Lully installed the Royal Academy of Music (ARM) at the Palais Royal in Paris where the French opera developed to its full extent. In fact, this particular French genre stood out from Italian opera, popular in Europe at the time, by the concomitant presence of elements such as court-ballet, pastoral settings, tragedy and tragedy-ballet, and stage machinery.

This brand new form of art called *tragedie en musique* (later in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century it was called baroque opera or lyrical tragedy) was a new and modern form of 'absolute art' (*art absolu*) which included music, dance, theatre and scenery. The court also brought the so-called 'machines' from Italy, which allowed quick scene changes and meant previously unknown illusions could be performed on stage.

In 1673 Lully composed *Cadmus and Hermione* to a libretto by Philippe Quinault, who became his appointed librettist and to whom is attributed this specifically



French form of opera called *tragédie en musique* (musical tragedy). Quinault was well known in Paris as a playwright and a verse dramatist, but from then on, mainly as a librettist. Lully was made royal composer, superintendent of the royal music and music master to the royal family. Quinault was also close to the court and a member of the royal *Académie française*.

The plot of a musical tragedy was almost always inspired by Greek or Latin mythology and legend. Unhappy love was a central theme, and the ‘miraculous’ aspect (*le merveilleux*) was also an important part of the play. The ‘machines’ made it possible for the gods of heaven to descend to earth and for monsters to climb up from the underworld, combining life on earth with life on Parnassus and life in hell. The tragedies also gave ample room for dancing, chorals and pastoral happiness.

Generally, the era of baroque opera and lyrical tragedy is divided into three generations. Lully and Quinault initiated the first generation of composers in 1673, and Rameau, in 1733 with *Hippolyte et Aricie*, paved the way for the second generation, succeeded in turn by a third generation initiated in 1777 with Gluck’s *Armide*. The baroque era ended with the French revolution.

The court of Louis XIV loved dance and ballet, and during the first years of French opera musical tragedies and ballets are intertwined on the stage of the ARM. The performances were always initially held in front of the king himself and his court in the Palais Royal and later on in Versailles. Louis XIV in younger days even performed in the ballet as a dancer. With the benediction of the king, *Le Roi Soleil*, the works could then be played elsewhere, but always to the elite of French society. The absolute monarchy also required that all printed texts be submitted for royal approval, *l’approbation du Roi*. Consequently, the officers of the king examined the opera librettos as separate texts before they were allowed to be printed. The printed texts, the librettos, also had a different status at that time, they were read as books by Parisian people who could not afford to go to the opera and see the performances.

These different works have been the subject of numerous academic studies; literary, musical and aesthetic analyses, but very few of vocabulary and discourse. The librettos indeed contain a very interesting text material, testifying not only to



times gone by, but also demonstrating how strong political absolutism or autocracy can totally dominate art and culture in a society.

### **Opera librettos, creation of a database**

To understand how a political message can be so deeply linked to artistic works through classical aesthetic inspiration, we propose to study the vocabulary content and the lexical themes in a systematic way, using precise tools to measure subtle aesthetics. Today's lexical and statistical tools allow us to measure vocabulary and lexical themes, frequencies, concurrencies and thematic evolutions in large textual corpora, applying modern Textometry techniques<sup>2</sup>.

We have therefore collected, scanned and digitalized the seventy-five librettos corresponding to the first generation of baroque opera, from the first, *Cadmus & Hermione* composed and written by Lully and Quinault in 1683, to the last, *Biblis*, composed and written by La Coste and Fleury in 1732, the play which marks the end of the first generation and the arrival of Rameau on the opera scene. This patrimonial corpus includes thus the entire repertoire of the first generation of French Opera librettos performed at the Royal Academy of Music of the Palais Royal.

The techniques provided by lexical statistics tools, such as *Hyperbase* (Brunet: 2014), today opens the door to many avenues of research in the field of corpus linguistics, including reconstructing the major semantic themes and lexical patterns of a textual corpus in a systematic way, thanks to computer-assisted semantic extraction.

The automatic extraction of collocations also allows us to analyse the micro-distribution of lexical items and semantic poles and collocations: on one hand by the extraction of thematic universes revolving around a pole, on the other hand by the extraction of co-occurrences and sequences of lexical items.

The baroque opera database, which counts 654,809 tokens and 16,489 lexical forms, has been scanned and processed by the *Hyperbase* software in its 9.0 version. *Hyperbase* is one of the most efficient French lexical statistics tools for quantitative treatment of large textual corpora. It allows two dimensions of investigation and analysis on a corpus; a pure hypertextual dimension combined with a full statistical dimension. The statistical processing can serve as a platform for various studies.



While *Hyperbase* was originally created for literary corpora, it is today used in various fields of research, for example sociology, psychology, history and political sciences, where formal discourse analysis is required. The hypertextual dimension focuses on documentary operations such as obtaining contexts and matches. The distribution of a lexical item can be studied in all of the texts simultaneously and viewed through graphical applications. The statistical exploration tools offer the possibility of various statistical analyses; not only the traditional, such as lexical richness, lexical distance or connection, chronological correlation etc., but also a method of analysing lexical specificities, compared to an external reference corpus, as well as in an endogenous perspective, within the corpus itself. *Hyperbase* processes different outputs such as lexical forms, lemmas, grammatical codes and syntactic chains. This corpus has been lemmatized and tagged with *Cordial*<sup>3</sup>.



**Fig. 1: Hyperbase illustrated with *Phaéton le char d'Hélios*,  
Nicolas Bertin, 1720**

The different statistical applications used by *Hyperbase* allow different approaches to semantic themes, or lexical microcosms, within a corpus. First of all, *Hyperbase* provides not only the immediate extraction of lexical correlates but it also makes it possible to extract all terms located in the immediate environment of a given lexical item.



It is important to underscore that we are not only interested in extracting the most frequent tokens of a corpus or to point out co-occurrences by pairs as an indicator of semantic proximity or idiomatic expression, well known as one of the major issues of lexical statistics as well as a prominent tool in literary research and discourse analysis. We are here interested in the correlation between two or more items, to extract patterns of semantic proximity.

### **Extracting lexical themes in French baroque opera**

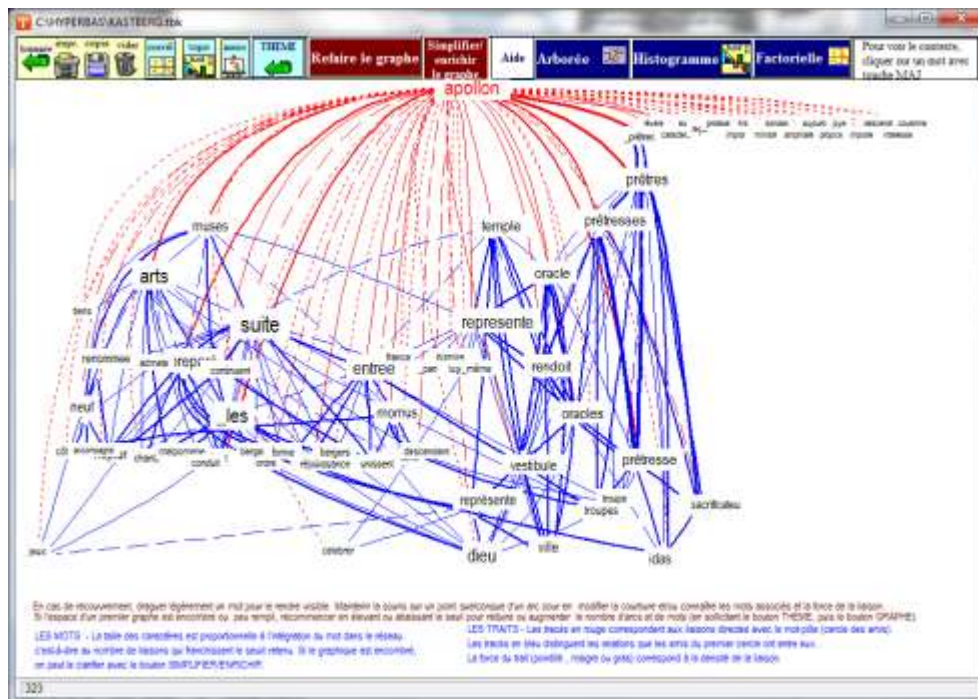
Humans and gods live together in baroque opera, together with the elements of nature, monsters, wizards, naiads, and nymphs, on earth, in the skies and in the underworld. Baroque aesthetics are also characterised by hyperbolic and allegorical paintings, writing, composition, etc. The baroque opera is an excellent example of this Renaissance conception of Art. The strong allegorical character of the *tragedies en musique* is also a testimony of how much art was linked to the central political power and the life of the royal court. All forms of Art in XVII<sup>th</sup> century France were in fact bearers of a political message, sometimes clear, sometimes disguised or represented in the complex cascades of allegory.

Nature belongs to and serves the purposes of the Royal politics. Louis XIV is considered the Son of God, even in popular representations. He is also assimilated with the sun, he becomes the *Roi Soleil*, and in allegories even assimilated with Apollo, God of Light, Arts and Divinities.

Moreover, as the sun since ancient times is assimilated with Apollo, the astral king becomes at the same time master of Light and Poetry. The assimilation with both Apollo and the sun allows the king to be represented as other gods, each representing a virtue of the great Sun. The comparison of princes with mythological heroes is very old and the royal power strongly maintains these confusions and ‘metamorphoses’ in order to register as a divinity in the collective imagination.

Figure 2 below provides a graphical representation of preferential links, weaving a sort of network around the word chosen as a pole, such as the item *Apollon (Apollo)* here.





**Fig. 2: Semantic associations of the pole Apollon (Apollo)**

*Apollo* often seems to play the role of master of ceremonies. The item is often associated directly or indirectly to items such as: *temple* (temple), *prêtres* (priests), *prêtresses* (priestesses), *oracles* (oracles) and *sacrificateur* (sacrificer), but *Apollo* also reflects high score co-occurent relation with items such as *arts* (arts), *muses* (muse) and *suite* (retinue).

The presence of the verb *représenter* (to represent) is significant. *Apollo*'s appearance on stage is always grandiose and preceded by precise stage directions. The introduction of Act III of *Bellérophon* illustrates this technique:

### ACTE III.

The Theatre represents the vestibule of the famous Temple,  
To which APOLLO sent his oracles in the city of Patara.  
The back of the Temple first appears closed, and opens only when the  
Ceremony begins<sup>4</sup>.

(Thomas Corneille, Jean-Baptiste Lully, 1679:  
*Bellérophon* ACT III, Scene 1)



The assimilation of the divine king to the Sun and to Apollo, which today seems totally implausible, is at the time, in the carnal XVII<sup>th</sup> Century, very real and present.

Political interest plays indeed an important role in the *tragédie en musique*, it is made extremely clear in *Médus Roy Mèdes*. Cuthbert Girdlestone justly points out the political message (Girdlestone 1972: 160): the tragedy ends with a celebration where the symbol of the Great King appears, the sun comes to bless the ceremony and, in this first year of the last war of Louis XIV, the Sun sings:

My son, the position that you leave  
Does not have enough of brightness for such a worthy king.  
Let a hundred different people bend under your law  
And found the Empire of Medes<sup>5</sup>.

(Joseph de La Grange-Chancel, Francois Bouvard, 1702:  
*Médus Roy Mèdes*, ACT V, scene 4).

The king and the royal power are also assimilated with the elements of Nature. During the period following the important works to beautify the Tuileries gardens and the construction of Versailles and its gardens, the *tragédie en musique* very often developed themes and settings where castles, gardens, fountains, ramparts, mermaids, nymphs and zephyrs live around the Gods of the Sun and in a beautiful setting. The garden with its fountains is indeed more than decor, this is the real centre of power, and the political message is indeed very strong.

However, the lexical items which refer to this idyllic nature regress, starting at the turn of the century and the advent of the War of the Spanish Succession in the beginning of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, to give way in the *tragédie en musique* vocabulary, to another type of element of nature: the natural forces. Lightning, storm, thunder, earthquake and other supernatural forms appear with the help of the famous ‘machines’. The theme of lightning and storm is indeed very present in the *tragédie en musique* and became increasingly important as the tragedies became more and more violent and cruel. Figure 3 below provides the relative frequency of the items *thunderstorm*, *lightning* and *thunder*.







We can also measure the evolution of the vocabulary, to observe which lexical items, or words, increase during this period and which regress; the evolution of vocabulary.

An observation of the development of the vocabulary of the first generation *tragédie en musique*, the analysis of chronological correlation at the endogenous level, can be very interesting. Indeed, since the texts that make up our corpus are spread over time and are listed in chronological order, a chronological correlation coefficient can be calculated by *Hyperbase* that compares the values for each word and establishes the Bravais Pearson coefficient.

Figure 4 below lists all the words that reach a threshold of 0.35 in the texts considered. The two columns replicate, first the list of words that librettists employ more and more often, and secondly the words that they gradually abandon:

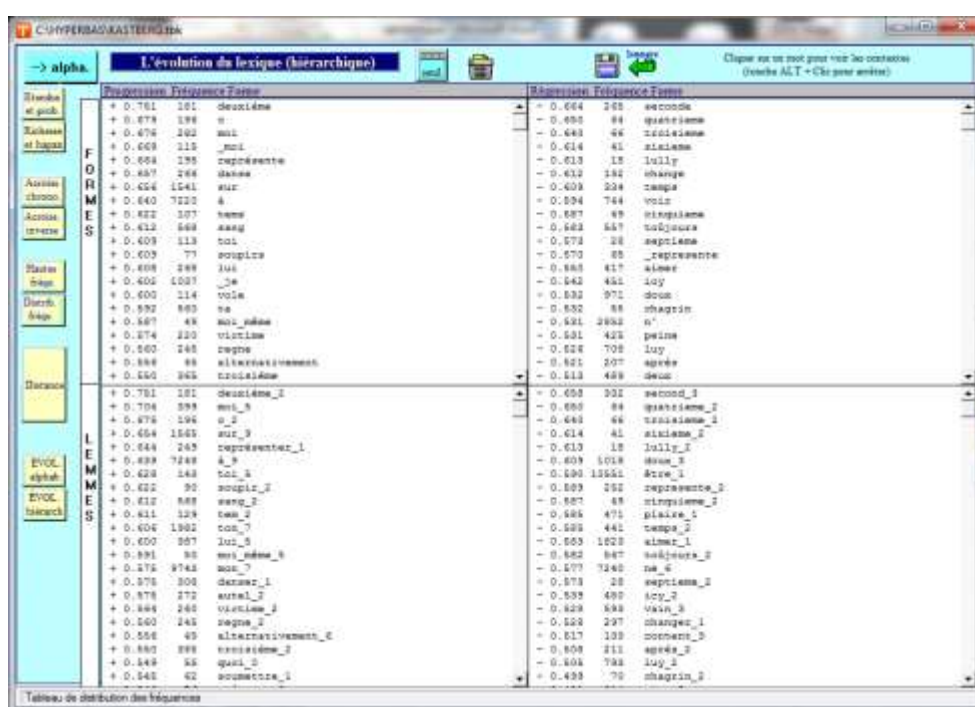


Fig. 4: Lexical evolution

Here we can observe the gradual increased use of personal pronouns as the corpus progresses in time. The use of pronouns in the first and second person, in their different constellations, rises considerably. This may well show that the dialogues (and monologues) tend to increase towards the end of this first generation of *tragédie en musique*.







the Spanish Succession is in full swing and the royal family loses several *dauphins* (heirs apparent) in infancy. Nicolas Boileau dies in 1711 and his enormous authority and influence in the Arts gradually declines.

The real mechanism of musical dramaturgy, writes Sylvie Boissou (2011: 11), is when lyric disaster meets the expectations of a public eager for dramatic and emotional experiences. Crimes are beyond all morality and law with an omnipresence of incest, suicide, murder and sacrifice, cataclysms, storms and earthquakes as well as underworld elements with witchcraft, dementia, metamorphosis and monsters. The public wanted violence, and the violence at the time constituted a mirror of society including disguised political propaganda.

We can mathematically observe that the vocabulary of tender love and pastoral idyll gave way to a much more cruel vocabulary where lexical items reflecting physical and moral violence, crime, death and sacrifice gradually became increasingly present in the tragedies as the corpus progresses in time. The analysis shows that the vocabulary of ‘tender love’ of the early years of Louis XIV and his courtesans, praising the glory of the king and beautiful love during the period of construction of Versailles and its gardens, reflects the time of metamorphosis and allegory. There is even the personification of natural elements, this is the time of the *Roi Soleil*, it gives the king a divine status, often Apollonian, which merges with the Sun.

The second period is darker. The court is mourning two *dauphins*, the influence of Madame de Maintenon is felt even in the arts, and especially during the War of the Spanish Succession, when an introduction of martial vocabulary is observed and when the king becomes Herculean. This period culminated with the death of Louis XIV in 1715 and during the following period, that of the Regency (*La Régence*) and the accession to the throne of Louis XV, the theme of the ‘divine king’ is always present, in a climate increasingly more violent, cruel and devastating. As Sylvie Boissou (2011: 13) writes:

Disasters will mark the entire evolution of the genre, reflecting economic and political issues of the *Académie Royale de Musique* in Paris, the very heart of baroque opera, and it will reflect a society in



change, introducing new conventions, depending on both new talented composers and the evolution of the public taste and opinion, largely guided by the spirit of *Les Lumières*.

This is a turning point for baroque aesthetics in general, which the themes of the *tragédie en musique* perfectly reflect. The era of *Les Lumières* (the Enlightenment) is based on the belief in a rational world, understandable and in order, which requires man to establish a rational and organised knowledge. This causes a radical change in vocabulary to reflect the renewal of knowledge, ethics and aesthetics of a new era, to fight the irrational, the arbitrary, the obscure and the superstitious.

The *Académie Royale de Musique* is closed completely during the revolution and this type of ‘political aesthetics’ would never again be an important factor in French opera. The opera house itself caught fire and closed down, and the new opera, the Opera Garnier, born many years later, would be totally different.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of Art is to serve politics; Wieviorka<sup>6</sup> underscored the importance of Literature and Art to put an end to violence. We totally agree with this statement. Although we should bear in mind that Art and Culture also serve a political will and can be strongly manipulated.

In the XVII<sup>th</sup> and XVIII<sup>th</sup> century in France, metaphor, allegory, makeovers and assimilations were indeed numerous and sought to give the royalty a divine status by referring to the heroes of Greek mythology. The *tragédie en musique* constitutes an illustration of the important status of mythology in the royal ideology. Jean-Pierre Néraudau (1991: 21) qualifies the Opera as a mode of expression for the greatness of the king:

The Renaissance culture gradually became, in the hands of the king, from the 1670s, a mode of expression of his greatness and he transformed it into the show where the *Roi Soleil* and *Apollo* became the directors. He mastered the fable, not to break with the memories of



the *société galante* trying to keep nostalgia, maybe also to avoid some nostalgia of his youth, he put on stage, sometimes with ironic magnificence, a world that he reduced to obsolescence<sup>7</sup>.

Kondo in his speech *From Japan to the World*<sup>8</sup> tells us that the deep ties with nature of Japanese culture are perhaps best embodied in the Japanese love for Mount Fuji, and he seeks to share with the world the heart of Japanese philosophy as a way to encourage a restoration of balance between nature and human thought. That is indeed an important difference between Japanese and European societies: in Japan according to Kondo “Man obeys Nature but Occidentals tend to try to make Nature obey them”.

In this article we have tried to show how Art and Culture in the West is very close to human culture and that sometimes it can even become a strong political vehicle and an instrument of power.

Kondo states in his conference the importance of Arts and Culture:

The power of culture and arts consists of seven elements: the means to express oneself and establish communication with others without depending on words; to provide dreams and motivation; to contribute to social integration; revitalization of economy; national branding; to give inspiration and innovation; and the means to inherit the wisdom of ancestors.

This is an important message for cultural heritage and the future. However, we should not forget how Art and Culture can be manipulated and used for political purposes, unfriendly to peace and harmony.

If the bird on the Japanese tree branch is free to sing on Mount Fuji, the bird in the royal *tragedie en musique* was replaced by a mechanical ‘machine’ and a human being ruled sky and nature.



It is our responsibility to learn from the past and see the signs, and to analyse the political message so that we can, as intellectuals, take responsibility for letting the birds sing freely in an open society that welcomes new independent inspirations and innovative aesthetics, and which lets the “Fragmentations and Divergences” in Arts and Culture form a beautiful choir in a free world.

---

<sup>1</sup> Seiichi Kondo, former commissioner of the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs, in his speech *Power and Impact of Art and Culture*, 11 March 2015.

<sup>2</sup> *Textometry* is the evolution of Lexical Statistics. Today, we do not only analyse the structure of vocabulary and singular lexical items as before. The techniques of today allow us further to study more largely morphosyntactic issues and semantic relations, opening up new avenues of modern discourse analysis.

<sup>3</sup> The lemmatization is an important issue in *Textometry*, it allows us to assemble all the different paradigms of a lemma and thereby to perform more efficient stylistic studies.

<sup>4</sup> Le Théâtre représente le Vestibule du Temple fameux,  
où APOLLON rendoit ses oracles dans la Ville de Patare.  
Ce Temple paroît d’abord fermé dans le fond, & ne s’ouvre que lors que la Ceremonie commence à paroître.

<sup>5</sup> Mon fils, le rang que tu cèdes  
N’a pas assez d’éclat pour un si digne roi.  
Que cent peuples divers fléchissent sous sa loi  
Et fondent l’empire de Mèdes.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Wieviorka in his speech *Pourquoi est-il si difficile de sortir de la violence ?*, 10 March 2015.

<sup>7</sup> La culture de la Renaissance est donc progressivement devenue, entre les mains du roi, à partir des années 1670, un mode d’expression de sa grandeur. Pour qu’elle le devienne, il l’a transformée en spectacle. Le roi solaire et apollinien est devenu metteur en scène. Il a maîtrisé la fable, et pour ne pas rompre avec les souvenirs d’une société galante qui pouvait en garder la nostalgie, pour s’éviter peut-être à lui aussi quelque nostalgie de sa jeunesse, il l’a mis sur le théâtre, où sa grandeur lui permet avec une ironique magnificence de faire revivre un monde qu’il a réduit à la désuétude.

<sup>8</sup> Seiichi Kondo at TEDxKyoto 2013.

## Bibliography

- BOUISSOU Sylvie (2011). *Crimes, cataclysmes et maléfices dans l’opéra baroque en France* [Crime, Cataclysm and Evil in French Baroque Opera]. Paris: Minerve, Musique ouverte.
- BRUNET Etienne (2014). *Hyperbase, Manual of reference, version 9.0*. Nice: CNRS-ILF, “Bases, corpus and language”, UMR-6039.
- GIRDLESTONE Cuthbert (1972). *La tragédie en musique (1673-1750) considérée comme genre littéraire* [Tragédie en musique (1673-1750) as a literary genre]. Genève: Librairie Droz.
- KASTBERG SJÖBLOM Margareta (2015). *Le vocabulaire de la tragédie en musique, France 1673 - 1732* [The vocabulary of French *tragédie en musique*, 1673-1732]. Paris: Champion, en cours de publication.
- NÉRAUDAU Jean-Pierre (1991). *La tragédie lyrique* [Lyrical Tragedy]. Versailles: Edition Cicéro, Théâtre des Champs Elysées.