ART AND POLITICS. THE THEATRE OF THE REVOLUTION

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ART AND POLITICS -
THE THEATRE OF THE REVOLUTION

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the development of the theatre as a social art during the years of the French Revolution. The study is based on a collection of contemporary editions of plays of this period which are to be found in the Library of Memorial University of Newfoundland. These plays were studied for the information they have to offer regarding their society.

The thesis is presented in three parts. The first part attempts to establish the theatre as an art form distinct and independent from the art of literature and, moreover, as a form of art which cannot be viewed in isolation from its social and political base.

In the second part, the French theatre is examined briefly as a background to a discussion of Diderot's theories on dramatic art, and Beaumarchais' interpretation of Diderot's "genre sérieux". The work of some modern critics of the Revolutionary theatre in France is studied to show, firstly, that the social, historic and political events were an integral part of the Revolutionary theatre and, secondly, to bear witness to the fact that the plays are still judged as much for their politics as for their artistry. Since the latter quality is almost non-existent, the theatre's potential value as a source of social commentary has been obscured.

The third part of this thesis is concerned with the study of the plays themselves and the effect of the Revolution on their creation, representation and public acceptance. The influence of contemporary events is strongly evidenced in the structure, language, characters

and themes, revealing radical changes as the theatre struggled to maintain its social relevancy. The progress of the Revolution itself is followed in these plays as they express the prevalent political views and reveal the customs which became, sometimes temporarily, acceptable in social intercourse.

This thesis does not present a dramatic criticism of the theatre of the Revolution, but rather offers the study of a selection of plays of the period as a socio-historic comment.

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INTRODUCTION

The years of the French Revolution are not generally considered a fertile era in the domain of literature and drama. A university text for advanced students of eighteenth-century French literary and philosophic writings devotes to this period a scant six pages, consisting of extracts from the speeches of four leading figures of the day. This text cites the lack of material worthy of inclusion as its reason for restricting its reference to revolutionary literature to oratory extracts:

> La Révolution s'accompagne d'une production littéraire intense mais médiocre. Populaire et moralisateur, le théâtre tend au mélodrame.[1]

Because of its mediocrity, its frequent melodramatic stage representations of the social turmoil, the theatre of the French Revolution is castigated by critics and historians in the fields of literature and drama. In consequence, the plays of this period have been largely ignored. Since they have little or nothing to offer literature and drama, there has been a tendency to brush them aside as having no value at all. Some plays have been condemned for their political propaganda, most have been forgotten because, from the dramatic point of view, they were not, in fact, memorable.

But such assessments stem from their being judged by the same criteria as would be applied to the work of a Shakespeare or a

Molière, whereas the value of the plays produced during France's years of revolution lies in the insight they offer concerning the social condition. The plays which will be examined in this dissertation have been selected for the information they divulge regarding the situation of the theatre during the Revolution and the testimony they bear concerning their contemporary society.

This thesis will attempt to discuss art in a social context before going on to examine the theatre as an independent art form whose role in society is essential to its development.

PART I

An artist can address the society of which he is a member only in the language which that society understands. In the France of Louis XIV, art was the privilege of a small, elite group and therefore, the artist's public was limited to a narrow segment of the population. Thus art, which owes its inspiration to the nature of man and his universe, was restricted to the ideals and conventions of the select few who formed the artist's public and source of patronage. These were found among the wealthier members of society whose values and aspirations were not necessarily those of the majority of the people. While such a situation did not prevent the creation of great works of art, it did enhance the cultural exclusivism of a fortunate minority and, in doing so, denied the achievement of an essential aim of artistic effort, namely, to offer man a different image of himself and his relationship to his world.

Art is a manifestation of man's view of himself, his universe and the relationship between them. Through the various forms of art, he asserts his conviction that the tangible world is not the limit of his probing mind. Art is the physical representation of ideas, passions and perceptions expressed in the style of the age which conceives it. Whatever may be encompassed by the concept of art is rooted in man himself. It cannot be greater than him, though it may well be more durable and history shows that its value has often been rated higher than the individual. Viewed in isolation, art may need

no justification, purpose or price, but society has usually insisted on linking it with at least two of these.

A work of art does not necessarily retain the value accorded it by the age which witnesses its creation. The play, painting or symphony is re-evaluated by succeeding generations and the conditions extant at its birth diminish in importance. This applies to the masterpiece, which may lose favour temporarily as fashions change, but it survives. Those which do not, have a different value. They bear witness to the social climate of their age.

The appreciation of art, the understanding of its value to man, may be universal, but the different forms of artistic expression are closely linked to the society in which they are produced. The artist himself is the product of a social group. The work of art, the individual creation of the artist, is based on the social and cultural environment of the artist. Something of this environment must be understood before his work can be fully appreciated.

In modern societies, certainly in what is defined as the developed, western world, a predominant force is that which urges man to materialistic achievement. Worship of materialism has as its foundation a personal selfishness which can be seen as a negative force in the social context. But the fulfillment of human potential does not lie in a purely materialistic, physical environment. The alternate area of potential achievement is in the domain of the abstract which feeds man's imagination, or his soul, or whatever the elusive quality may be which makes him more than a functioning, physical entity. The role of art is to provide a link between these two worlds and to offer

man a glimpse of a deeper reality than that suggested by the exigencies of his physical existence. Sartre says that man is the means by which things are manifested and also that one of the chief motives of artistic creation is man's need to feel that necessary in his relationship to the world.[1] He is speaking from the artist's point of view, but we also have this need and we rely on the artist's perception to aid our fulfillment of it.

The artist communicates to his society the connection he perceives between the material and abstract worlds. For the majority, this link is an exterior force and society in general relies heavily on others for its interpretation. The critics and historians of the various art forms play an important role in this. They become the mediators between the public and art. The public is too large and too diversified to be fully understood by an individual and therefore, both artist and critic tend to address themselves to that segment which they can more easily identify, the portion of society which reflects their own social, or cultural preferences.

An artistic elite emerges with its own language and values, rendering itself largely impenetrable to the majority. As the already considerable obstacles between the general public and its comprehension of the arts increase, art becomes less relevant to the major proportion of the population. Art becomes, involuntarily, the means of augmenting the divergences of social groups. The attitude of each individual to art is shaped by his socio-economic background, his education and his working environment, conditions which sociologists refer to as divisions of class. Since art is a universal concept, no single group or

class possesses an exclusive right to the appreciation of art as a result of its superior social opportunity, or conversely, the lack of this.

The artist who believes himself liberated from ties of class nevertheless finds himself shackled by the ignorance of those who are not sufficiently educated to appreciate his work. One must obviously be able to read before one can independently appreciate literature. In seeking to widen his potential public, the artist is faced with a dilemma. If he remains aloof from social inequalities, he risks catering to a narrow segment of the population. If, on the other hand, he tries to reach all levels, he may find his work relevant to none. The situation in the eighteenth century in France illustrates this point.

Aspects of the French scene during the eighteenth century were recorded in paintings depicting a pleasant, ordered way of life. The painters depended for the most part on the patronage of a wealthy clientele whose tastes dictated the artist's subjects and style. Such paintings reveal a preponderance of images of a life-style restricted to the more affluent members of French society. It was the age of classicism, by definition a static concept. In a century which was to end in the chaotic destruction of a social system, these paintings give few overt indications of the pressures which brought it about. Eighteenth-century art was full of conflicting ideals and trends which, in France particularly, remained so entrenched in their opposing beliefs, that on the social level, they collided in the conflagration of the Revolution. The great art of the time, painting, music,

architecture, was religious art, yet philosophy was rapidly developing along anti-religious lines, while secular life-styles were increasingly profane.

These paradoxes did not foment new, creative ideas so much as they caused reactions. The Rococo style was a reaction, in part, against the overbearing classicism of Versailles. In reacting against the academic style, Rococo achieved a level of freedom, allowing the expression of more delicate shades of feeling such as can be found in the works of Watteau. He captures the transitoriness of pleasure, seeming, as he does so, to hint at its decadence. He portrays elegant company in exquisite surroundings, revealing his delicate understanding of the relationships between men and women, but the relationship is based on romantic love, and the men and women live in the same enclosed social world. His paintings have an aura of melancholy. That he was himself aware that the society he painted existed in isolation is perhaps why he depicted himself in Fêtes vénitiennes as the bagpipe player, not quite part of the same scene, but an observer. Again in Gilles, 1717-19, he gives us the outsider, the artist in isolation.

Later, Fragonard observed the more sensual aspect of the pleasurable world he painted and his paintings were more implicit in portraying the corruption of that world. He found the women of Paris more inspirational as sources for his paintings than the historical subjects demanded by the Academy; but the women represented merely the goal of the pleasure-seekers. His most famous painting, Les Hasards de l'escarpolette, 1767, is a symbol of his time. It is pleasing, soothing and graceful, hinting at ephemeral pleasures and inevitable decay.

The peasant class was not ignored, but its representation implied no outright questioning of its lowly position. Chardin, considered by Sir Kenneth Clark to be "the greatest painter of mid-eighteenth century France,"[2] found his subjects both in the bourgeoisie and in the peasant class, but the quiet security which emanates from La Toilette du Matin is not threatened by the scullery maid toiling on the outer fringes of this ordered world. Diderot considered Chardin as one of the painters who represented the voice and health of France, not seeing in his work, perhaps, the corruption which Fragonard implied.

Literature looked to the aristocracy for its heroes and heroines, or at least for their motivations and emotions. The finer feelings were thought to be unknown below a certain social level. On the stage, characters outside the nobility were either functional or comic. Before Diderot, even the bourgeoisie was not considered suitable material for tragedy. Classic drama dealt with noble actions springing from noble passions, neither of which could be found in a character of less than noble birth.

Diderot proposed a new form of dramatic art, 'le genre sérieux,' to express the elements of tragedy and comedy he believed to exist in everyone's life:

> Un renversement de fortune, la crainte de l'ignominie, les suites de la misère, une passion qui conduit l'homme à sa ruine, de sa ruine au désespoir, du désespoir à une mort violente, ne sont pas des événements rares; et vous croyez qu'ils ne vous affecteraient pas autant que la mort fabuleuse d'un tyran, ou le sacrifice d'un enfant aux autels des dieux d'Athènes ou de Rome?[3]

Eighteenth-century France witnessed the development of a powerful middle class. As it grew in wealth, its influence was felt in almost every aspect of French life. Diderot's efforts to see the bourgeoisie's increasing importance reflected in the theatre will be discussed more fully at a later point in this thesis.

The traditional church resisted the inevitable social change and remained largely impervious to the growth of diverging social and moral attitudes. Its opposition to the Enlightenment made it a target for the attacks of the philosophers. Diderot's Encyclopédie was perhaps the most remarkable work of the eighteenth century and constituted a weapon of propaganda in the battle against the church.

Few people attacked the church more violently than Voltaire. His goal was the reform and improvement of the social condition and he had no compunction about exploiting the art of literature to propagate his philosophy. His weapons were a combination of ridicule, satire, common sense and reason. His considerable literary output was directed against social and religious intolerance. The fundamental principles of his philosophy remained constant throughout his long life and were first expressed in the Henriade, a poem written during his first incarceration in the Bastille. Voltaire raged in this poem against the intolerance of the church, the corruption of kings and the carnage of wars:

> Ces monstres furieux, de carnage altérés,
> Excités par la voix des prêtres sanguinaires,
> Invoquaient le Seigneur en égorgeant leurs frères;
>
> Le roi, le roi lui-même, au milieu des bourreaux,
> Poursuivant des proscrits les troupes égarées,
> Du sang de ses sujets souillait ses mains sacrées.[4]

Before Voltaire, Montesquieu had used a literary art form to present a critical commentary on French society. In the epistolary form of Les Lettres persanes, 1721, Montesquieu found the scope he needed to express his involvement with contemporary social problems:

> . . . dans la forme de lettres, où les acteurs ne sont pas choisis, et où les sujets qu'on traite ne sont dépendants d'aucun dessein ou d'aucun plan déjà formé, l'auteur s'est donné l'avantage de pouvoir joindre de la philosophie, de la politique et de la morale à un roman, et de lier le tout par une chaine secrète et, en quelque façon, inconnue.[5]

Voltaire found the epistolary form useful for conveying the tenets of his philosophy. During the two years of his exile in England, Voltaire associated with nobles, merchants and men of letters. His lively intellectual curiosity led him to examine closely many aspects of English life and history. He admired much of what he saw, however, his Lettres philosophiques (published first in England in 1733 and one year later in France), were not written to praise the English but rather to demonstrate to his countrymen that improvements in the human condition could be achieved by the reform of the social and political structures without destroying what was essentially good in the existing framework.

Neither Voltaire nor Montesquieu hesitated to exploit an art form as a vehicle for the propagation of their philosophies. They were closely involved with their contemporary society and saw the study of man and his society as the centre-pin of art and philosophy. Perhaps because the eighteenth-century view of culture comprised art, science and philosophy as parts of a whole, and because the lines had not then been drawn which divide them into separate specialities, they conceived no reason why their concern for human welfare should

not be articulated in an art form. And if no suitable art form was available, then, like Montesquieu's Lettres, one could be created.

If the artist remains aloof from his social environment, he tends to isolate himself in unreality and his artistic freedom risks becoming enclosed within his egoism. An artist with the genius of a Baudelaire can perhaps escape this tendency, but it can entrap those less gifted. The creative mind which feeds upon itself for inspiration excludes the diversity and richness of human relationships which, almost without exception, flourish only in a social context. Questions pertaining to human nature perhaps cannot always be fully answered by the introverted study of one's own humanity.

One question which is not only far from being answered but is not being considered with any urgency, is whether human nature can ever reach a state of perfection. However, it should be considered by an artist who attempts artistic perfection. The artist must confront the phenomena of justice and injustice which are inherent in the question of perfection and which cannot exist outside the social context, since they describe a particular state of human relationships. Evidently, injustice exists in every level of all human society and when a man of art becomes aware of it, his artistic integrity is threatened if, as an artist, he ignores what he is aware of as a member of his society. In turning away from injustice, he allows a barrier to be raised between himself and his public. He can no longer serve them as the link between the physical world, whose unpleasant reality he wishes to ignore, and the abstract world in which he seeks refuge. He may find a personal release in his work but to the public this may seem a form of escapism which can

too easily fall to the level of ephemeral entertainment. Pleasure might be necessary, but it does not equate with art.

The role which art plays in society is often confused with the part it is sometimes called upon to play in the propagation of a doctrine. Communism asserts that art, being part of the social superstructure, must reflect the ideology of the economic base. Daniel Hamiche quotes Mao Tse-Tung as saying:

> Il n'existe pas dans la réalité d'art pour l'art, d'art au-dessus des classes, ni d'art qui se développe en dehors de la politique ou indépendamment d'elle.[6]

The opposing theory of art for art's sake developed when barriers had been allowed to grow between the artist and his society. The artist sought refuge in intellectual activity, sealing himself in a closed world into which only a tiny proportion of the public was worthy of admittance. Victor Cousin's phrase, 'l'Art pour l'Art'[7] became the rallying cry for those poets who rejected the philosophers' demand that they participate in the effort made by an intellectual elite to improve the human condition in the France of the 1830s.

In the preface to Mademoiselle de Maupin, published in 1835, Théophile Gautier discussed this view of poetry which insists upon complete detachment from all moral, social and political questions. More than twenty years later, he reiterated his belief in this doctrine in the poem L'Art, published in 1857. As expressed by the Parnassians, this doctrine meant the poet must remain aloof from the preoccupations of his times and restrained in expressing emotions. Moreover, the poet must renounce the idea of pleasing the public taste. The only objective of art must be the search for 'le Beau', that is, aesthetic purity. This ideal beauty was a luxury

which had nothing to do with morality or utility:

> Il n'y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien; tout ce qui est utile est laid, car c'est l'expression de quelque besoin, et ceux de l'homme sont ignobles et dégoûtants, comme sa pauvre et infirme nature.[8]

Two intriguing consequences emerged from this doctrine. The first was that poets like Charles Baudelaire, Leconte de Lisle and Théophile Gautier, following André Chénier and the neo-classicists who traced the path, became convinced that the French public was totally incapable of appreciating poetry. The problem here was not the social condition which rendered the general public a stranger to art but the artists themselves who, wishing to escape the contradiction between their idea of 'le Beau' and the real world, put art out of the public's reach. The second consequence was that in seeking new sources of inspiration, since the contemporary world and human relationships were too disagreeably real, the artist turned to the past, often the resort of those who feel insecure in the present. But society progresses and those poets who sought refuge, not knowledge, in the past, found their art more and more irrelevant and incomprehensible to their contemporaries. The poet became increasingly entrenched in his own narrow world, metaphorically isolated from his society.

The tendency for the artist to become isolated from society existed in the eighteenth century. The image of the artist starving in a garret, popularised in Puccini's La Bohème, first performed in 1896, was not known before the nineteenth century and has largely disappeared today, but, in the eighteenth century, the artist accepted the opinions of the ruling class either by choice or from necessity because of the

system of patronage. Consequently the role of art in society was defined by the artistic clientele, or by those who employed the artist. This alienation of the artist from the general public was less pronounced in the world of theatre. The actor and the audience generated, then as now, a reciprocal reaction to create the theatrical experience. All definitions of theatre, both as a concrete and as an abstract phenomenon, state, or imply, the participation of the theatre public. At this point, it may be useful to examine some definitions.

In the ancient world, the theatre was a:

> construction en amphithéâtre . . . comprenant quatre parties: le theatron (enceinte destinée au spectateur), l'hyposcenium, le proscenium et l'orchestre.[9]

A more modern definition of the theatre is given as an "édifice où un spectacle est présenté au public,"[10] or, "le spectacle où on assiste dans un tel édifice,"[11] and, by extension, "les spectateurs qui assistent à une représentation théâtrale."[12]

Diderot understood that in order to present the new type of dramatic art, changes were necessary in the structure of the building itself and that the audience must necessarily be considered when affecting the alterations:

> Je ne demanderais pour changer la face du genre dramatique, qu'un théâtre très étendu, où l'on montrât . . . différents endroits distribués de manière que le spectateur vît toute l'action. . . .[13]

In the abstract sense, the theatre is defined as an "Art visant à représenter devant un public . . . une suite d'événements où sont engagés des êtres humains agissant et parlant."[14]

The theatre is an art form which more than any other offers itself as a social catalyst. An individual can react strongly to any work of art, but in the theatre there is a dual reaction. Some aspect of the spectator's social condition is represented on stage, relating to him as an individual and as part of a social group. Any reaction generated across the footlights is enhanced by the experience of participation, of knowing that feeling is shared by others.

The theatre can take an ordinary situation and orchestrate it to reveal a reality which is recognisable but exaggerated to such a degree that the spectator is exposed to a deeper reality. In doing this, the theatre is serving as a catharsis. Something of this was expressed by Gide in his Nouveaux Prétextes, 1947:

> . . c'est une extraordinaire chose que le théâtre. Des gens comme vous et moi s'assemblent le soir dans une salle pour voir feindre par d'autres des passions qu'eux n'ont pas le droit d'avoir - parce que les lois et les moeurs s'y opposent.[15]

It is not that the members of the audience are forbidden those passions but rather that they are inhibited in their overt expression. This points to one of the purposes of the art of theatre, not merely to offer the means of freedom from reality, but to extend the reality of our thoughts and emotions so that we may understand and relate to them in a situation of comfortable normality. One can perhaps put one's private despair into a more tolerable perspective when one observes another acting out its compulsions. The theatre can constitute a link between reason and passion.

Cinema and television form part of the extended theatre and though there is a point where they cease to be an art form and become an industry, audience participation is still a factor. However, it

is probably more accurate to say that the public still remains the goal of these two enterprises, while the participation is increasingly passive.

Finally, in defining theatre, it might be noted that in such phrases, as 'théâtre de guerre' and 'théâtre du crime', the public has become the theatre itself.

The participation of the audience remains an integral element in the theatre. The author and the actor aim at awakening a response in the spectator. Whether comedy or tragedy, the action on stage springs from a source recognisable to the spectator. The theatre is the social art which cannot exist without the public. To retain its public, the theatre must be involved, to some degree, in the world that public inhabits. It is this essential aspect which serves as a conceptual base for this thesis rather than the view of the theatre as a literary phenomenon, given that literature pertains to written works in the sense of the latin word, 'littera', from which it derives.

From its origins, the dramatic tradition has developed separately from the literary tradition. The dithyramb, the precursor of Greek tragedy, existed as a hymn or narrative song long before Arion was credited with its transformation into a literary composition in the fifth century B.C. The mime is at least as old as tragedy or comedy. Among the Greeks and the Romans, drama made its appearance at festivals, accompanied by music and dance as a form of artistic expression totally unconnected with the written word.

During the Middle Ages, dramatic elements were incorporated into certain church festivals as a visual manifestation of religious

beliefs. Up to the end of the thirteenth century, serious drama was developed under the aegis of the church. The mystery plays were didactic dramas which conveyed the religious message in a way more easily understood by the illiterate people of the time. An echo of this is found in the festivals and plays of the French Revolution which offered colour, excitement, pageantry and simple messages to the still largely illiterate populace. The tournaments, masks and folk plays of medieval times, the festivals of the Supreme Being, the side-shows and the propagandist plays of the revolutionary era, the extended theatre of today, comprising opera, ballet, cinema, television and even sports events, are all branches which have their origin in traditional theatre.

The participation of the public is not the only way in which the dramatic art differs from the literary. The relationship which the theatre attempts to establish with the spectator is unlike that which the writer, according to Sartre, creates with the readers:

> ... l'écrivain ne rencontre partout que <u>son</u> savoir, <u>sa</u> volonté, <u>ses</u> projets, bref lui-même: il ne touche jamais qu'à sa propre subjectivité, l'objet qu'il crée est hors d'atteinte, il ne le crée pas <u>pour lui</u>.[16]

The relationship between the author and the reader is perceived by Sartre to be intellectual.

Jean-Louis Barrault sees a totally different relationship in the theatre. He judges the relationship created by the dramatist with the spectator to be emotional:

> L'art du théâtre, en s'addressant essentiellement au sens du toucher, est donc avant tout l'Art de la Sensation. Il est à l'opposé de toute préoccupation intellectuelle.
> Nous sommes très loin, donc, de la littérature et de l'écriture.[17]

Barrault maintains that the theatre deserves to be considered as an independent art form, "Indépendant de la littérature et de tous les autres arts."[18]

If the theatre is to be viewed as an independent art form, the criteria applied in its evaluation cannot be the same as those applied to other forms of art. Literary criteria should, therefore, not be used in judging drama any more than in criticising music. A theatrical production, it is true, incorporates painting, music, the literature of the text, but these are fused to form drama and are not intended for evaluation as individual art forms.

There seems to be no general accord on what constitutes the basic criteria for evaluating the plays of the French Revolution among writers who interest themselves in the theatre of this period. Controversy is rife between those who cherish the idea of art being uninvolved, and those who, like Sartre, believe that, "Il n'y a d'art que pour et par autrui."[19]

The belief that the arts are to remain uninvolved, unsullied by social and political complexities, ever striving towards the elusive goal of an ideal beauty, negates the notion that art itself is a projection of man. An interesting question arises regarding the criteria which determine this ideal beauty, whether they are to be found in the artistic style or in the subject matter. If one accepts the theory of art for art's sake, a problem emerges concerning how one should approach an example such as Goya's Le Trois Mai. This painting exposes the stark horror of a firing squad and is judged by Clark to be the finest example of Goya's work.[20] Death has always been a favourite theme in art but it is not always synonymous

with beauty, It is difficult to view a painting like Le Trois Mai from a standpoint sufficiently objective to judge it solely for its technical merit. The impact it makes on the viewer is not just that of an impressive work of art, it demands a response from the individual to the human suffering it portrays.

The ugly images of poverty in the novels of Charles Dickens do not preclude that writer from being accepted as a literary artist and yet his books are deeply involved with his contemporary society, demonstrating the warmth of human relationships as well as miseries of social injustice.

Jean-Louis David dominated the world of fine arts in France during the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Many of his greatest paintings were inspired by contemporary events and he was himself very much involved in the Revolution. In effect, David epitomises the relationship between the artist and politics. His greatest paintings were the outcome of his own political fervour and conviction, expressing revolution as an idea. The political connotations cannot be ignored in the evaluation of his work. In 1785, his Oath of the Horatii, was first shown in Rome, and when it was later shown in Paris, it established David as one of the leaders of national life. His painting, Brutus, was hailed in 1789 as a republican work and had a powerful impact on the imagination of the French people. A year later it had taken on an even more explicit anti-royalist meaning when it was associated with a revival of Voltaire's Brutus, written in 1730. David placed a bust of Brutus on the stage where it remained throughout the play, the performances of which concluded with a living tableau enacting his painting and

emphasising its message.[21] The painting evoked a strong political response culminating in its being prohibited. This caused such a furore that the ban was rescinded. On its reappearance, a group of artists stood watch over it while eager crowds absorbed its political significance. The painting was later bought by the King, whereupon it was removed from public view.

David's Marat Assassiné (1793) is all that political art should be, that is, it is real enough to please the ignorant, ideal enough to commemorate a national hero, and well enough designed to present a memorable image. It is, however, more than this. It is not only the "greatest political picture ever painted,"[22] but is accepted as a great work of art by any atandards.

The argument between the supporters of the social involvement of art and those who affirm that art, while exploring the broader concept of the nature of humanity, should remain detached from contemporary social and political entanglements, reaches a more intense level of conflict in the domain of the social art of theatre.

On June 22, 1958, the English daily newspaper, The Observer, published the views of a theatre critic, Kenneth Tynan, on Les Chaises, by Eugène Ionesco. It signalled the opening round of a controversy which was to involve an historian, an actor and an art critic, all celebrated in their fields, as well as many other interested participants. Les Chaises had just opened in London, but the dispute ranged beyond the play itself to attack the principles of Ionesco's philosophy of the art of theatre. The argument centred on divergent theories on the role of art in society which are particularly important when dealing with the theatre as the social art.

Tynan attacked Ionesco's view of the theatre, accusing the playwright of being, "l'avocat passioné de l'anti-théâtre: il s'opposait ouvertement au réalisme, et tacitement à la réalité même."[23] Tynan accused Ionesco of rejecting the human view of the world and replacing it with:

> . . . une vision personnelle tout à fait légitime, présentée avec beaucoup d'aplomb imaginatif et d'audace verbale. Le danger commence lorsqu'on le présente comme exemplaire, comme le seul accès possible vers le théâtre de l'avenir - ce lugubre monde d'où seront exclues à jamais les hérésies humanistes de la foi en la logique et de la foi en l'homme.[24]

Ionesco's reply was entitled, 'Le rôle du dramaturge', and here he expressed his belief that the source for the study of man is found in the artist himself:

> Pour découvrir le problème fondamental commun à tous les hommes, il faut que je me demande quel est mon problème fondamental, quelle est ma peur la plus indéracinable. C'est alors que je découvrirai quelles sont les peurs et les problèmes du chacun.[25]

He would oppose the view that human relationships can only be studied in a social context.[26] Such a context would include the social environment which influences people and the way they relate to each other. Ionesco would leave to others the disposition of more mundane affairs, regarding them as irrelevant to the artist's analysis of man:

> Apporter un message aux hommes, vouloir diriger le cours du monde, ou le sauver, est l'affaire des fondateurs des religions, des moralistes, ou des hommes politiques, . . . Un dramaturge se borne à écrire des pièces, dans lesquelles il ne peut qu'offrir un témoignage, non point un message didactique. . . .[27]
>
> Une oeuvre d'art n'a rien à voir avec les doctrines. . . . Une oeuvre d'art qui ne serait qu'idéologique, et rien autre, serait inutile, tautologique, inférieure à la doctrine dont elle se réclamerait et qui trouverait meilleure expression dans le langage de la démonstration et du discours. Une pièce idéologique n'est rien autre que la vulgarisation d'une idéologie.[28]

The truth of this last sentence cannot be denied, but it ignores the social aspect of the theatre's role. Barrault considers the audience, an essential factor, and what they seek in the social art:

> Ils veulent assister à un réajustement de l'équilibre de la Vie . . . ils veulent assister à la Justice,[29]

and justice describes a state of human relationships.

Tynan, in his response to Ionesco's theory, wonders, "Pourquoi M. Ionesco tient si fort à cette conception fantômatique de l'art comme monde clos, autonome, responsable devant ses propres lois."[30]

Ionesco's vision of the dramatist's role is perhaps why he remarks, "Il est difficile de se faire comprendre."[31] He goes on to say that it is our social environment which forces us to exist as separate entities, since:

> Aucune société n'a pu abolir la tristesse humaine, aucun système politique ne peut nous libérer de la douleur de vivre, de la peur de mourir, de notre soif de l'absolu. C'est la condition humaine qui gouverne la condition sociale, non le contraire.[32]

Ionesco disassociates himself from those who seek to improve the social condition. He suggests a limit to the role of art. He sees the source of art as springing from the human condition, and its role being to understand and comment on human suffering, while artistic integrity is preserved by not involving art in lessening that misery. It must be clearly pointed out that Ionesco's basic philosophy is not in harmony with the theory of art for art's sake. He is concerned with the universal society of man rather than any particular social group, and for him the reality perceived by the artist is incommunicable.

Tynan, on the other hand, believes that, "l'art vit de la vie," and that both art and ideology, "s'appuient sur l'expérience

humaine pour expliquer les hommes à eux-mêmes. Ils sont frère et soeur, non père et fille."[33]

Sartre claimed that, "l'oeuvre d'art, de quelque côté qu' on la prenne, est un acte de confiance dans la liberté des hommes."[34] Marxist theorists can go even further to relate art to society:

> Art as a human enterprise involves an expenditure of human energy and material goods, and therefore is not exempt from the general necessity of moral justification.[35]

The danger of the view is that it is too often interpreted as an ideological creed which makes art subservient to a political regime, with the result that the value of art as propaganda is more important than any artistic merit. Bertolt Brecht remarked that the production of works of art cannot be organised in the same way as the production of eggs, implying that men can be regimented, but art itself cannot.[36] Political leaders must offer artists creative freedom if they want art to flourish in their society. The artist is a man like other men and as such he has the same rights and responsibilities as every other individual in his society, but if his society is not free, the artist either cesses to function, or risks persecution.

Communist theory maintains that the attist can only be free in a classless society, but the elimination of an unequal class structure does not automatically bring about freedom. A Communist society has no class structure as we know it in the western world, but the example of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, to name but one of many persecuted Russian dissidents, suggests that a Communist regime destroys artistic freedom at least as efficiently, and possibly more so, than the stifling tradition of a Capitalist system. Any state which is founded on order and subordination demands an art with a similar basis,

an art of reason by which appropriate works may be produced when required, rather than allowing the artist to work from his own inspiration, which is beyond the reaches of state control. The attitude of unquestioning belief demanded by a totalitarian state is supported by the classic attitude toward subject matter, that it should be clear and unequivocal. If the artist must conform to the ruling ideology, his degree of freedom diminishes in direct proportion to the rulers' fear of challenge. Thus, it may be that ideology does not destroy art as completely as the oppression of ideology.

Labelling a creative work with a price tag can be just as much of a threat to artistic freedom and the quality of art as ideology. For the public of a Capitalist society, the artistic value of a work of art is often confused with its monetary value. John Berger cites the example of a drawing by Leonardo da Vinci, The Virgin and Child with St. Anne and St. John the Baptist, which, a few years ago, was known to only a limited number of connoisseurs. A prospective buyer offered two and a half million pounds sterling for it. Today the National Gallery in London sells more reproductions of this drawing than of any other picture in its collection:

> Now it hangs in a room by itself. The room is like a chapel. The drawing is behind bullet-proof perspex. It has acquired a new kind of impressiveness. Not because of what it shows - not because of the meaning of its image. It has become impressive, mysterious, because of its market value.[37]

One of the unfortunate consequences of this attitude is that art loses its inherent significance for the majority, who come to regard it as the special domain of the intellectuals and the rich:

> The majority take it as axiomatic that the museums are full of holy relics which refer to a mystery which excludes them; the mystery of unaccountable wealth. Or, to put this another way,

> they believe that original masterpieces belong to the preserve (both materially and spiritually) of the rich.[38]

The idea that only the rich can afford to indulge their taste for artistic excellence spills over into other art forms and classical music and literature become irrelevant to the general public. As the social art, theatre is more susceptible to prevailing attitudes. Today, the traditional theatre appeals to few compared with the popularity of cinema and television. Public support for art is not very strong.

Contemporary cinema and, to a certain degree, television, are in the process of developing as autonomous art forms. Unfortunately, both these media are controlled by those who operate them as industries, and profits are not made by disinterested efforts to educate public taste. Cinema and television are becoming artistic deserts, but they still pursue the essential goal of theatre, that is, they represent to a society aspects of its life. As Barrault sees it:

> La représentation théâtrale va être une prise de contact et un échange entre ce qui est individuel et ce qui est collectif. . . . Sur la scène il va y avoir tous les "Soi" et, dans la salle, il y aura tous les "Autres."[39]

This goal does not lead to the representation of realism, but rather to the stylised and idealised representation of reality. The position of the individual in society becomes the source of the analysis of the human condition, which is a central theme of modern theatre.

The plays of the French Revolution moved towards the development of this theme. They attempted to explore the situation of the individual in the society which was evolving around him. This period does not attract those who look for artistic grandeur in the theatre, but for those who are concerned with the study of the human and

social conditions, the dramatic productions of the revolutionary years constitute an interesting source.

In a society undergoing revolution, one system, one set of values, is being replaced by another. Human progress exacts changes in the social condition and when a powerful minority resists change, revolution becomes inevitable. Ideologies conflict and political moderation becomes a transitory phase in the seemingly inexorable movement to destroy the existing social structure. During a comparatively short period of time, such a society suffers fundamental unheaval in every area of human activity. As the turmoil verges on revolution, each social problem assures an almost exaggerated urgency. Moral, social and political questions become of immediate importance and, in effect, constitute the actual social condition, which the artist should explore.

Great artists, such as Molière and Shakespeare, attained their peaks of popularity in times that were reasonably stable. Their works were concerned with the fundamental human qualities which are unchanging and do not lose their appeal over the years. But although these qualities endure, the conditions and climate of opinion in which they act, undergo considerable change. It is possible that the pressures and attitudes prevalent during a period of political and social upheaval are better exposed in a work which is more relevant but less inspired than great art.

If the theatre is established as the supreme social art, it follows that it must be influenced by contemporary events. The theatre in a revolutionary society must undergo changes comparable to those

which reshape the political structure of that society. The plays produced by the theatre of the Revolution can inform us on the social, moral and political climates of its era.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Introduction

1. Lagarde et Michard, Le XVIIIe Siècle, p. 405.

Part I

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, Situations, II, pp. 55-330, "Qu'est-ce que la littérature," pp. 89-90.

2. Kenneth Clark, Civilization, p. 253.

3. Denis Diderot, Oeuvres Complètes, Tome III, p. 186, "Entretiens sur la Fils naturel."

4. H. Legrand, Oeuvre poétique de Voltaire, pp. 26-27.

5. Montesquieu, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. I, p. 129, "Quelques Réflexions sur les Lettres persanes."

6. Daniel Hamiche, Le Théâtre et la Révolution, p. 19.

7. (i) Paul Robert, Dictionnaire de la Langue française, Vol. 1, p. 255, "(Cette formule a été) employée pour la première fois par Victor Cousin."

   (ii) Philippe van Tieghem, Les Grandes Doctrines Littéraires en France, IVe partie, p. 236, "L'expression même de 'l'Art pour l'Art' aurait été lancée par (Victor) Hugo dans une discussion littéraire en 1829 . . . 'Plutôt cent fois l'Art pour l'Art'."

8. Théophile Gautier, Mademoiselle de Maupin, p. 28.

9. Paul Robert, op. cit., Vol. VI, pp. 720-722.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Diderot, op. cit., p. 152.

14. Paul Robert, op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 721.

15. André Gide, Nouveaux Prétextes, p. 19.

16. Jean-Paul Sartre, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

17. Jean-Louis Barrault, Le Phénomène théâtral, p. 21.

18. Ibid., p. 93.

19. Jean-Paul Sartre, op. cit., p. 93.

20. Kenneth Clark, The Romantic Rebellion, p. 87.

21. Brutus was revered as the Father of the Roman Republic. As consul, he exacted from the people an oath that they would never submit to royal authority. His sons violated this oath. They were tried, condemned and executed in their father's presence. David's painting shows Brutus, in the shadow of a statue representing Rome, while behind him, the bodies of his sons are borne into his home.

22. Kenneth Clark, The Romantic Rebellion, p. 30.

23. André Veinstein, coll., Eugène Ionesco, Notes et Contre-Notes, p. 70.

24. Ibid., p. 71.

25. Ibid., p. 74.

26. See p. 11 of this thesis.

27. Eugène Ionesco, op. cit., p. 72.
It could be argued that Ionesco's plays are didactic, the difference being that his messages are subtly implied rather than overtly expounded.

28. Ibid., p. 72.

29. Jean-Louis Barrault, op. cit., p. 15.

30. André Veinstein, op. cit., p. 77.

31. Ibid., p. 72.

32. Ibid., p. 73.

33. Ibid., p. 77.

34. Jean-Paul Sartre, op. cit., p. 111.

35. Lang and Williams, eds., Marxism and Art, p. 10.

36. John Willett, ed., Brecht on Theatre, p. 269.

37. John Berger, Ways of Seeing, p. 23.

38. Ibid., p. 24.

39. Jean-Louis Barrault, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

PART II

The theatre of mid-eighteenth-century France remained steeped in the classic traditions of tragedy and comedy and while these traditions may have been a suitable interpretation of the climate of opinion in seventeenth-century France, they were no longer a valid expression of their society as it progressed into the next century. The theatre public reflected the attitudes of a society which had changed considerably since the age of Louis XIV, but the theatre itself seemed, for the most part, untouched by this evolutionary process.

The theatre cannot survive as the social art unless it is sensitive to the changes in its social environment, thus, its adherence to the classic tradition was causing the eighteenth-century theatre to lose its significance because the limits such a tradition imposed on the dramatic art rendered it sterile. With its concentration on conforming to the rigid rules of classic drama, the theatre risked losing its ability to develop with its society.

Diderot saw that the theatre was becoming alienated from its own public and he devoted three major works to this problem. His theories on the dramatic art stressed the importance to art of man and society. He viewed the position of the individual in his society as the source for the analysis of humanity. He saw this as the inspiration of drama, and it remains a central idea of the modern theatre. Diderot believed that the theatre needed to become more socially aware, to align itself with the society it served. As has

been stated previously, the bourgeoisie now held a more prominent position in this society. It was Diderot's opinion that the theatre should present an image of life that was more closely related to reality. He was not proposing the representation of realism, but rather an image of reality such as can be achieved in a painting, where each line, each colour, each object is chosen to represent the truth perceived by the artist, not just an image of the object itself.

Diderot described creative artists as "des spectateurs assidus de ce qui se passe autour d'eux dans le monde physique et dans le monde moral."[1] He believed that the aim of the artist was to reveal the reality of nature through the reality which can be understood by the spectator. He developed his theories on the dramatic art because he felt that the theatre did not permit the representation of the reality of his contemporary society. He maintained that the theatre should reflect the changing social attitudes, and, in order to do this, he claimed that it needed to be reconstructed and provided with a new form of dramatic expression. His intention was to create a practical outline for a dramatic form more pertinent to the social condition.

The values and customs represented by classic tragedy and comedy formed part of a superstructure which no longer had its base in reality. The glorious sufferings of the classic hero were losing their appeal for the spectators as the eighteenth century advanced. They wanted to see on stage characters with whom they could more easily identify, in situations that were recognisable. Diderot saw man as the central interest rather than forces which, in classic drama, operated beyond his control. Such a man was not be be found among the heroes of the classic theatre.

Diderot was not the only, nor even the first, writer to try to narrow the gulf between the theatre and contemporary society. There already existed some 'comédies bourgeoises', but these were frequently nothing more than an awkward combination of tragedy and farce in which characters representing the middle classes usually provided comic relief. Diderot repudiated these plays and aimed at the creation of an entirely new concept of drama, 'le drame bourgeois', or, to use his own terminology, 'le drame sérieux', which he envisaged as a third form of drama on the same level as the classic tragedy and comedy. In his study of eighteenth-century French drama, Felix Gaiffe confirms the need for a new dramatic style:

> (Le drame est) une forme dramatique nouvelle, créée en opposition avec les genres classiques de la Tragédie et de la Comédie, et pour répondre aux aspirations de la bourgeoisie, qui désirait voir consacrer par le théâtre la situation de jour en jour plus considérable qu'elle occupait dans la société.[2]

The plays of 'le genre sérieux' were to be limited neither to pure tragedy nor comedy but were to project Diderot's view that life contains elements of the two, and that the essential realism of human problems and situations is weakened if they are exaggerated in order to conform to the classic theory of traditional theatre.

In accordance with his conviction that man should be the pivot, Diderot believed that the basis of the new dramatic form was to be found in the social condition. It was with the intention of establishing this view that he presented his ideas in an essay which accompanied Le Fils naturel, in 1757, a play which he described as being, "entre la comédie et la tragédie."[3] In the Entretiens sur le Fils naturel, he states:

> Ce ne sont plus, à proprement parler, les caractères qu'il faut mettre sur la scène, mais les conditions . . . , il faut que la condition devienne aujourd'hui l'objet principal, et que le caractère ne soit que l'accessoire. . . . C'est la condition, ses devoirs, ses avantages, ses embarras, qui doivent servir de base à l'ouvrage.[4]

To illustrate the social condition, Diderot wanted to see portrayed on the stage, "l'homme de lettres, le philosophe, le commerçant, le juge, l'avocat, le politique, le citoyen, le magistrat, le financier, le grand seigneur, l'intendant. . . ."[5] Many of these were already frequently seen on the stage but, with the exception of 'le grand seigneur', they were not always shown in a good light. Fundamentally, human beings have similar traits, but each individual owes his way of acting, or thinking, to his condition. For Diderot, the condition of man offered the creative mind a source quite as rich as the human character. He saw man as the mainspring of artistic inspiration, and the analysis of man's thoughts, emotions and actions, formed by his social condition, as the basis of drama.

Diderot realised that the development of a new form of drama would require new dramatic techniques. He was equally concerned with the practical aspect of drama as with the source of its inspiration. In the Entretiens, he methodically enumerated what was needed to be done:

> La tragédie domestique et bourgeoise à créer.
> Le genre sérieux à perfectionner.
> Les conditions de l'homme à substituer aux caractères, peut-être dans tous les genres.
> La pantomime à lier étroitement avec l'action dramatique.
> La scène à changer, et les tableaux à substituer aux coups de théâtre . . . .
> La tragédie réelle à introduire sur le théâtre lyrique.[6]

Diderot enlarged upon these points and pursued his aim of involving the theatre more closely with its society in two other works,

Following his own methods, he wrote Le Père de famille, which was published in 1758 and given its first performance three years later. This play was also accompanied by an essay, Discours sur la poésie dramatique, in which he noted the faults of classic theatre and elsborated on the reform proposed in the Entretiens. In the Discours, Diderot discussed the forms of drama, the design, the dialogue, the characters, the development of the action, the mood, the style, the setting, the author, the critic, in effect, everything associated with the creation of drama.

Even the title of his play, Le Père de famille, emphasised the importance he placed on social condition and it would certainly strike a familiar chord in each member of its audience. He gave a detailed description of the setting, a room which the audience would recognise as being "celle du père de famille." He classified this play as being "entre le genre sérieux du 'Fils naturel', et la comédie."[7] It opened with a tableau, or more accurately, a mime, which, as the actors obeyed Diderot's preciae instructions, would not only set the scene, but also provide the background for the plot. He thought that the 'tableau vivant' should reveal the emotional and social background without unnecessary dialogue. This was because he rejected declamatory asides as a means of divulging information and because he believed that the art of painting had a great deal more to offer the theatre than merely providing the supporting scenery. He hoped that these tableaux could represent on stage something of the quality of such painters as Greuze and Chardin who captured in their work the concentrated moment of living drama.

He included many instructions for the actors in his two plays. These instructions were necessary if the new form of drama was to succeed. The actors of the classic theatre accentuated mime and declamatory style of speech. Even their costume detracted from the theme of the play since each actor dressed to suit his own taste and not in accordance with the condition of the character he was portraying. It was not, in fact, till the end of the eighteenth century that any real effort was made to suit the costume to the role. Diderot proposed, "des habits vrais, des discours vrais,"[8] together with a natural style of movement which he deemed necessary for the new dramatic form. Instead of the declamatory style of speaking, he advised the playwright to model his dialogue on that of the people who would form the theatre public:

> Ecouter les hommes, et s'entretenir souvent avec soi: voilà les moyens de se former au dialogue.[9]

In La Paradoxe sur le Comédien, in 1773, Diderot concentrated mainly on the role of the actor, but he touched on all the arts in his discussion. Diderot used the actor as an example to demonstrate more clearly his theories on the aesthetic arts. He discussed the relationship between the artist's imagination, nature and art. He referred frequently to the 'modèle idéal' which the actor could present to the public by means of his technique and his study of nature. This model was the creation of imagination and reason and Diderot believed that it could be revealed to the public at the theatre through the art of the writer and the actor. It was this 'modèle idéal' which he felt should lead people to 'la vertu'. Diderot believed firmly in the didactic role of the theatre:

> C'est en allant au théâtre qu'ils se sauveront de la compagnie des méchants dont ils sont entourés; c'est là qu'ils trouveront ceux avec lesquels ils aimeraient à vivre; c'est là qu'ils verront l'espèce humaine comme elle est, et qu'ils se réconcilieront avec elle.[10]

In Diderot's view, the artist and the actor had a great responsibility toward the public and the dramatic art had a very important role to play in society. The theatre, therefore, had to study man and all the aspects of his life in order to fulfill its role.

In his insistence that the theatre should be socially aware, Diderot's approach was revolutionary, but he himself was not preaching revolution. He wanted to replace the kings and emperors of the classic theatre with characters exemplifying bourgois life-styles. The aristocracy no longer dominated its society as it did its theatre. Diderot wanted the theatre to reflect the progress man had made, but for him, as for the other philosophers of the mid-eighteenth century, man represented the bourgeoisie, the class which, at that time, was penetrating the traditional preserves of the nobility.

Diderot was concerned with making the theatre more aware of its society and his own social condition led him to represent that concept in the narrow terms of the middle class. He clearly stated that the theatre should propagate the bourgeois virtues, but he was adamant that these did not include sentimental sensibility. He advised the creative artist, "C'est toujours la vertu et les gens vertueux qu'il faut avoir en vue quant on écrit."[11] In the Paradoxe, he stated that great dramatists control their imaginations and sensibilities as great actors control their emotions, in order to give the public a more exact image of what their genius leads them to perceive;

> La sensibilité n'est guère la qualité d'un grand génie. Il aimera la justice, mais il exercera cette vertu sans en recueillir la douceur; c'est la tête qui fait tout.[12]

He understood that the perception of an artist who was too involved on a personal level was likely to be coloured by prejudice.

The influence of Diderot's theories of drama is evident in certain works of Beaumarchais. Although Diderot's plays had not yet been performed when Beaumarchais wrote Eugénie, 1767, he was familiar with Diderot's philosophy of the theatre. Beaumarchais prefaced Eugénie with an Essai sur le genre dramatique sérieux, in which he supported Diderot's theories and enlarged upon them with a discussion of the language of serious drama and the importance of a moral purpose. Eugénie, 1767, and Les Deux Amis, 1770, were written as examples of serious drama. Later, Beaumarchais was to reject 'le genre sérieux' but he reaffirmed his support in this last play, La Mère coupable, 1792. Today, Beaumarchais' reputation stems from his two comedies, Le Barbier de Séville, 1775, and Le Mariage de Figaro, 1784, which have since been made even more popular by the operas of Rossini and Mozart. Beaumarchais' other plays have been lost in obscurity. Even at the time he wrote them, his three examples of serious drama did not achieve success.

His Essai sur le genre dramatique sérieux, 1767, supported Diderot's theories but was written from a much less objective point of view. With the rising importance of the role of the bourgeoisie in the French society of his time, Diderot saw the new style of drama as an autonomous form of the dramatic art in accordance with his view of the theatre as a socially related art. For Beaumarchais, the Essai was not only to propagate a theory based on the increasing social

awareness of this period, but a means of justifying his play in the eyes of his critics. He did not separate the criticism of a particular play, Eugénie, 1767, from that of the genre itself.

In attacking the critics of 'le genre sérieux', and of his own play, Beaumarchais treated with scorn those who confused the serious drama with "Tragi-comédie, Tragédie bourgeoise, Comédie larmoyante . . . ces productions monstreuses!"[13] While emphasising the potential of the new form, he offered no solution to a fundamental problem of contemporary drama, which was the veneration of sentimentality among the bourgeoisie. In fact, his plays compounded the problem. Diderot's theory of man and his society being central to dramatic inspiration was interpreted by Beaumarchais in the narrower sense of middle class man in his limited social environment. It was the representation of the bourgeois predilection for sentimentality which led to the almost inevitable degeneration of 'le drame sérieux' into 'le drame larmoyant'. In place of the 'tragédie réelle' which Diderot proposed as the theme for serious drama, Beaumarchais substituted emotive tragedy. It was the practical presentation of these tragic emotions which caused them to be easily confused with the bourgeois sensibility he claimed to criticise. The dignity of the turmoil of the human spirit which Diderot hoped to see represented in the theatre within the framework of the bourgeois condition, was reduced in Eugénie to the display of emotional sensibility.

Beaumarchais stated in his Essai:

> Un principe certain de l'art, qu'il n'y a ni moralité ni l'intérêt au théâtre sans un secret rapport du sujet dramatique à nous.[14]

This reaffirms the concept proposed by Diderot of the theatre's duty to its public, but Beaumarchais diverges from Diderot's theories in asserting that the result of this relationship would be manifested by the tears of the spectators:

> Celui qui pleure au Spectacle est seul; et plus il le sent, plus il pleure avec délices, et surtout dans les pièces du genre honnête et sérieux, qui remuent le coeur par les moyens si vrais, si naturels. Souvent, au milieu d'une scène agréable, une émotion charmante fait tomber des yeux des larmes abondantes et faciles. . . . .[15]

The reaction of the spectator to the play becomes illusory if the author's intention is to generate this 'émotion charmante' instead of concerning himself with the development of realistic characters and situations.

Diderot viewed the didactic role of the theatre as one area of its social responsibility and he placed considerable importance on its representation of morality ('la vertu'). Beaumarchais gave greater emphasis to the role of moral sensibility ('la moralité'). He referred to it in his definition of the new drama:

> Il est l'essence du genre sérieux d'offrir un intérêt plus pressant, une moralité plus directe que la Tragédie héroique, et plus profonde que la Comédie plaisante.[16]

By 'moralité', Beaumarchais might well have meant the ethic quality of virtue, but the morality he depicts in his plays resembles the social code of bourgeois manners.

In January, 1767, the year of Eugénie's first performance, he wrote a letter in which he stated the moral, didactic purpose of his play:

> Comme cet ouvrage, enfant de ma sensibilité, respire l'amour de la vertu, et ne tend qu'à épurer notre théâtre et en faire une école de bonnes moeurs. . . .[17]

These 'bonnes moeurs' were those of the bourgeoisie. Beaumarchais wanted to establish them in place of the social code of the aristocracy which prevailed in the theatre. Instead of widening the social base of the theatre, Beaumarchais seemed to be aiming at replacing it with a different class. In this he revealed the attitude which was largely acceptable at that time. It was the attitude of those who wanted to share the privileges from which they had previously been excluded, and not of those who were seeking radical changes in their society.

In his two comedies, Le Barbier de Séville, 1775, and Le Mariage de Figaro, 1784, Beaumarchais used satire as a weapon against the values of the privileged class. These plays exploited the dissatisfaction with the situation wherein a small proportion of the population could trample with impunity on the rights of others. Neither play betrayed a truly revolutionary attitude on behalf of its author, because the rights that Beaumarchais wanted to protect belonged to the middle class, not to society as a whole.

A satirical play is a criticism of society and the success of such a play depends on spectators who appreciate the object of satire. Satirical comedy implies a degree of acceptance of the situation it satirises, otherwise the situation would be likely to provoke disgust, or even fear, rather than humour. Beaumarchais' satirical comedies launched an attack on the abuse of 'bonnes moeurs'. The satire is directed against the aristocracy whose members, though they constituted an unrepresentative minority in society, were allowed to exploit and mock both the diligent industry and the moral respectability of the middle classes. The Revolution was to topple the nobility from

its privileged position but as it continued to advance toward more radical social reforms, it went beyond the changes Beaumarchais had sought.

Beaumarchais' satire sprang from the myth that social equality can be limited. The leaders of the early stages of the Revolution, for the most part, believed similarly, that when they preached equality, all men would aim for their middle class version of it. Like Beaumarchais, they approached contemporary social problems with the mentality of the Age of Reason, a mentality which was blind to the working class perception of equality, and which found itself far removed from the activism of the revolutionaries.

Observers of the revolutionary period in France tend, in the Western world, to share the same mentality as Beaumarchais. This is of particular concern to those who would study the theatre of the Revolution, since, like Beaumarchais, those observers often dismiss the plays which this period produced, because they are offended by the radicalism many of these plays contain.

Beaumarchais' refusal to accept the progression of the Revolution beyond the reforms he deemed desirable, manifested itself in his reaction to the controversy surrounding Marie-Joseph Chénier's tragedy, Charles IX, ou, l'Ecole des Rois, 1789. There were certain points of similarity between this controversy and the situation Beaumarchais had found himself in a few years earlier. In 1782, Beaumarchais had refused to accept the official view that the time was not right for the public performance of Le Mariage de Figaro, which the royal censor had banned because it contained offensive allusions to controversial contemporary issues. Beaumarchais gave private readings of his play

to recruit support among the general public and in the court itself. His campaign succeeded and the play was performed in 1784. Five years later, similar reasons were given for the repression of Chénier's Charles IX, 1789, which was more radical in its condemnation of the existing political scene. It went too far for Beaumarchais, who gave his support to those who demanded that Charles IX be banned. However, although on this occasion, Beaumarchais' standpoint was counter-revolutionary, his plays constitute examples of his view that the theatre should be involved in the movement toward social reform.

As the revolutionary mentality developed during the 1780s, the involvement of the theatre in social issues revealed its potential usefulness in the field of propaganda. In the theatre were present those conditions which Ridgway considers necessary for the purposes of propaganda:

> Tout effort de propagande ambitieux, pour être efficace, doit remplir deux conditions essentielles: présenter un message clair et simple, ou du moins susceptible de remuer les esprits, et disposer des moyens d'atteindre un public étendu.[18]

In Ridgway's view, the problem of the eighteenth-century theatre concerned neither its right to exist nor its potential ability to further moral education, but how it could be adapted to mould public opinion more efficiently. During the revolutionary period, public opinion played an increasingly important role, since the success of various revolutionary measures depended on public support. The theatre of the Revolution was of paramount importance in the propagation of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary ideologies. The theatre became a means of communication by which the public was made aware of political ideology; new ideas were presented on stage where

the oral and visual interpretation of their message made them easy to understand.

The spectator was thus kept informed of current issues and developments in the political arena without having to read or listen to speeches. A play performed in a theatre was able to reach a much larger public than a political pamphlet. The importance of the theatre as a means of communication is stressed in an article by Amanda Binns:

> There was no doubt that, given high illiteracy and printing costs, and the lack of technological alternatives, the revolution gave birth to a popular theatre that was the most effective mass media of its time.[19]

As the Revolution approached, the theatre became involved in the demand for more freedom on its own behalf. Dissatisfaction with the laws governing theatres surfaced in those places which flourished outside the domain of the established institutions whose exclusive right to the best examples of the dramatic art was protected by law. Writers whose works were not accepted by the establishments and who, therefore, could not benefit from their more expert productions, joined in protesting their monopoly.

The popular theatres (as opposed to the establishment), were forbidden to show plays of five acts and plays written in the language of classic tradition. They resorted to some quite ingenious devices in seeking to avoid contravening the law, but in spite of the welter of plagiarisms which ensued, the popular theatre evolved a language, mimes and characters which were original. In their often temporary structures, these theatres presented stereotyped characters and situations, well-known to the audience who would often join in the vaudeville which followed the plays.

The established theatres, particularly the Comédie-Française, persisted in their harassment of the unofficial theatres, which, however, not only survived, but became more popular with the public. The popular theatres charged a modest fee for admission and the spectator did not need a classical education to understand their productions. Indeed, most of their actors as well as their audiences were not well educated. Dramatic technique became more important than the finer points of dramatic art, and popular appeal was assured by the production of shows which, though scorned by higher society, pleased the lower class audiences to whom these theatres catered.

Dramatic art was not the only victim of the official theatres' monopoly. Resentment was felt by many writers who, from 1789, proposed new rules of the theatre. On December 17, 1790, one of their number, La Harpe, presented to the Société des Amis de la Constitution (the future Club des Jacobins), his Discours sur la Liberté du Théâtre, in which he demanded new regulations and deplored the existing situation wherein a privileged group, the Comédiens-Français, whose patriotism and sense of civic duty were in doubt, had monopolised the heritage of France's great writers and who, therefore, exerted the greatest influence in the realm of the theatre.[20]

In the beginning of January 1791, the Assemblée Nationale discussed the report it had commissioned regarding the writers' petition on the liberty of the theatre. The seven articles of law which were eventually voted, were based on five of the articles proposed by the writers and began with the words, "Tout privilège exclusif étant aboli. . . ."[21] The writers' petition had been signed by men of letters among whose names was that of Beaumarchais.

One of the results of this law was that several theatres appeared, almost overnight, all over Paris, but most of them were short-lived. These theatres tried to present plays which had previously been the exclusive property of the Comédie-Française, but they lacked the resources necessary for such enterprises.

Later, the Jacobins took charge of the reorganization of the Parisian theatres, with the aim of furthering the propagation of ideological indoctrination. Consequently, theatres became closely associated with political clubs. From 1793, each district of Paris was ordered to present selected plays to the public which was obliged to attend in the name of patriotic duty. Certain theatres were chosen by the government as beneficiaries of a state grant to ensure the presentation of plays whose theme advanced the popularisation of the new ideological principles. These performances took place under the watchful supervision of the police.

Consequently, the theatre was subordinated to revolutionary ideals. The plays attempted to explain the revolutionary language and the significance of questions issuing from the practical application of revolutionary ideas, such as the usage of 'toi', which Binns considers fundamental to the development of the revolutionary mentality:

> The question of whether one should address a man in the polite or informal 'you' form was integral to the whole issue of fraternity, equality, liberty. If these concepts were to have immediate meaning in the lives of every Republican they would need to be witnessed on every occasion of social intercourse.[22]

The plays performed during this period aided in the new, revolutionary interpretation of such words as 'vertu', 'honneur', 'patriote' and 'citoyen'. The theatre language of the former regime yielded to the

vulgar tongue whose greatest disadvantage lay in its inability to effectively express philosophic concepts. The theatre offered itself as a means to remedy this.

As the theatre was exploited as a vehicle of propaganda for the revolutionary ideology, its ability to function as an expression of the dramatic art was weakened. The propagation of revolutionary attitudes was emphasised by the choice of costume, vocabulary and the actor's political zeal, to the detriment of the quality of the dramatic art. With the intention of removing all unacceptable royalist allusions, the plays of Voltaire and Racine were mutilated, while Corneille's works were dropped from theatrical repertoires. The actors who played parts unsympathetic to popular concepts of revolutionary principles often faced the audience's open hostility. An actor's dramatic talent was secondary to his revolutionary commitment and good republicans were chosen before good actors. As regards costume, the actors were more concerned with what would please their audience than with what was suited to their role in a particular play. The action of the play itself was frequently interrupted by spectators who disagreed with the sentiments expressed in certain lines, or who vociferously demanded revolutionary songs, or even by an actor who would break off his dialogue to assure the audience that the lines he was speaking did not reflect his personal views.

Critics of the French theatre of this period have often condemned its lack of artistic value, and this has led to its receiving little attention in literary histories. Even those who accept the social role of the theatre deplore the depths to which it sank as far as artistic merit is concerned. The more the theatre of the

Revolution departed from the traditional concepts of theatre, the more it is regarded as betraying its role in society. But those who thus condemn the revolutionary theatre are those who do not uphold the theatre as an autonomous social art, which does not belong exclusively to the individual domains of literature, history or politics, though it includes elements of all three disciplines.

The works of three critics who deal with the theatre of the Revolution will be examined, particularly those parts of their studies which relate to an incident which took place in 1789. At this point, it becomes necessary to digress in order to review the events and implications referred to by these critics, so as to show the basic differences between their approaches.

In 1788, the Comédie-Française had accepted into its repertoire, Marie-Joseph Chénier's tragedy, Charles IX, ou, l'École des Rois, but Suard, the royal censor, had forbidden its performance because the play contained attacks, judged too outrageous, against the church and the monarchy. The tragedy centred on a weak king, portrayed as his ministers' puppet, who was finally responsible for the massatre of Saint Bartholomew's Day. Chénier's struggle to have his tragedy performed, was noticed by the revolutionaries, Danton amongst them.[23] On August 19, 1789, the Comédie-Française's performance of a play by Fontanelle, was disrupted by a demonstration by a group in the audience calling for Charles IX. The Comédie-Française brought the demonstration to an end by promising to seek permission for the performance of Chénier's play from the municipal administration which had taken over theatre censorship. Bailly, the mayor of Paris, took its decision to the Assemblée Nationale which, in turn, submitted the

play to a committee. The committee's permission was opposed by the higher ranks of clergy and so the controversy continued. This delay, led to the polarisation of the opinions of actors and public and the ensuing publicity assured the position of Charles IX as a 'cause célèbre' for the revolutionaries, for whom the fate of the play became inextricably associated with the progress of the Revolution itself. Opposition to the play itself was finally overcome and on November 4, 1789, Charles IX was given its first performance at the Comédie-Française. It was a triumph for the revolutionaries, but not the end of the rift it had caused in the Comédie-Française and among the general public.

In 1953, H.C. Ault published a criticism of this play in an article,"'Charles IX, ou l'Ecole des Rois': Tragédie nationale." Under the guise of a literary analysis, Ault's article condemns the play's political ideology and implications while he evaluates it from the emotional point of view of one whose own politics are revealed as reactionary and conservative in comparison.

Ault scornfully rejects Chénier's claim that he had written a national tragedy. First, he asserts that Chénier erred in following Voltaire's example, "(Whose) influence was on the whole disastrous to Tragedy,"[24] and, moreover, that the author of Charles IX betrayed his ignorance of the essence of classical tragedy. Chénier's view was that tragedy should instruct and that a national tragedy should inspire patriotic virtue and pay homage to France. Ault states that such didactic aims destroy the true concept of classical tragedy whose purpose, as he sees it, is:

> the dramatic representation of a man of heroic stature struggling unavailingly against powers mightier than himself, of a man going greatly to his doom.[25]

Ault does not entertain the possibility that Diderot's dramatic theories could have influenced the development of the tragic genre in the eighteenth century; on the contrary, his article expresses the view that classic tragedy does not permit development. This belief in the immutable quality of classicism was one of the causes of 'la Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes' which persisted from 1683 to 1719 and which gave rise to the question of whether art should profit from the experience of the centuries. But the urgency of this question diminished as the classic doctrine lost its absolute authority and gave way to the prevailing aesthetics of Chénier's time.

Ault disputed Chénier's claim that his tragedy was national, on the grounds that its popularity was ephemeral:

> Since the first years of the Revolution this tragedy, proudly hailed as the model 'tragédie nationale', has not been acted.[26]

In studying the speeches of the characters in Charles IX, Ault finds their lack of historic fidelity deplorable:

> All these speeches ring out with the assured optimism of the century of Voltaire, never do they suggest that of the Valois.[27]

It is a criticism that suggests that Ault did not understand why Chénier chose to set his tragedy in that particular period of his country's history. Neither did Ault appreciate that the play was not intended as a period piece.

Ault devotes half of his article to an analysis of the text and to the structure of the play which conforms quite closely to the classic formula. His criticism of the play's dramatic quality is

fairly brief. He finds the tragedy "too cold and too static," and he opines that "The action has little interest and its presentation is rather dull."[28] Further on, Ault allows a certain grudging praise of the play:

> There are passages in the play that are not without eloquence; there are many that are sincerely meant; there are occasional scenes that have some dramatic value; . . .[29]

The article includes an account of the events which preceded the first performance of Charles IX, and also contains a reference to Chénier's letters to the press in which he attempted to justify his tragedy. These letters, says Ault, show that:

> (Chénier) was never for one moment concerned with the question of the wisdom of producing such a play at such a moment in the history of France.[30]

But it was precisely because it was such a moment that Chénier fought for his play's public presentation. Ault's view of political wisdom is coloured by his own political opinions which are obviously opposed to Chénier's.

This article gives the impression that neither Chénier's talent, nor the tragedy's artistic merit is at issue, but rather it is the author's political beliefs which are being criticised. Ault's antipathy to the revolutionary cause espoused by Chénier is revealed in the way the critic alludes to Louis XVI whose name he usually prefixes by 'unhappy' or 'unfortunate', and whom he sees as being at the mercy of "every enlightened Frenchman (who was) prepared to deliver some lesson or sermon to that unhappy monarch."[31]

It seems, on reading Ault's article, that Chénier's major fault was not an erroneous concept of tragedy, but his didactic purpose, more specifically, the wrong ideology which directed that

purpose. Ault asserts that Bailly was right to refuse his consent to the performance of Charles IX and he refers to the revolutionaries who demanded it as "the young hotheads of 1789."[32]

The conclusion of this article is written in a style more suited to a political pamphlet than a literary critique, as Ault appears to suspend his academic objectivity and literary judgement to identify with the counter-revolutionary opinion expressed in a letter by Beaumarchais which deplored the inflammatory content of Charles IX and its inopportune presentation:

> That criticism of the tragedy, Charles IX, ou l'École des Rois, and in particular of its presentation at such a dangerous moment, in November 1789, is still pertinent and exact.[33]

In his opening paragraphs, Ault defines classic tragedy and condemns Chénier for not conforming to this definition, and from this point, the article moves further and further away from the usual tenor of a piece of literary criticism. Chénier's play was a catalyst both socially and politically. Its value to the theatre of the Revolution lies in the fact that it did indeed activate a public reaction and provoke political confrontation in the theatre. A criticism which deals only with the literary point of view is limited when dealing with such a play whose fame did not depend on its literary merit. Ault's article is weakened because he judges the play mostly on its political implications, which are abhorrent to him, while claiming to write a literary criticism.

Daniel Hamiche, in his book, Le Théâtre et la Révolution, 1973, goes to the other extreme. Hamiche exploits the theatre to reinforce the marxist-leninist theory regarding the arts. But

Hamiche's political commentary is not superfluous, as is Ault's, since Hamiche openly asserts that politics are central to the theme of his book.

In his introduction, which contains references to the works of Engels, Lenin, Mao Tse-tung, Marx and Stalin, Hamiche declares the conceptual base of his book:

> Le théatre, l'activité dramatique, l'institution théâtrale sont des composants de la superstructure sociale . . . la superstructure peut, dans certaines conditions, modifier, voire transformer, la base économique . . . pour être victorieuse, une révolution doit s'attacher à transformer les choses et les esprits, la base économique et la superstructure.[34]

Hamiche adheres to the marxist-leninist philosophy of which the fundamental maxim regarding the arts is that all art, all culture, must serve the economic base. The artistic merit of a play such as Charles IX, is, to him, irrelevant; its importance lies in its usefulness to the Revolution at that time. From this standpoint, Hamiche states the significance of Chénier's tragedy:

> Charles IX, ... représente précisément l'idéologie bourgeoise dans la révolution à ses débuts, en lutte, au niveau de la superstructure, contre l'idéologie aristocratique qui n'a pas disparu.[35]

The 'battle' of Charles IX, which began with the controversy between Chénier and the Comédie-Française, revealed three aspects of the class struggle, in Hamiche's view. First, on the level of the economic base, the author of this play challenged the authority of the Comédie-Française which controlled the economic monopoly in the theatre; on the level of the political base, the Comédie-Française was unwilling to accept the new, revolutionary authority which gave permission for the play to be performed; finally, on the ideological level, a group of Comédiens-Français opposed the tragedy because it

reflected an ideology contrary to that of the former regime.

Hamiche claims that a fundamental concept of revolutionary ideology was being fought over in the 'battle' of Charles IX, in that the theatre which rejected this tragedy in favour of plays reflecting the idéology of the defeated class, advanced the cause of the counter-revolutionaries. On several occasions, Hamiche reaffirms the marxist-leninist theory supporting this view:

> La nécessité absolue où se trouve toute révolution qui ne peut s'élever qu'à mesure qu'elle détruit l'ancienne société, non seulement son appareil d'État mais aussi sa morale, ses moeurs, sa culture, cette nécessité absolue se traduit, dans les faits, par une "révolution culturelle" qui entreprend de remodeler toute la société en fonction de l'idéologie de la nouvelle classe qui prend le pouvoir.[36]

In recounting the details of the 'battle' of Charles IX, Hamiche's attitude is determined by this central idea that all art must serve the interests of the revolution, and he labels those who wanted to ban the play as counter-revolutionaries. Suard, and Beaumarchais opposed its presentation because they feared it would kindle the passions of its audience in an already troubled time. From the point of view of political moderates, it was a reasonable opinion, but Hamiche asserts that anyone not actively supporting the Revolution was serving the interests of the oppressors and prejudicing the chances of the oppressed. The success of a cultural revolution necessitated the arousal of popular passions directed toward the destruction of the former social system.

Hamiche is obviously not attempting an impartial analysis of the Charles IX affair. Although he accurately quotes extracts of the public correspondence between Chénier and the Comédie-Française, he does not hesitate to interpose his personal judgement of the members

of the official theatre. He qualifies these extracts with such phrases as:

> . . . ce petit morceau d'une rare hypocrisie.[37]
>
> Ce ton suppliant, servile même, des Comédiens-Français. . . .[38]
>
> . . . l'assemblée générale des Comédiens-Français prit la délibération suivante qui est, pour le moins, hypocrite: . . .[39]

At this point, it might be profitable to refer to another critic, Marvin Carlson, who has published a work dealing with the same plays and events as Hamiche. Therefore, it is perhaps inevitable that their divergent opinions should be compared, especially since Hamiche unleashes a personal attack on Carlson.

Whereas Ault's article is ostensibly a work of literary criticism, and Hamiche's book is centred on the political aspects, the theme of The Theatre of the French Revolution, 1966, by Marvin Carlson, is the troubled history of the Comédie-Française from 1789 to 1799. Carlson traces the progress of the Revolution through the fluctuating fortunes of the principal theatre of Paris as it battled against the political tides and also against the threat of lesser theatres whose appearance, though largely transient, in the city, challenged the Comédie-Française's traditional monopoly. This book gives a detailed account of the effects of contemporary events on the theatre, the actors, the management and the theatre public, on all of whom it imparts a wealth of valuable information. Carlson recounts the various crises suffered by the theatres during this period, but his book fails to offer an in-depth study of the revolutionary theatre.

Carlson and Hamiche agree on the significance of the controversy surrounding Charles IX and both recognise the importance of the

uproar in the Comédie-Française on August 19, 1789 as constituting the first political demonstration of note in the French theatre.[40] But although these two books are partly based on the same historic events, the authors generally have widely differing views on their importance and their interpretation.

To a degree, Carlson is content to relate the history of events, while Hamiche is concerned with their value to revolutionary politics; neither author considers them from the point of view of what these developments can mean to a sociological study of the theatre itself. They do not condemn the theatre of the Revolution for not conforming to tradition, as Ault does, but they do judge the theatre of this period from the standpoint of their own modern ideologies.

After dealing with the history of the theatre during the period of bourgeois revolution, the bias of Carlson's criticism is revealed in the judgement he passes on those plays which reflect the Jacobin ideology. In Carlson's history, the controversy over Charles IX is just an incident in the Comédie-Française's struggle to reach a compromise with the revolutionary authorities. Carlson does not exploit the incident for political purposes, but his personal repudiation of the revolutionary mentality is, nevertheless, made very clear. He does not employ a vocabulary which would betray his antipathy toward the revolutionaries, but he does describe the moderates and the counter-revolutionaries in very sympathetic terms. Referring to the occasion when the Comédie-Française was forced to seek permission of the mayor of Paris for the presentation of Charles IX, Carlson describes Bailly as:

> . . . a Constitutional Royalist and a prudent man, (who) saw clearly that the demand was really the demand of a minority less interested in the play itself than in stirring up the populace.[41]

He adds nothing to suggest that the motive of this minority might constitute a justifiable aim for revolutionaries, or that the theatre had entered a new phase in carrying out its social role. Although he appreciates the value of Charles IX to revolutionary propaganda, he ignores the possibility that the play itself manifests some aspects of the struggle between the bourgeois and the aristocracy.[42]

Carlson and Hamiche show that their ideologies diverge even more when they deal with another play which had considerable impact at this time, L'Ami des Loix, by Laya, which was performed at the Comédie-Française January 3, 1793. Both critics judge this play from a political point of view. In Hamiche's opinion, L'Ami des Loix:

> . . . illustrait sur la scène, l'ultime et vain effort du parti modéré, et où les personnalités du moment, Robespierre et Marat, transparaissaient sous les personnages chargés de 'Nomophage' et 'Durichrâne'.[43]

He calls the spectators who applauded it, "des aristocrates et des ennemis jurés de la Révolution."[44]

Carlson, on the other hand, declares his sympathy with the author's intention:

> Laya had supported the early stages of the Revolution, but its recent manifestations concerned him deeply; his play was a passionate cry for freedom with order and a slashing attack on the Jacobin extremists.[45]

The attitudes of Carlson and Hamiche diverge even farther to reach the height of their disaccord which appears in their treatment of Le Jugement dernier des Rois, by Maréchal. This play was performed on October 18, 1793, and identified itself very closely with the cause of the Jacobin extremists who had just taken the political

power out of the hands of the bourgeois moderates. Carlson totally condemns this play, judging it a frightful example of propaganda, devoid of any quality which might detract from its faults:

> . . . the République tried to silence its critics by presenting one of the most infamous plays of the Revolution, Pierre-Sylvain Maréchal's Le Jugement dernier des Rois.[46]

Hamiche considers the presentation of this "pièce révolutionnaire modèle"[47] the highest achievement of the revolutionary theatre because of the play's political ideology.

The action of Le Jugement dernier des Rois, 1793, takes place after the Revolution on a desert island, dominated by an active volcano and inhabited by an old man, le Vieillard, exiled from France during the reign of Louis XIV. Ten Sans-Culottes from different European countries bring to the island their kings and the Pope, deposed by an international revolutionary movement. The farcical buffoonery of the quarrelsome rulers presents a stark contrast to the simple dignity of the Sans-Culottes. At the end of the play, the volcano erupts, engulfing the abject kings and Pope.

The play symbolises the solidarity of the common people in the face of their oppressors. It shows that their solidarity crosses the barriers of nationalism, an idea cherished by the revolutionaries. The author's purpose, as described by Hamiche, was:

> . . . aider, par le théâtre, les masses populaires de la capitale à poursuivre la grande entreprise de 'révolutionnarisation' idéologique dont les journées de février, de mai et de juin 1793, sont comme les manifestations tangibles. . . .
>
> En même temps qu'il tente une systématisation des traits les plus positifs de la mentalité des Sans-Culottes, Maréchal offre aux spectateurs comme aux lecteurs, une image purifée mais non déformée, de leur propre comportement souvent diffus.

> Il tente, . . . de créer le 'héros positif' (le Sans-Culotte) qu'il oppose, sur la scène, aux héros négatifs (les monarques) dans un jeu dialectique d'ombre et de lumière.[48]

This 'héros positif' is represented in the play by the character of the old man, to whom Carlson, in his resumé of Le Jugement, makes not the slightest reference. Maréchal's purpose, as described above, would appear to agree with Diderot's view that the theatre should offer the public examples related to their own social condition.

While Carlson denounces the play as the most infamous of the period, Hamiche vaunts its importance:

> En aidant à cette prise de conscience, en 'prophétisant' le jugement dernier de tous les tyrans (concept qui va s'élargir dès 1793) et la victoire inéluctable des peuples, aube d'un monde nouveau, régénéré et fraternel, le communisme utopique de Maréchal va permettre, une fois la gangue du moment enlevée, au communisme scientifique de se développer sans interruption.[49]

Hamiche is familiar with Carlson's book and permits himself to criticise what he terms Carlson's "calomnies"[50] regarding this play, going so far in his footnotes as to attack Carlson personally: "notre 'historien' se permet de donner 'son' jugement moral et esthétique sur la 'Prophétie' de Maréchal," and further to imply doubts regarding Carlson's qualifications:

> On apprend que Monsieur Carlson est 'professeur' à la Cornell University (New York): 'professeur' de quoi au juste? Nous serions curieux de l'apprendre.[51]

Hamiche accuses Carlson of not having bothered to read the plsy he criticises so roundly. This accusation appears to result from Carlson's description of the play's island setting. In the French translation of Carlson's book, it is described as "un îlot volcanique perdu et désert."[52] Hamiche reacts strongly to this:

> Désert? que non! Il est habité depuis vingt ans (!) par un homme. . . !53

Carlson's English text reads, "a volcanic isle, savage and desolate."54 Hamiche is obviously referring to the French text and perhaps the fault lies with the translation of 'desolate' by 'désert'. By this bitter attack, Hamiche reveals an emotional reaction to Carlson's opposing political views, since it is hardly an objective, academic criticism.

Both Carlson and Hamiche fail to perceive the value of this play outside of its political implications or its literary merit. This would indicate that the historical approach is no more capable of effectively analysing the theatre of the Revolution than the political or the literary approach. Hamiche's criticism is little more than a political tract aimed at the propagation of a modern ideology; by contrast, Carlson rejects the open intervention of politics but his distaste for the revolutionary mentality prevents his appreciating the value of this play as a study of the theatre in a revolutionary society; Ault repudiates the notion that the political aspects of society have any place in the theatre.

Among the historians of the French Revolution, the development of a new method of approach has led to a more intensive study of the significance of the lower classes at this period. Following the example of Georges Lefebvre, scholars such as Richard Cobb, Georges Rudé, and Albert Soboul have evolved a new school of thought, whose method of research is explained by Robert Palmer:

> The gist of the new school is to go into the street, to discover the city people, especially those of Paris, to explore the sociological and economical differences among them, to argue that the Revolution, though always essentially bourgeois,

> owed its success against absolutism and aristocracy to the support of these working classes.[55]

This method attempts to overcome the ideologies of the past which properly belong to the consideration of history as an autonomous discipline, separate from literature and politics, but Palmer warns his readers that modern ideologies are not so easily overcome. This is evident from the works of Carlson and Hamiche.

In achieving objectivity, the great difficulty lies in the unavoidable fact that the theatre of the revolutionary period was as much a product of the experiences of the past as it was of contemporary events. The plays performed during this period offer a microcosm of the Revolution itself. Before going on to examine the plays, the background of the Revolution will be briefly considered.

The seventeenth century saw the beginning of the long and bitter conflict between organised religion and philosophy, a conflict which, in a way, reached its culmination in the storming of the Bastille and the festivals of the Goddess of Reason. The plays performed in the theatre of the Revolution were a public manifestation of one aspect of the natural outcome of the seventeenth century's challenge to authority.

The Revolution stemmed as much from eighteenth century philosophy as it did from economic, political and social conditions, and the philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment had been greatly influenced by the writers of the previous century. They had been particularly influenced by the writings of Pierre Bayle, "la personnification de l'esprit critique,"[56] who was the epitome of the seventeenth century mentality of self-determination. Bayle's Pensées sur

la Comète, 1682-83, presage eighteenth century thought and constitute not only a criticism of tradition and authority, but also a demand for freedom of expression. In his Commentaire philosophique, 1686, Bayle crystalises the seventeenth century mentality:

> Je veux dire, que, sans exception, il faut soumettre toutes les lois morales à cette idée naturelle d'équité qui, aussi bien que la lumière métaphysique, illumine tout homme venant au monde.[57]

His view that man should be the nucleus of the quest for understanding universal truth was strengthened by Galileo's proof that the earth revolved around the sun, a fact which challenged the previously accepted idea that God's creation was the centre of the universe. The discovery took philosophical interpretation out of the church's control, bringing it to a permissible personal level.

The classic mentality saw man as having a place in a well-organised universe. But by the end of the seventeenth century, knowledge of the world had been augmented by Jesuit missionaries and scientific discoveries. It was becoming increasingly apparent that the natural universe was not organised in the regulated way of classicism.

Classic truth lay in achieving a difficult balance between passion and form. Racine's plays are an example of this. They show human emotions within a simple structure, expressed in a limited, controlled vocabulary. Their form is pure and classic, their interior is contained emotion, in effect, they illustrate the ultimate danger to classicism. Since the pure form cannot contain thoughts and emotions which develop, classicism is either destroyed from within, or becomes sterile. As the eighteenth-century philosophers repudiated

the sterility of classicism, their search for a natural law led them to romanticism. But the duality of human nature is such that it contains elements of both classicism and romanticism. One of the major themes of the eighteenth century which led to the development of the revolutionary mentality, was the search for unity.

Carl Becker says that whether arguments command assent or not depends less upon the logic that conveys them than upon the climate of opinion in which they are sustained. The reason for this is that the climate of opinion imposes a peculiar use of the intelligence and a special type of logic. The medieval pattern was fashioned by the church which maintained that, as man's life on earth was temporary, his role in the cosmic drama was to accept what had already been ordained, and the function of intelligence was limited to demonstrating the truth of knowledge as it was revealed to him.

The climate of opinion in the eighteenth century imposed a greater reliance on rationalism and Becker believes the philosophers were victims of common sense and logic, to which they were led by their faith in the scientific method. This, they hoped, would explain everything and banish mystery from the world. Becker sees the trend of modern thought as moving away from an over-emphasised rationalisation of the facts to a more careful and disinterested examination of the facts themselves.[58]

The eighteenth-century philosophers were prolific propagators of their thoughts who used propaganda as a weapon as they questioned the established order and sought reform. As the revolutionary mentality grew, it incorporated all available forms of social expression to communicate its message. The Revolution came at a point when

the greater freedom of the intellectual leaders had increased social awareness that a contemporary life-style was being imposed by an almost medieval authority. Consequently, freedom for social development was demanded as well as freedom of thought and expression.

The revolutionary mentality was neither universal nor of long duration but its effect was immeasurable. The pattern it established during those few years can be recognised in the many other social upheavals the world had witnessed since 1789. It begins with an enthusiastic idealism, moving to the white hot reality of revolution, then comes the inevitable backlash, followed by a hiatus.

Because the few years of revolution were so disruptive, nineteenth-century French historians set a style of passing quickly over the phenomena they brought to light in certain fields, particularly in the domain of theatre. The reaction of the nineteenth century to the Revolution has influenced modern attitudes to the submerged history of the ordinary people which the theatre of the period can reveal. The study of the common people was the theme of an address by Richard Cobb at the Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Lyon, on January 9, 1958:

> Il y a eut sans doute une certaine survivance de la mentalité révolutionnaire, notamment dans les armées, . . . aussi sur le plan politique. . . . Mais c'est l'affaire d'une poignée de chefs. . . . Pour les autres, c'est de nouveau le silence d'avant 1789. Les révolutionnaires ont été engloutis avec les circonstances exceptionnelles qui leur ont assuré une vie ardente mais passagère, avec les institutions dont les procès-verbaux ont permis d'extraire pendant quelques mois de l'histoire submergée des petits gens les attitudes et les préjugés d'un monde de boutiques et d'ateliers. . . .[59]

We owe our knowledge of the past to writers of history and critics of the different aspects of art and too often both groups have

been influenced by their modern ideologies. The culture of the revolutionary years is often dismissed in a few lines except for references to Beaumarchais, whose major works were written before the Revolution, or to André Chénier, whose poetry constitutes a link between pre-revolutionary classicism and the romanticism of the nineteenth century, but is not characteristic of the revolutionary mentality. A text published in 1946, concerned with the major literary doctrines in France from 1550 to 1930, claims to deal with:

> . . . théories fécondes, signale à l'attention soit l'importance des oeuvres qu'elles ont suscitées, soit l'intérêt des discussions qu'elles ont provoquées . . . [60]

but its table of contents is blank for the period 1789 to 1800.[61] It may be true that a clearly defined literary doctrine did not emerge from the revolutionary years, but it is important to acknowledge that these years did give birth to great social and political doctrines which today inspire so many artistic productions.

The theatre of the Revolution suffers especially from two causes: firstly, the attitude that culture was dead during this period; secondly, the treatment that it receives usually depends on the critic's own feelings about revolution. A play which glorifies revolution causes uneasiness in a critic who opposes radical politics, even if the play dates from the eighteenth century. Martin Esslin, in his introduction to The Theatre of the Absurd, 1974, states the problem:

> A public conditioned to an accepted convention tends to receive the impact of artistic experiences through a filter of critical standards, of predetermined expectations.[62]

It is the predetermined expectations of the critics which have impeded modern appreciation of the importance of revolutionary theatre as a

source of information regarding the mentality of the people at this time. Esslin underlines the value of this aspect:

> The theatre . . . is the point of intersection where the deeper trends of changing thought first reach a larger public.[63]

The fluctuations during the different stages of the Revolution were mirrored in the fortunes of the theatres. But, in general, as the revolutionary movement gained momentum, the dramatic artistry of the theatre diminished, as has been previously indicated. The drama seemed to spill over from the stage to the audience, from the audience to the streets and into the political clubs and committees. Events on the streets of Paris were increasingly dramatic as riots, festivals and executions provided public spectacles. No play could compete with the excitement of seeing and participating in what was, in effect, live theatre. The actors stepped down from the stage to participate actively in politics, where their fame was exploited to attract public attention to political occasions. They led parades, played major roles in the festivals, joined the Garde civile, sometimes as a result of their revolutionary fervour, sometimes to save themselves from being accused of anti-revolutionary feelings, and sometimes as a result of pressure applied by political figures. This social involvement must have been rather satisfying in a way, even to those who were not revolutionaries, since actors had previously been pariahs in the social sense, with few rights as citizens. It is also feasible that the actors had little choice from a financial point of view because their usual audience had consisted of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy who were less and less visible as spectators as the Revolution continued.

During the Terror, the plays given public performances were often not much more than political skits, hurriedly put together to capitalise on the events of the day. But after June 1794, reaction set in. The counter-revolution, as seen in the theatre, was vicious in character at first. A society cannot, however, maintain its passions at such a high pitch of intensity for an extended period of time, and by 1796, the fever of the previous years had faded. The theatre produced plays whose calmer moods were less didactic and more entertaining.

During the Revolution, the theatre was, in some respects, more vital and alive than ever before or since. The theatre public expanded to include all social classes, particularly the lower ranks who had been largely unaffected by pre-revolutionary dramatic trends. Theatre became a social phenomenon. It acquired an educational significance. The bewildering, and to the illiterate masses, often boring political events of those days, were simplified and dramatised. Members of the public chose their positions after seeing an ideologically acceptable performance. 'Social changes were being made so fast and so frantically, that people needed a little help to understand and to accept that these changes were right. Where pure entertainment might have fallen flat, dramatised propaganda found a ready audience. It was not art, but it was theatre.

The value of most of the plays to be discussed in this thesis lies not in their contribution to dramatic art, but in the light they shed on the role of theatre as a social art at a time when their society was undergoing more change than the world had previously witnessed.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Part II

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40. (i) Marvin Carlson, The Theatre of the French Revolution, p. 23.

(ii) Daniel Hamiche, op. cit., p. 42.

41. Marvin Carlson, op. cit., p. 23.

42. This play will be examined later in this thesis from the point of view of its text.

43. Daniel Hamiche, op. cit., p. 160.

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PART III

The plays which have been selected for study in this dissertation span the years between 1788 and 1804. Following the progress of the Revolution itself, these plays fall into three distinct categories. The first comprises those plays which reflect the initial motivations of the moderates who dominated the political scene during the first years of the Revolution. These are plays which portray royal authority as basically an acceptable concept and while they offer advice to the king, they stress the bond between a monarch and his subjects.

The second category consists of plays more directly concerned with the ideologies of revolution and counter-revolution. The third group reveals a reaction to partisan extremism, showing that as popular political fervour diminished, the theatre tended to offer plays which were more entertaining than didactic.

Collin d'Harleville began his career as a playwright in the years immédiately preceding the Revolution. He is cited in Carlson's history of the theatre as having "established himself just before the Revolution as one of the foremost comic dramatists in France."[1] His name was included on Chateaubriand's list of famous writers who accepted the Revolution.[2] The plays he wrote were performed in the prestigious Comédie-Française. His first great success was L'Inconstant, 1786. He continued to write throughout the Revolution but his dramatic output was interrupted by his participation in the

Garde civile, a duty wherein he acquitted himself creditably as the commander at Mévoisins.

Collin d'Harleville's plays reflect the social trends and attitudes of his day rather than make any attempt to explain or dictate what these might be. His work shows the influence of the Revolution only indirectly. The settings and characters move from the aristocratic to the bourgeois without becoming involved in the political conflict.

His second play, L'Optimiste, 1788, achieved the distinction of being presented twenty-six times at the Comédie-Française, twice more than any other play.[3] In the preface, the author explained the addition of a subtitle as a warning to the public that it was not a dramatised version of Voltaire's Candide. L'Optimiste, ou, l'Homme content de tout, is light and elegant. Michaud's vast Biographie universelle describes it thus:

> Cette pièce, quoiqu'elle ne fût point encore la véritable comédie, devait obtenir les suffrages des gens de goût, parce qu'elle s'éloignait de toute espèce d'affectation, et qu'on n'y trouvait point ce jargon précieux qui était alors en possession de plaire au public.[4]

The plot centres around M. de Plinville's attempts to arrange the marriage of his daughter, Angélique, to a M. de Morinval, unaware of the girl's reluctance which, however, is perceived by Mme de Roselle, his niece. This enterprising lady favours the suit of a young man who, since his family has fallen upon hard times, disguises himself as a secretary and enters the de Plinville household under the name of Belfort. Having entrusted his fortune to a friend who gambled it away, M. de Plinville is reduced to penury and faced with the prospect of losing his chateau. But it is Belfort's father,

Dormeuil, who won the fateful wager and the play reaches a happy ending with Belfort revealing his identity, marrying Angélique, and M. de Plinville retaining his possessions.

The language of the play is gentle and refined. Various allusions to Paris and to the court compare these unfavourably with the simplicity of country life. The optimism of M. de Plinville contrasts with the pessimism of the more worldly de Morinval, with the rather brusque realism of Mme de Plinville and with the practicality of Mme de Roselle, the instigator of the action.

The setting is the de Plinville chateau in Touraine where the characters, noble and charming, live their calm, well-ordered lives. Collin d'Harleville, in his preface, claimed that his father was the basis of the character of M. de Plinville who seems, in retrospect to be representative of those who, while the world they knew slipped slowly towards annihilation, remained blissfully unaware of the impending catastrophe. In pursuing this thought, there are three scenes in the first act which merit closer study.

Scene VIII offers us M. de Plinville soliloquising on the pleasing order of a world where the different social classes nurture each other:

> Je suis émerveillé de cette Providence,
> Qui fit naître le riche auprès de l'indigent;
> L'un a besoin de bras, l'autre a besoin d'argent;
> Ainsi tout est si bien arrangé dans la vie,
> Que la moitié du monde est par l'autre servie.[5]

His valet, Picard, enters with the complaint that he is of the half that serves. He asks why he should not be as rich as his master who does not know how to answer except to reaffirm his belief in the existing state of affairs:

M. de Plinville.
Eh mais, pouvions-nous être tous
Riches?
Picard.
Je pouvais, moi, l'être aussi bien que vous.
Tu ne l'es pas enfin.
Picard.
Voilà ce qui me fâche.
Je remplis dans ce monde une pénible tâche.
Et depuis cinquante ans.
M. de Plinville.
Tu devrais, en ce cas,
Être fait au service.[6]

M. de Plinville assures Picard that he is loved and respected like a father by all the other servants, but Picard finds no consolation in this, since, as he points out, "Je suis valet comme eux,"[7] Picard tries to make his master see that his satisfied complacency has no base in reality, that he should open his eyes to what is going on around him:

Picard.
Chez vous on pille, on pleure, on gronde;
Vous trouvez tout cela le plus joli du monde.[8]

But the old aristrocrat remains blind to his valet's warning and Picard leaves, frustrated. M. de Plinville brushes aside what he deems to be merely his valet's ill-humour because, in his heart, he is convinced that, "Je suis aimé, chéri de toute ma maison."[9] He goes on to congratulate himself on being born a nobleman of France, a situation comparable in its privileges and responsibilities towards the lower orders, to that of a king. He delivers a monologue steeped in the attitude of those who saw their duty, but could not conceive of a different social order:

Je suis de mes Vassaux respecté comme un Roi,
Adoré comme un père: il n'est autour de moi
Pas un seul pauvre.[10]

This paternalistic attitude to the lower classes reveals his total inability to comprehend that they might need something more than being looked after. Indeed, his own rank depends on there actually being someone for him to look after. Consequently, the sight of those less fortunate than himself, far from distressing him, comforts him by reaffirming the proper order:

> . . . j'aime à voir ses pauvres malheureux
> Travailler en chantant. Je raisonne avec eux.[11]

The way in which nature supports this perfect order is perceived by M. de Plinville after his barn has been reduced to ashes during a storm. He finds consolation for his own loss by considering how it will benefit lesser mortals:

> Les pauvres ouvriers y gagneront. Enfin,
> Sans tels accidents, beaucoup mourraient de faim.[12]

M. de Plinville is satisfied with everything becauae he closes his eyes to anything which might distress him. During these three scenes, the author is making an observation that the audience, aware of social dissatisfaction, would accept without finding it disturbing. In 1788, the bourgeoisie was looking for reforms which would improve its own situation. This class as a whole did not see that the affairs of the lower levels of society were of pressing urgency. It seemed as though there would be time to redress the inequalities suffered by the lesser ranks after the bourgeoisie had achieved its own objectives.

L'Optimiste exudes a calm gravity and an atmosphere more middle class than noble, in spite of the aristocracy of the characters. Picard's complaint about his status would reach sympathetic ears in the audience of the day, but since the dissatisfaction was voiced by

a servant, it was sufficiently removed for that audience to empathise with the sentiment without feeling that they were being challenged to declare themselves. If Picard had represented a higher class, the audience might have felt threatened by the sight of a member of their own rank expressing their dissatisfaction so openly. As it was, they could applaud Picard's desire for a more equal status, but still identify with the superior position of the master. The audience was largely bourgeois. They wanted social change, but a controlled, selective process of change which would be jeopardised by overt, provocative expression.

L'Optimiste portrays characters, conventions and sentiments in keeping with the contemporary situation. Its author avoids making political statements yet five years later, the mood had changed so much that this play was banned because of the scene where a nobleman lectures a peasant on his place in society, an idea totally unacceptable during the Reign of Terror.

In 1788, the Revolution was still in its moderate, bourgeois stage. There was not, as yet, a general movement towards the total rejection of the royal authority. It was still thought possible that fundamental changes could be made in the social structure without completely destroying the whole. The middle classes were active in the field of politics but the lower classes had not yet raised their voices. The middle class moderates sought support among members of their own rank and it was largely this class who filled theatres like the Comédie-Française and the Théâtre-Italien.

On February 20, 1789, another play by Collin d'Harleville was very successfully presented at the Comédie-Française. Les Châteaux en

Espagne, 1789, was:

> . . . a good-natured satire on the false security of the court and the aristocracy, full of thinly disguised advice to the royal family.[13]

A good many plays of this period offered advice to the king, usually citing ministers and courtiers as the villains who led good rulers astray.

Les Châteaux en Espagne achieved a certain notoriety when it was first performed, but for purely literary reasons. It was the cause of a controversy between its author and Fabre d'Eglantine, whose play, Les Présomptueux resembled Collin d'Harleville's too closely.

Michaud confirms Collin d'Harleville's play's popular success but deprecates its value to theatre, saying that:

> (Cette pièce) fut très acceuillie du public, sans rien ajouter à la réputation de l'auteur. . . . C'est toujours la même idée, et presque les mêmes personnages présentés sous des faces différences (sic) et dont on chercherait vainement le modèle dans la société.[14]

The actions of the aristocracy on their noble estates were losing their relevance, though they could still entertain.

Although its central theme is a satirical allusion to the false security of the privileged classes, as in L'Optimiste, the play itself contains few direct references to the contemporary social and political situation. As this situation became more pressing, Collin d'Harleville's plays began to lose their base in reality. One must recognise the validity of Palissot's criticism of Collin d'Harleville's works:

> Le ton doucereux, sentimental, quelquefois même un peu niais, qui est le ton dominant de presque tous ses ouvrages, l'absence totale de sel et l'insipidité qui les caractérisent, prouvent qu'il n'était pas né pour la comédie.[15]

His plays, in fact, are more in line with Diderot's views on drama rather than actual comedies.

Les Châteaux en Espagne, 1789, is very similar to L'Optimiste, 1788, which had been critically acclaimed. It was written for the same audience who received it almost as well as the earlier play. The trouble lay in the fact that the social environment, in which it was received, had changed and the time was no longer right for gentle references to inequalities and injustice. What was at fault was the author's observation of his society. Michaud points this out:

> Cette pièce . . . manque de fonds et de ce qui fait la véritable comédie, l'observation des moeurs.[16]

The underlying social discontent at this time was too serious, emerging as a disturbing reality which could no longer be ignored. Perhaps Collin d'Harleville lacked the courage, or the imprudence, necessary to write about customs observed, since they might have exposed the problem more clearly than he, or the audience at the Comédie-Française, was prepared for. Perhaps he was simply not sufficently aware of the social and political atmosphere, believing that a play should not be too involved in such issues. Whatever the reason, his plays became irrelevant. The Comédie-Française was continuing to offer plays which had appealed to the pre-revolutionary theatre public. In the early months of 1789, the Comédie-Française audience was largely composed of people who were not supporters of the growing revolutionary trend. The political polarisation of theatre audiences was to develop into an important factor, resulting in bitter feuds between theatres, actors, and theatre-goers, and was to cost the Comédie-Française dearly during the course of the next few years.

Elsewhere in Paris, the theatre public was changing, demanding less entertainment and more relevance. As the social art, theatre has to be in touch with contemporary thinking. Collin d'Harleville's plays were going out of style because the world they reflected was disappearing.

Les Châteaux en Espagne is set "au château de M. d'Orfeuil, à quelques lieues de Moulins en Bourbonnais"[17] in contemporary France, so the spectators might logically have expected to see realistic people and situations, but the inhabitants of the château are enveloped in a cocoon of unreality. The satirical relationship between the château in the Bourbonnais and the 'châteaux en Espagne' is not sufficiently exploited either in the dialogue or in the development of the plot.

At M. d'Orfeuil's château, the occupants are awaiting the arrival of the daughter's suitor. They have agreed to his request to be met as a stranger so that he can evaluate his prospective bride before proposing to her. A stranger duly arrives, not M. de Florville, the potential fiancé, but a M. d'Orlange. There follows a series of foreseeable errors, further complicated by de Florville's arrival. The plot lacks originality and surprise. The secondary intrigue, involving the servants, Justine and Victor, is very weak, but the main interest centres on noble characters, who, though their language and habits belong to the aristocracy, evince a bourgeois mentality. There are occasional signs that the title, like L'Optimiste, alludes satirically to the bourgeois dreams of equalling noble privilege.

The system of patronage, which mainly benefitted the aristocracy, is lightly attacked. The adventurer d'Orlange explains the

procedure which can lead to a possible career at court for a young man like himself who possesses "un nom, de la naissance.":

> Il me reste, en tout cas, la faveur du Ministre.
> . . .
> De mon père, au Collège, il était compagnon:
> Et de cette amitié j'hérite en droite ligne.
> . . .
> Demain, je pars, je vais d'une traite à Versailles,
> . . .
> D'abord chez le Ministre, en courrier, je descens;
> . . .
> Moi, je lui dis: "Monsieur, . . .
> d'Orlange en ce jour vient s'offrir,
> . . . vous le verrez courir,
> S'il pouvait être utile à son prince, à la France."
> . . . voilà mon début.
> Ce n'est qu'un premier pas: je vais droit à mon but.
> Je ferai mon chemin: je puis, de grade en grade,
> Tout naturellement, aller à l'Ambassade . . .
> Que sais-je enfin? . . . je puis être . . . Ministre un jour:
> Et je protégerai les autres à mon tour.[18]

D'Orlange's dream is based in reality because fortunes could be made this way. As long as the aristocracy formed the ruling class, his dream was possible. As his monologue continues, he articulates the dream of the bourgeoisie; having completed his first step, being installed in the ministry, his voyages will lead him to an island where he will be "élu Chef des siens, puis fut nommé leur Roi," he goes on to outline a bourgeois utopia:

> J'aurais peu de sujets, mais ils seraient heureux.
> Je choisirais surtout un ministre honnête-homme.
> Le choix est bientôt fait quand le public le nomme.
> On célèbre en tout lieu et mon ministre et moi;
> J'entends crier par-tout "Vive notre bon Roi"!
> Le pauvre me bénit au fond de la campagne.[19]

"Un ministre honnête-homme" alludes to those who served Louis XVI and who, in the eyes of the French people, demonstrably lacked this quality for the most part. "Le public" would not comprise anyone below the level of the middle class, universal franchise was not one of their demands.

D'Orlange's daydream is interrupted by Victor, who is representing the French bourgeoisie in opposition to the aristocracy:

> En rêvant, vous faites des merveilles.
> Je suis un criminel: je vous ai détrôné.[20]

This is an interesting choice of words. There is no record of this line having caused any reaction. The mostly royalist audience did not seriously entertain the thought that the throne of France was in danger.

A note of realism creeps in during this exchange. D'Orlange excuses his daydreaming,—"Chacun fait des châteaux en Espagne," and goes on to explain why it is necessary:

> C'est quelque chose encor que de faire un beau rêve.
> À nos chagrins réels, c'est une utile trêve.
> Nous en avons besoin: nous sommes assiégés
> De maux dont à la fin nous serions surchargés,[21]

but the practical Victor points out that, "ce n'est point manger que de rêver qu'on mange."[22]

It is Victor who voices a more personal bourgeois objective in the realm of social reform when he, in his turn, builds his castle in the air:

> J'aurai donc, à mon tour, des gens à mon service!
> Dans le commandement je serai peu novice;
> Mais je ne serai point dur, insolent ni fier,
> Et me rappellerai ce que j'étais hier . . .
> Tous bas, sur mon passage, on se dira: "Voilà
> Ce bon Monsieur Victor." cela me touchera.[23]

Victor hopes to achieve this happy future by means of a lottery, but his chances recede when he cannot find his ticket: "Depuis quand ce billet est-il donc invisible?"[24]—one of the rare moments of humour in Collin d'Harleville's plays.

The thread running through this long speech is the repeatedly stated ambition of benefitting from improved social conditions, but it is expressed from the standpoint of an individual, or perhaps of an

individual class. It is nowhere suggested that reform should be universal or that progress should be other than personal. The object of the desired reform is to advance oneself in society as it presently exists, certainly not to alter the structure of that society in order to make opportunity equally available to all people. Equality has no place in these castles in the air.

As regards the king, this play's attitude expresses the belief held by the bourgeois revolutionaries. In 1789, political debates were increasingly attracting the interest of the middle class Frenchmen. The 'ancien régime' was losing its authority, ceding ground to the revolutionaries, but these were of the bourgeoisie. Their vision was of a new state, headed by the king. Having deposed the first and second estates, nothing would come between the king and his loving subjects. The motivating theme of politics during this period was liberal reform, not socialist revolution. The power of the ruling class was to be shared, but there was as yet no question of the participation of the lower classes. However, it was being recognised that the support of this vast section of the population was essential. The changing attitude toward the lower classes was reflected on the stage where peasants and servants were being portrayed as serious, honest characters rather than providing light or comic relief as had formerly been common.

The moderates' support of royal authority, and their attitude to the peasantry were very clearly defined that same year in another very successful play. Raoul, Sire de Créqui, was first performed at the Théâtre-Italien on October 31, 1789. Its author was Jacques Boutet de Monvel, a dramatist and actor with the Comédie-Française,

whom Michaud describes as:

> Cet habile comédien, le plus intelligent peut-être de tous ceux que nous avons connus.[25]

Monvel was to play an important role in the festivals of the Revolution, and a later play of his, Les Victimes cloîtrés, 1791, is cited by Moland as one of the plays which made a great mark on the theatre of the Revolution.[26]

Raoul, Sire de Créqui is a melodrama whose fast-moving action and striking scenery was designed to arouse and hold the interest of the audience. The setting calls to mind Mrs. Radcliff's gothic novels. A ruined castle in France at the time of the crusades, an unfortunate wretch imprisoned in a dark tower, fitfully illuminated by flashes of lightning and shaken by crashes of thunder, form the background for a tale of virtue triumphing over treachery. The family of the Sire de Créqui believe he died in Palestine. Baudouin, his cousin, has incarcerated him in the tower, driven his family out of their castle and threatened the life of Raoul's son, Craon, if the 'widow' Adèle does not marry him. Baudouin's evil designs are thwarted by the prison warden's children, who release the prisoner, and by the faithful peasants who rescue the Créqui family from the villain's clutches.

The elegant language of the helpless, but noble family contrasts with the peasants' rough dialect, but the contrast is to point out how different groups can have the same objective, and certainly not to provide humour. The peasants have the major portion of the dialogue and carry out most of the action. The servants are honest and faithful; there is mutual love and respect between the peasants and the family of the rightful ruler of the estate. Only the jealous

cousin, who wants the ruler's power for himself, is wicked. Although the plot is centred on the nobles, they are passive, their characters are not clearly individual. The peasants are much more real and vibrant.

This play is almost flamboyant in its political statement. It is not so much propaganda, aimed at stirring the public to action, rather it is an affirmation of what it deems to be public opinion, glorifying actions already taken.

The Créquis, reduced to poverty, accept the help of their servant, Landre, who sees it as his duty, almost his privilege, to do what he can for them:

> . . . voici le moment de reconnoître, au moins selon mon pouvoir, tout le bien que vous nous avez fait dans le temps où vous pouviez en faire. . . . . le village entier nous soutiendra; . . . venez partager le peu que je possédons. . . .[27]

Later, it becomes obvious that the Créquis are going to need protection against Baudouin and the soldiers he has brought in. The peasants are determined to defend the noble family, but they have no weapons. In a rousing song, Landre explains how they can acquire arms for what amounts to a popular uprising:

> Nous en forgerons,
> . . .
> Le soc de nos charrues,
> Glaive foudroyant deviendra
> les instruments du Jardinage,
> Du Labourage,
> Le plus vil meuble du ménage
> De forme bientôt changera
> Bientôt il deviendra
> L'arme du courage,
> Et son usage
> l'ennoblira.[28]

The audience would recognise the incident to which this song refers. In August and September of 1789, bread riots in Paris and

demonstrations in Versailles had frightened the king into following his ministers' advice to surround himself with troops unaffected by revolutionary ideas. This caused added complications. On its arrival, the Flanders Regiment was welcomed by the king's Garde du Corps with a banquet on the stage of the palace opera house. Louis, and his queen made an appearance on this stage and distorted versions of the evening's revelry added fuel to the already incendiary situation in Paris. On October 5, market women led a march on Versailles to protest food shortages. The king was persuaded by Necker and Lafayette to accede to the people's demand that he return to Paris. The following day, the royal family returned to the capital, amid cries of, "Vive le Roi!", and accompanied by triumphant Parisians, carts of flour, stolen cannon, and pikes bearing the heads of slain palace guards.

Three weeks later, Monvel's play offers a scene strikingly reminiscent of this event. After urging the peasants to prepare to defend the Créquis, Landre comes on stage, "à la tête d'une troupe de Paysans armés."[29] The heavens are called upon by the peasant women to protect the ruler's family, the oppressed victims of a power-hungry usurper:

> Ciel! juste ciel! veille sur eux,
> Nous t'implorons, prends leur défense;
> Dérobes-les à tous les yeux.[30]

The heavens oblige with darkening clouds and heavy thunder.

The soldiers are ready to carry out Baudouin's orders but the author imputes no blame to them. The children of the guardian of the tower discuss the soldier's position:

Eloi.
. . . pourquoi ces méchans-là vont-ils chagriner chez eux de bonnes-gens qui ne leur ont jamais fait de mal?
Bathilde.
Mais dans le fond ce n'est pas leur faute à ces pauvres hommes d'armes . . . on leur dit: allez-moi rosser ces gens-là, et ils y vont; c'est cet enragé de Sire Baudouin qu'il faudroit frotter. . . . C'est lui qui veut le mal, c'est lui qui l'ordonne, c'est lui qui en devroit porter la peine. . . .[31]

Blame is placed where it clearly belongs.

At the end of the play the soldiers are vanquished by the peasants by whose efforts the noble family is restored to its former glory, and the rightful ruler reinstated. During the final scenes, the drama and excitement of Louis XVI's return to Paris are recreated and its message made clear. It was not absolute royal authority which menaced society but the abuse of power by some members of a privileged class. Goodwill could prosper among peasants and their rulers when each class respected its responsibilities toward the other. Social order and justice could be maintained when the proper distance was observed between the classes and those exploited as the tools of oppression were not to be mistaken for the enemy.

This play propagates the same doctrine of which Picard, the valet in L'Optimiste, 1788, complains. The type of society it proposed is still one in which the bulk of the population serves the minority. There is no question of the equality of the classes. The play is permeated with the belief that all will be well when the Baudouins, who abuse their positions, are cast out. Still at the base of the reformed society is the feudal, paternalistic attitude of the ruling class towards the peasants. Gérard, father of Raoul, advises his grandson of the duties his superior rank imposes upon him:

> Mon fils, sois toujours l'ami du pauvre . . . tu le vois . . . le plus souvent, hélas! c'est chez lui seul, que l'on trouve l'amitié désintéressée, compassion et générosité![32]

Cramon admits to the peasant children that, "le malheur m'apprend que nous sommes égaux,"[33] but this equality remains in the area of human suffering and has nothing to do with the concept of social equality.

The idea that equality pertains to the human condition rather than belonging in a social context is much more evident in a play by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly which was performed at the Théâtre-Italien on January 13, 1790. Pierre le Grand states unequivocally that the ideal system of government is when a good king possesses the trust and love of his people. Although set in Russia, this play delivers its message directly to the King of France and is the visual representation of the idealistic principles of the early stages of the Revolution.

Pierre, Emperor of the Russias, accompanied by the Necker-like character LeFort, spends a year in a village, disguised as a carpenter. He is about to marry a virtuous peasant girl, Catherine, when his identity is discovered. Catherine's virtue renders her the equal of an emperor and the marriage takes place, uniting the king and his people.

This play restates the belief, still upheld by the bourgeois at this stage of the Revolution, that the necessary reforms could be brought about when the king and his people were free to establish their proper relationship without the interference of a power-seeking, privileged class, represented here more realistically than in Raoul, Sire de Créqui, 1789. This relationship was still not one of equals, rather, the dominant authority figure could only unite successfully with a submissive people. The paternalistic view is strongly upheld,

in Pierre le Grand.

The central theme is revealed in the song which opens the play, sung by Pierre and LeFort with their fellow workers singing the chorus:

(Pierre) Trésors, honneurs, sceptre et couronne,
Vous n'offrez tous qu'un faux bonheur.
Rarement avec vous, on peut livrer son coeur
Aux doux égarements que la gaîté nous donne. . . .
(LeFort) Mais tous ces plaisirs salutaires,
Du vrai bonheur ne font que la moitié;
Deux choses sont encore nécessaires:
L'amour et sur tout l'amitié.[34]

The second scene reveals the strong influence of Rousseau's philosophy, on which LeFort has modelled Pierre's education. LeFort praises the character of the emperor-carpenter who answers:

> Cesse de me louer, mon cher LeFort: tout ce que je fais, n'est-il pas ton ouvrage? . . . tu voulus que celui qui devait gouverner des hommes, commençat par être homme lui-même.[35]

Both this play and Raoul, Sire de Crequi praise the simple peasant life, as yet uncorrupted by sophisticated society and unhindered by any concept of the reality of such a thing. Pierre has known this life-style, "élevé à la façon grossière et barbare de mes ayeux,"[36] he was saved by LeFort with whom he roams the world to study human nature:

> L'âge précieux que tant de Princes passent dans les plaisirs et la mollesse; vous l'avez employé, vous, à dompter vos passions, à étudier les hommes, à cultiver les sciences, à vous former une âme digne de votre rang.[37]

LeFort articulates the most vital aspect of the play, "Quel exemple vous donnez aux Souverains!"[38] Later in this scene, there are two more examples of how the moderates' ideals can flourish in the reformed social structure. Pierre is in love with Catherine, "la veuve d'un simple Soldat,"[39] and on the subject of their marriage, Pierre avows:

> Si ma naissance me met au dessus d'elle, ses vertus la rendent mon égale.[40]

It is a sentiment expressed several times. The second example refers to the Boyards:

> . . . ces Grands qui, ne jugeant des choses, que par le faux éclat qu'elles répandent, ne s'imaginent pas que le mérite puisse se trouver dans l'obscurité.[41]

Once again the villains of the play, and of the society it reflects come from the class which interposes itself between the king and his people, and which holds so much power.

At the moment when Pierre's identity is about to be revealed to his people, Mensikoff, a loyal minister who has come in search of his emperor, makes the declaration in a way which articulates the bourgeois revolutionaries' view of the king:

> Il est mon père, vous dis-je, il est aussi le vôtre;
> Il est celui de tous ceux qui habitent ses contrées.
> Un Monarque, occupé sans cesse du bonheur de ses
> Subjets, n'est-il pas en effet leur véritable père?[42]

Catherine reinforces this image of a father figure who knows what it means to live a life of daily toil:

> Quoi ce front que tant de fois j'ai vu couvert
> de sueur du travail, avoit porté le Diadème!
> Quoi cet homme si simple, si modeste, cet ouvrier
> si habile est Pierre notre Empereur![43]

(One is irresistibly reminded of Marie Antoinette playing at being a shepherdess.)

The humility of this great monarch is attested to several times in the last scene. The simplicity and honesty of the sentiments expressed in this scene contrast vividly with the spectacle of the final tableau. At the back of the stage rises a hill covered with soldiers, before whom stands Mensikoff, "à la tête d'une partie des Gardes de l'Empereur dont ils portent les étendards."[44] The rousing music of a military march accompanies Pierre's descent of the hill,

"dans tout l'éclat de la Majestie Impériale."[45] Surrounded by villagers, Pierre swears his nuptial vows to Catherine, uniting his majesty with his people. He embraces Georges, his master carpenter:

> Georges.
> Ciel! vot' Majesté daigne s'abaisser. . . .
> Pierre.
> M'abaisser! va, brave homme, va, cette position nous honore également tous les deux.[46]

The concept of the equality of good men cutting across the barriers of social rank is central in this last scene. Catherine has been crowned with flowers by the villagers in recognition of her goodness and virtue. She hesitates to take Pierre's hand:

> Catherine.
> . . . laissez-moi dans le rang où le destin m'a placée . . .

She goes on to regret her unworthiness:

> hélas! que n'ai-je comme vous, un Empire, une Couronne! . . .
> Pierre. (désignant la couronne de fleurs qu'elle a sur la tête.)
> Comptez-vous cela pour rien? Je ne tiens la mienne que du hazard, de la naissance; et vous, Catherine, vous tenez la votre des vertus: croyez-moi, vous êtes mon égale. . . .[47]

Pierre signs the marriage contract of two young peasants ("jarni! quel honneur pour nous!")[48] who reverently kiss the portrait he gives them. He offers work and his protection to his former friends, the carpenters, indicating how a flourishing economy can exist in the state where the ruler understands the subjects with whom he unites.

The vaudeville which concludes this opéra-comique speaks directly to the King of France. The verse which Catherine sings 'au Public' was repeated several times at the audience's request on the occasion of the play's first performance:

En célébrant un Empereur
Que son peuple chérit, révère,
Chacun de nous sent que son coeur
Lui nomme notre auguste Père,
Si, par ses travaux assidus,
Pierre fit fleurir son Empire,

Louis, par ses grandes vertus,
Force tous les Français à dire:
Béni soit à jamais
Notre Prince dont la tendresse
S'occupe sans cesse
Du bonheur de ses Sujets![49]

The audience who applauded the sentiment expressed in these lines did not completely share the view of kings held by the Russian villagers. The national tragedy of Marie-Joseph Chénier, which contained a much more pointed and serious lesson for the king, was still to be the catalyst which would drag the theatre into the swelling maelstrom.

The very evening of Pierre le Grand's opening at the Théâtre-Italien, January 13, 1790, Charles IX was shown at the Comédie-Française, having once again conquered the opposition of the royalist faction.

In August, 1789, La Déclaration des droits de l'homme et des citoyens had struck fear into certain sections of the bourgeoisie who felt that the Revolution was moving beyond their control. Louis XVI himself believed the Declaration might lead to further unrest and withheld his consent till his hand was forced by the people's march on Versailles. The political 'left' and 'right' wings began to take form. The liberal reformers mobiliaed the common people who soon surpassed them in revolutionary zeal. The phenomenon of revolutionary man was waiting in the wings and he took the stage in the late summer of 1792 when the Republic was established, in September of that year.

The two plays, Pierre le Grand, and Charles IX, personified two aspects of the reformist mentality which was to be confronted with a traumatic choice between turning against the Revolution it had instigated, or following the extremist goals it had not foreseen.

Pierre le Grand, 1790, expressed the view, politically naive, that all would be well when the aristocracy which abused its privileges was rendered powerless, and the mutual love between the king and his subjects was allowed to flourish. Charles IX, 1789, recognised that the problem was more complex. First, the corrupt element which exerted an evil influence over the king, and which excluded all other classes from power, had to be removed. Then the king must understand that royal power and authority came from the people, not from the nobility, nor the clergy. Charles IX preached reform to the king, warning him that a ruler has a choice: he can unite with his subjects, or he can stand with the privileged class against the people, risking a catastrophe of the same magnitude as that which rendered the reign of Charles IX infamous:

> Soyez roi de la France, et non de votre cour. Elle opprime le peuple.[50]

Chénier makes a plea for constitutional monarchy as being the only form of government possible if the king was to remain head of state. In his play, replying to the Cardinal de Lorraine's insistence that, "Un roi peut ce qu'il veut,"[51] the Chancelier de l'Hôpital exclaims:

> Quelle horrible maxime!
> Ainsi les souverains sont traînés dans l'abîme!
> Si le roi vous croyait. . . . Juste ciel! j'en frémis.
> Quoi! de leur liberté lâchement ennemis,
> Je verrais les Français, martyrs du fanatisme,
> Sur leur trône à l'envi placer le despotisme!
> Non, non, des souverains connaissez mieux les droits,
> Nous sommes leurs sujets, ils sont sujets des lois.[52]

Louis XVI, however, remained deaf to such warnings and in 1791, his abortive attempt to escape reduced his popularity and made it difficult for his people to retain the rosy image of a father figure whose loving care for his subjects was trammelled by an evil court. The plays offering such an image rang false.

A law passed by the Assemblée Nationale on January 13, 1791, gave theatres more freedom and took away the Comédie-Française's monopoly of the best examples of France's dramatic heritage. The Comédie-Française itself suffered a schism in its company, one group leaving with the actor, Talma, to form the Théâtre-Français, becoming known as the Richelieu from the name of the street where it was situated. The remaining group changed its name to the Théâtre de la Nation.

Talma made theatrical history in Voltaire's Brutus by appearing in Roman costume and won instant favour with the audience with whom silk, the actors' usual choice, had become very unpopular. During the summer of 1791, the Théâtre de la Nation prudently dropped its subsidiary title, Comédiens Ordinaires du Roi, as the king became suspected of siding with the enemies of the Revolution. In September of the same year, Talma tried to repeat his tremendous success in Charles IX, but this time, the play which had caused such an uproar barely two years previously, fell flat, its message no longer topical, already overtaken by the Revolution.

Chénier was back in the limelight as a dramatist on February 9, 1792, when his play, Caius Gracchus, was performed at the Richelieu. The day before, a decree had been issued confiscating the property of those Frenchmen who had fled the country. This caused controversy

which again emerged in the theatre audience. During the performance of Caius Gracchus, opposing sides cheered different parts of the dialogue, all approving of Chénier's tragedy which allowed the differing interpretations. As the Revolution progressed, Chénier's modération became more evident and he fell out of favour, though he was called upon to write, for Gossec's music, the Fête for the Swiss of Chateauvieux. This lavish spectacle was countered by the moderates who organised an elaborate funeral for Jacques Simoneau, the Mayor of Etampes, who had been killed in a revolutionary uprising. Both of these events were occasions of pomp, pageantry and music. Theatre was beginning to take to the streets.

In the midst of the growing political fervour evident in other Parisian theatres, another play by Collin d'Harleville achieved an almost surprising success when it was performed at the Comédie-Française on February 24, 1792.[53] Le Vieux Célibataire was one of the most popular plays of the year in spite of, or perhaps because of, being devoid of any political thought. Michaud confirms that this play, its author's masterpiece, "obtint le succès le plus éclatant."[54] Its popularity survived the years of the Revolution and it was performed for Napoléon at the Comédie-Française in 1801.

The author acknowledges his debt to Diderot for the character of the commander in Le Père de famille, 1761, and to Regnard's Géronte in Le Légataire universel, 1708. The final paragraph of his preface explains how, according to its author, Le Vieux Célibataire serves the revolutionary cause:

> . . . j'espère mêler bientôt ma voix à celle des écrivains patriotes: car c'est être véritablement patriote que de prêcher la morale: et en ce sens je crois l'avoir été dès

> avant la Révolution. Cette Révolution va donner à nos accents plus de ton, à nos pensées plus d'énergie, et plus de développement à nos moyens: mais j'aime à croire que la décence et le goût auront toujours leur prix, et qu'avec des intentions droites et franches, un style pur et un but constamment moral, les auteurs dramatiques mériteront bien de la Patrie, et serviront aussi une République qui se fonde sur le patriotisme ardent, mais ne se soutient que par les moeurs et la vertu.[55]

Despite the author's patriotic intentions, the characters of Le Vieux Célibataire are not remarkable for their virtue or their sense of morality, as are the characters of Le Père de famille.

The plot revolves around intrigue and deceit. As a result of the machinations of two members of his household, M. Dubriage has been alienated from his relations. Mme Evrard and Ambroise have contrived to blacken the characters of the nephew and his wife to such an extent that the unfortunate Charles and Laure are obliged to disguise themselves as servants in order to gain admittance to their uncle's house. Hoping to enlist the new valet's support, Mme Evrard reveals to Charles her plans to marry the wealthy M. Dubriage. The old gentleman, however, is so enchanted with his new servants that when Mme Evrard threatens to leave if Laure is not instantly dismissed, he tells the housekeeper to go. The truth is discovered, M. Dubriage embraces his nephew and heir, and is reunited with his family.

The concept of class structure is the same as in pre-revolutionary days, the difference being here that Collin d'Harleville has replaced the noble characters of his earlier plays with representatives from the middle class. The setting is the Paris house of a wealthy bourgeois instead of a nobleman's chateau. The servant class still accepts its inferior position. Georges, the faithful old retainer is disturbed by the injustice he perceives in a situation that

makes a servant more fortunate than his betters:

> Je suis honteux de voir qu'un misérable
> Que moi, qui près de vous ne suis qu'un pauvre diable,
> Sois plus heureux pourtant: c'est un chagrin que j'ai.[56]

-Laure, playing the part of a servant, strongly resents the suggestion that she has always belonged to this class. She makes the point quite clearly that while those who serve belong to an inferior rank, the artisans are worthy of partaking of such bourgeois sentiments as virtue. The most interesting scene, from the standpoint of this thesis, is the one in which Laure tells M. Dubriage about her background after he has remarked upon her "ton de candeur" and her "air sage."[57] In speaking of her parents, she refers to the difficulties of those with middle class virtues and lower class incomes:

> Mes père et mère étoient un couple respectable,
> Placé dans cette classe où l'homme dédaigné
> Mange à peine un pain noir de ses sueurs baigné,
> Où, privé trop souvent d'un bien mince salaire,
> Un ouvrier utile est nommé "mercenaire",
> Quand on devrait bénir ses travaux bienfaisans:
> Mes parents, en un mot, étoient des artisans![58]

To which M. Dubriage replies:

> Artisans! croyez-vous qu'un riche oisif les vaille?
> Le plus homme de bien est celui qui travaille.[59]

M. Dubriage is impressed by the worthiness of the parents who raised their daughter according to these simple principles: "Crains Dieu, sers ton prochain et sois honnête femme."[60]

This play is completely bourgeois in outlook and the success it attained can be partly attributed to the fact that the Comédie-Française's audience certainly did not come from the ranks of the Sans-Culottes who were making their presence felt in other theatres in Paris. This theatre's association with those hostile to the Revolution was a major factor contributing to the difficulties which

beset the Comédie-Française during this period.

During the eventful weeks which preceded the Déclaration de la République, September 1792, the Théâtre de Marais staged a play by Beaumarchais. L'Autre Tartuffe, ou, la Mère coupable was first performed on June 26, 1792 and met with total failure. His play's lack of success was attributed by Beaumarchais to the political climate which, he declared, "n'est guère propice au theatre."[61] The play was indeed more successful when it was performed in 1797, but this last dramatic work by Beaumarchais is inferior to the brilliant comedies which made him famous.

La Mère coupable involves the same characters who figure in Le Barbier de Séville, 1775, and Le Mariage de Figaro, 1784. It is the conclusion of the story of Count Almaviva, "le tableau de sa vieillesse,"[62] and is based on the idea that, "On est meilleur quand on se sent pleurer. On se trouve si bon après la compassion!"[63] Beaumarchais offers this play as a compromise between the gaiety of the pre-revolutionary world of the noble Almaviva and his irrépressible valet, and the sombre world of a revolutionary society. The play contains references to several new customs but they seem to intrude awkwardly into the faded grandeur of Almaviva's setting:

> Figaro.
> . . . Depuis que nous sommes à Paris, et que M. Almaviva . . .
> (Il faut bien lui donner son nom, puisqu'il ne souffre plus qu'on l'appelle Monseigneur. . .).
> Suzanne; avec humeur.
> C'est beau! et Madame sort sans livrée! nous avons l'air de tout le monde![64]

Beaumarchais describes the Count's son, Léon, as a "jeune homme épris de la liberté, comme toutes les âmes ardentes et neuves."[65] True to this description, Léon proposes a patriotic solution to the

dishonour which threatens to overwhelm his mother and himself:

> Sous mon nom de Léon, sous le simple habit d'un soldat, je défendrai la liberté de notre nouvelle Patrie. Inconnu, je mourrai pour elle, ou je la servirai en zélé citoyen.[66]

But the defence of liberty loses its appeal for him when his marriage to Florestine becomes possible.

La Mère coupable is not a political play in spite of its references to contemporary customs and language. It is rather a 'comédie larmoyante', a sad echo of an era its author apparently regrets.

The plot of his last play is complicated. The characters, even Figaro, seem to reflect the portrait Beaumarchais paints of himself at this time, "En vieillissant, l'esprit s'attriste, le caractère s'embrume."[67] The wicked Bégearss, "grand machinateur d'intrigues,"[68] discovers the Countess' secret, that Léon is not the Count's son. The young man is in love with Florestine, "pupille et filleule du Comte Almaviva,"[69] whom Bégearss also covets. The Count, outraged by his wife's twenty-year old act of infidelity, rejects both the wretched countess and her son. Thanks to Figaro and Suzanne, the Count is persuaded to revise his judgement, after it is revealed that Florestine is probably his own illegitimate daughter, and the play reaches a satisfactory conclusion.

In keeping with the guidelines laid down by Diderot for the 'genre sérieux', the play does have a moral purpose. It shows that, "tout homme qui n'est pas né un épouvantable méchant, finit toujours par être bon."[70] Its many political allusions are peripheral rather than central to the theme. The first meeting between Léon and the Count after the latter has been made aware of Léon's parentage, informs us that Léon has spent the evening in "une assemblée estimable"

where he gave a reading of his easay, "sur l'abus des voeux monastiques, et le droit de s'en relever."[71] While waiting for someone to serve them chocolate, Florestine suggests to the Count that he should show her, "ce buste de Washington, que vous avez, dit-on, chez vous."[72]

A more direct reference to politics, but not specifically revolutionary politics, is Bégearss' cynical definition of the phenomenon when he explains to Suzanne:

> . . . c'est l'art de créer des faits, de dominer, en se jouant, les événements et les hommes; l'intérêt est son but; l'intrigue son moyen; toujours sobre de vérités, ses vastes et riches conceptions sont un prisme qui éblouit. Aussi profonde que l'Etna, elle brûle et gronde longtemps avant d'éclater au dehors; mais alors rien ne lui résiste; elle exige de hauts talents: le scrupule seul peut lui nuire; (en riant) c'est le secret des négociateurs.[73]

Possibly Bégearss, a villainous character who merits the spectator's opprobrium, is here expressing the author's view. Beaumarchais had become bitter and disillusioned as the Revolution progressed and from being a figure of some renown during its early days, by this time, he was largely ignored, in both political and literary circles.

Bégearss' final threat, when his infamy has been exposed and he faces expulsion from the Count's household, is to reveal the Count's revolutionary sympathies to the royal authorities in Madrid:

> Ce que je vais dénoncer à Madrid. N'y eût-il que le buste en grand d'un Washington dans votre cabinet, j'y fais confisquer tous vos biens.[74]

However, the noble house of Almaviva willingly accepts permanent exile from their homeland preferring to enjoy the freedom of the new revolutionary society in France.

At a time when the theatre was increasingly involved in the contemporary scene, Beaumarchais was writing for a public on the verge of extinction. His audience could laugh at a comedy, but with

the foundations of its world collapsing, it had no time for the luxury of those "larmes abondantes et faciles"[75] which Beaumarchais thought a moral melodrama should inspire. The sensibility of a play like La Mère coupable, even though its author had attempted to attune it to contemporary taste by sprinkling topical allusions throughout, was an anachronism, basically because it was insincere. It not only showed a lack of sympathy with the problems nagging at the people in the audience, but a total lack of understanding that such problems were not peripheral, but central. Bégearss' threat was empty since Almaviva was out of Madrid's reach, but the threat to Beaumarchais' audience was real. Moreover, its source was not a familiar, bureaucratic authority, but a bewildering, ever-changing group of revolutionaries.

The two other plays featuring Figaro were famous, not only for their sparkling wit, but also because they satirised a contemporary situation, constituting a clever attack on the customs of the ruling class. They had enhanced Beaumarchais' reputation which gave substance to the argument of those who were seeking to reform the system of censorship in the theatre. The public knew him as a man who had shared the revolutionary temperament during its early days, but now, like many of the moderates, he could not understand nor accept the direction the Revolution was taking.

After the second Revolution of 1792, events marched inexorably towards the creation of the Jacobin Republic in June, 1793, when the Gironde was vanquished by the Sans-Culottes' leaders. The Reign of Terror began. The Terror was judged necessary by its perpetrators to safeguard the Revolution against the forces who wanted to crush it. The French Republic was fighting for its very existence against the

armies of European kings and also against the sixty départements of France, out of a total of eighty, who were in revolt against Paris. In the capital itself, the confrontations between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries were increasing.

In the beginning of this eventful year, the Comédie-Française presented, on January 2, 1793, a play by Jean Louis Laya, L'Ami des Loix, which extolled the triumph of the moderates over the radicals. At that time, and even today as has already been suggested,[76] opponents of the Jacobin doctrine judged this play to be politically moderate and reasonable, while the revolutionaries condemned it as counter-revolutionary and even unpatriotic propaganda.

A contemporary newspaper, Le Moniteur, reviewed the play, applauding its pro-revolutionary and anti-jacobin stand:

> On sent à chaque vers que ce n'est pas l'ouvrage d'un homme de parti, mais celui d'un citoyen vertueux, d'un poëte sensible, honnête qui veut l'affermissement de la liberté par les lois, le retour de l'ordre après une agitation nécessaire.[77]

Laya himself prefaced his play with "quelques réflexions que je crois indispensables,"[78] where he attempted to forestall critical attacks. He offers a reasonable explanation of the conceptual base of his play, but his view of what is reasonable is founded on the beliefs of the middle class moderates of 1789.

Hobsbawm defines "the classical liberal bourgeois" of this time as:

> . . . not a democrat but a believer in constitutionalism, a secular state with civil liberties and guarantees for private enterprise and government by taxpayers and property holders.[79]

The moderate bourgeois was now faced with the actions and demands of a group of people he found himself unable to condone. Hobsbawm states:

> The peculiarity of the French Revolution is that one section of the liberal middle class was prepared to remain revolutionary up to and indeed beyond the brink of anti-bourgeois revolution: these were the Jacobins, whose name came to stand for 'radical revolution', everywhere.[80]

The bourgeois supporters of the Revolution were split into two opposing factions. The moderates were unable to comprehend the Jacobins' conviction that the Revolution had not yet achieved its objectives.

Laya's play is the articulation of the moderates' viewpoint. He tried to present the moderates' side of the argument in the naive belief that if he explained the position clearly enough, everyone would understand. He epitomises the dilemma of the reasonable man confronted with the unreason of revolution. Laya, in effect, was speaking for the man of the Age of Reason faced with the totally incomprehensible phenomenon of the revolutionary mentality. There was no possible way that L'Ami des Loix could fulfill its author's hope of offering his troubled contemporaries a solution to the bitter conflict between the two factions, because it shows no trace of understanding the opposing doctrine.

This is apparent in the preface to the play. Laya addresses himself to "le reproche d'avoir fait de mon Ami des Loix un ci-devant noble."[81] He did this, he says, in order to:

> . . . faire triompher de ses préjugés celui à qui ses préjugés faisaient couler une existence commode et douce . . . faire briser de ses propres mains à un homme les liens si puissants de son amour-propre: lui faire immoler à ses frères ses plus douces prérogatives: . . . exposer aux yeux le véritable homme libre, - le sage par excellence en prise avec la scélératesse et l'adversité, bénissant sur les débris de sa fortune cette révolution qui le ruine, avant laquelle il vivait heureux et paisible; n'est-ce pas la sanctifier à jamais?[82]

The Jacobins could be forgiven for finding Laya's explanation somewhat condescending in tone. Moreover, when Laya goes on to mention Forlis, the ci-devant noble's generosity in regularly donating money to the poor, he reveals his failure to perceive that the revolutionaries saw no generosity in Forlis' giving up wealth he was not entitled to, since he had acquired it with his noble birth.

Of all the plays which are to be considered in this thesis, L'Ami des Loix most strongly, and obviously expounds the ideology of a political faction. Laya deals with an issue which was central to his society, offering to his audience a model hero, one who exemplified the qualities he deemed necessary in a son of the Revolution:

> Je sais bien que les "nomophages" de nos jours, qui ont pris à tâche d'honorer comme patriotes les incendiaires et les assassins, ont traité de "feuillant" ce Forlis qui, ne voulant point d'une liberté furibonde, fait la guerre aux subvertisseurs, veut de l'ordre, des moeurs, des lois. . . .[83]

But the burning question of the moment was precisely who was to establish those customs and laws. The dispute centred on whether it should be former nobles and bourgeois, converted to revolutionary principles, or the people, who, it must be admitted, had no reason to believe in the justice of those nobles who had been content with their privileged positions until the Revolution had snatched them away.

The play's critics might have found it more difficult to attack if Laya had restrained himself from presenting the two Jacobins, Nomophage and Duricrâne, as such complete villains. Laya admits, "Ce n'est pas en blessant les coeurs qu'on parvient à les gagner."[84] He ought, therefore, to have felt no surprise at the Jacobin opposition. He does concede that his play is propaganda, in fact, his 'réflexions'

have the ring of sincerity when he writes of the aim of L'Ami des Loix:

> Le but principal, le but réel de mon ouvrage a été d'éclairer le peuple: mais surtout de le venger des calomnies qui lui attribuent tous les crimes des brigands. C'est en rappelant sans cesse au peuple le sentiment de sa dignité, qu'il s'en pénétrera à jamais.[85]

And he stresses this point in the play.

The people do not actually appear on stage in the play. The dominant roles are those of the former nobles who, in spite of the reactionary tendencies of Versac, are both men of integrity, while the Jacobins show not one particle of respect for human life and dignity.

L'Ami des Loix, 1793, is set in the Paris of 1792. Beneath the list of characters in the text of 1793 is clearly printed the instruction that the theatre is to be illuminated, suggesting the author's intention that the members of the audience were to feel intimately involved. The various characters are not developed as individuals but as representatives of different political factions. The dialogue is an exposition of their ideology and motives, as understood by Laya. The plot is very simple, being merely a vehicle for the propagation of Laya's political message.

Forlis, a former marquis, is devoted to the principles of the Revolution and symbolises the political moderate, whose position he clearly states:

> . . . l'homme sage;
> Citoyen par le coeur plus que par le langage;
> Qui contre l'intriguant défend la vérité,
> En dût-il perdre un peu de popularité,
> Sert, sachant l'estimer et par fois lui déplaire,
> Le peuple pour le peuple et non pour le salaire,
> Patriote, et non pas de ceux-là dont la voix
> Va crier "Liberté" jusqu'au plus haut des toits,

> Mais de ceux qui sans bruit, sans parti, sans systèmes,
> Prêchent toujours la loi qu'ils respectent eux-mêmes;
> Si fuir les factions, c'est être modéré,
> De cette injure alors j'ai droit d'être honoré![86]

He visits the house of an ex-baron, Versac, who remains unconvinced of the virtues of the Revolution, sighing that, "Le bon temps est passé."[87] Versac shows Forlis "un manifeste adroit, bien détaillé" which warns that, "Toute la volonté de l'Europe alarmée, Par cent bouches à feu va vous être exprimée."[88]

This is a reference to the Duke of Brunswick's manifesto, issued at Coblenz on July 25, 1792, which warned the people of France that the allied armies of the Holy Roman Emperor, the King of Prussia, together with twenty thousand troops assembled by the emigrés, were preparing to attack France. The manifesto contained a challenge to the Assemblée, the Commune, and the people of Paris to abandon the Revolution or accept the consequences of invasion. Four days later, July 29, 1792, Robespierre addressed the Jacobin Club, demanding, as a defiance to Brunswick, the immediate overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic. Beginning on August 4, the various sections of the city sent notices to the Assemblée that they no longer acknowledged the king as head of state. Shortly afterwards, the royal family was taken out of the Tuileries and imprisoned in the Temple.

Versac condones the intentions of these forces massing on the French border:

> On veut vous éclairer, et non pas vous détruire:
> Vous nous abattez tout, on vient tout reconstruire;
> Commerce, industrie, arts, tout tend à s'abîmer. . . .[89]

Forlis, however, cannot agree with him:

> Pour de vains privilèges,
> Verrez-vous sans effroi ces hordes sacrilèges,
> Rougir le sol françois du sang de nos guerriers?[90]

But Versac, though he cannot approve of his fellow aristocrats who fled their homeland, admits:

> . . . dans l'ame comme eux gentilhomme François,
> Je puis, sans les servir, attendre leur succès.[91]

There is no divergence of opinion between these two friends concerning the Jacobins, a group referred to as, "vos petits messieurs, héros en déraison,"[92] and, "ces nains transformés en géans politiques."[93] Madame Versac, sympathetic to the Jacobins, asserts that they are patriots, which causes Forlis to launch a tirade against their false interpretation of the word:

> Patriotes! Eh quoi! ces poltrons intrépides
> Du fond d'un cabinet prêchant les homicides!
> Ces Solons nés d'hier, enfans réformateurs
> Qui rédigeant en loix leurs rêves destructeurs;
> Pour se le partager voudroient mettre à la gêne
> Cet immense pays rétréci comme Athène:
> Ah! ne confondez pas le coeur si différent
> Du libre citoyen, de l'esclavé tyran.
> L'un n'est point patriote, et vise à le paroître:
> L'autre tout bonnement se contente de l'être.[94]

The most virulent sentiments are expressed against the characters of Nomophage and Duricrâne, thinly disguised caricatures of Robespierre and Marat. Versac castigates Nomophage:

> . . . voilà
> Ce que j'appelle un homme! un héros! l'Attila
> Des pouvoirs et des loix! Grand fourbe politique;
> De popularité semant sa route oblique,
> C'est un chef de parti. . . .[95]

Duricrâne is deacribed as a "journaliste effronté"[96] and mockingly referred to as "cet ami du peuple."[97]

Nomophage's unscrupulous and cynical exploitation of the Revolution is made clear. Having rid themselves of the noble landowners, Nomophage and his cronies plan to divide the country for their own personal aggrandisement, boasting that they will have "des sujets, des trésors, des honneurs,"[98] and asserting that their nefarious schemes are best carried out in confusing secrecy, since, "un état démembré/Seul à l'ambition offre un règne assuré."[99] Nomophage recognises that men like Forlis represent a danger to him, admitting that the moderates are "les amis du peuple, et ne sont pas les nôtres."[100]

This is one of the reasons for his hatred of Forlis, the other being more personal. Both Nomophage and Forlis aspire to the hand of Versac's daughter and they are forced into each other's company as Mme Versac's dinner guests. In order to discredit his rival, Nomophage arranges for Duricrâne to steal some papers which will be offered as evidence that Forlis is plotting against the Revolution. Duricrâne incites a mob to ravage Forlis' house and kill him, but the plan is not completely successful because Forlis is not at home. The crowd comes searching for him. Forlis goes alone to speak to the people and declares himself willing to accept their judgement. The assassins in their midst are prevented from carrying out Nomophage's orders and are attacked by the people who learn that the stolen papers, far from proving Forlis' villainy, attest to his generosity in sharing his wealth with the poor.

Forlis has previously warned Nomophage that the people will not long be duped by him and his fellow radicals:

> Mes ennemis déjà triomphent hautement.
> De ce succès d'un jour qu'ils goûtent bien les charmes!
> Ils pourront dès demain l'expier de leurs larmes.[101]

And now, as the mob howls for the blood of the man who exploited them, Forlis sends Nomophage to face retribution:

> Vos amis ont parlé. Les yeux sont dessillés.
> Le Peuple est là, monsieur; ils vous connoît: tremblez![102]

Laya allows Nomophage a certain dignity in his departure. Having discovered that escape is impossible, he decides to rely on his oratorical talents to persuade the people that he is only guilty of over-enthusiasm. He will not, he says, descend to bargaining for his life:

> Je brave tout mon sort: et sais envisager
> Le prix d'une action bien moins que son danger.
> À côté du succès je mesure la chute;
> Et certain de tomber, je marche et j'exécute;
> Adieu, monsieur Forlis. Vous pouvez l'emporter;
> Mais j'étois avec vous digne au moins de lutter![103]

One of the points Laya was attempting to emphasise was that neither revolutionary principles nor the people were at fault, and that the blame for politically motivated excesses should be directed against those whose actions were the outcome of self-interest or false logic. Such people were the real enemies of the Revolution. Laya exonerates the soldiers employed in the enforcement of radical decrees, attributing to them the same sense of honour held by the former nobles. The officer sent to arrest Forlis is distressed by the task of discomforting so reasonable a gentleman, who insists that his captors uphold the law even though it appears to victimise him. The embarrassed soldier is further troubled by the thought that he and his men might be considered in the same light as Nomophage's associates:

> . . . nos citoyens soldats
> Ont tous le même coeur, ont tous le même zèle.
> Ces coeurs n'admettent point une vertu cruelle;
> Et, jamais endurci d'insensibilité,
> Le courage est toujours chez eux l'humanité.[104]

Laya stresses even more the innocence and integrity of the people. When Forlis tries to convince Versac of the justice of the reformed system, the ci-devant baron deplores the disorder of the new regime:

> Mais, quelle est dont (sic) la base où repose affermi
> Notre gouvernement? Où, régnant par lui-même,
> Notre cher souverain, ce monarque suprême,
> Le peuple vers l'excès par sa fougue emporté,
> Fonde sur des débris sa souveraineté?[105]

Forlis speaks eloquently in their defence:

> Le peuple! allons, le peuple! Ils n'ont que ce langage!
> Tout mal vient de lui; tout crime est son ouvrage!
> Eh! mais, quand un beau trait vient l'immortaliser
> Que ne courez-vous donc aussi l'en accuser?
> Non, non, le peuple est juste, et c'est votre supplice!
> Qu'il punit les brigands, ne s'en rend pas complice.
> Ce peuple, je dis plus, des fautes qu'il consent,
> Des excès qu'il commet est encore innocent.
> Il faut tromper son bras avant qu'il serve au crime;
> Revenu de l'erreur, il pleure sa victime.[106]

Versac is finally convinced. He realises now that integrity, the quality he most reveres, is not only to be found in gentlemen of noble birth. He delivers the last line of the play, which interestingly juxtaposes the ideal of the pre-revolutionary polite world with that of the new society:

> . . . le seul honnête homme est le vrai citoyen.[107]

L'Ami des Loix, 1793, reflects the paternalist attitude of the feudal system. It suggests that the people are fundamentally honest but in need of good leaders, and that these leaders are more likely to be found in the noble class which has the habit of leadership. It is not surprising that in those turbulent days this play created as much furore as Chénier's Charles IX had caused in 1789.

This thesis will not deal with the dramatic merit of L'Ami des Loix, since this was not the source of the controversy. Charles IX

had constituted a weapon for the revolutionaries in 1789. L'Ami des Loix offered itself as a weapon to the counter-revolutionaries in 1793. These two ideologies confronted each other in the theatre. The opponents of the Jacobins found their supporters in the pit and henceforth, the theatre-goer had to declare himself for or against the Revolution. Authors, actors and spectators were once again expected to proclaim their loyalties.

The first performances of L'Ami des Loix at the Comédie-Française provoked considerable agitation among revolutionaries who had seen the play or heard about it, but official reaction was slow. Louis XVI's trial, beginning nineteen days after the play's opening performance, occupied everyone's thoughts. By the time the authorities' attention was drawn to the play, the supporters of L'Ami des Loix were established as a force that could not be ignored. The play's message, which Laya intended as pro-revolutionary propaganda was regarded as quite the opposite by the influential Jacobins in authority. It was now necessary that the ruling powers attack the dissident elements who were appealing so strongly to the enemies of the Revolution.

Once again a play which had been intended as an appeal to justice and moderation, succeeded only in provoking quite different emotions. This play was the subject of a debate in the Convention Nationale, in spite of the urgency of other business, in which one Prieur, citing Le Moniteur which had described Forlis as an aristocrat but an honest man, asked, "Comment on peut être honnête homme et aristocrate."[108] The play was banned and the theatres, growing arenas of political confrontation, were threatened with closure. Laya, when the Convention decided he should appear before it, not unnaturally,

panicked:

> Épouvanté sans doute à l'approche de cette tempête parlementaire qui allait fondre sur lui . . . se retira instinctivement . . . Laya abandonnait ainsi sa pièce à la destinée.[109]

But the public was not prepared to let it go so easily and demanded to see the play. The Convention compromised. The theatres could stay open, but the ban on L'Ami des Loix remained in force.

While plays such as Laya's offered the theatre public a dramatised view of the political forces in their lives, there were other plays which explored the more personal implications of life in a revolutionary society. The night before the first performance of L'Ami des Loix, the Théâtre des Variétés presented a play by Joseph Patrat, Le Présent, ou, l'heureux Quiproquo, 1793. Its plot is simple, containing no direct references to the Revolution, but the characters and the language reflect the contemporary social scene, exposing the customs and sentiments of the ordinary people of the day.

The setting is the Parisian salon of Merval, described in the dramatis personae without a title but as being an "homme opulent." The male actors are listed as "les citoyens" although the actresses retain the titles of madame and mademoiselle.[110] Bourgeois and peasant characters intermingle as regards dialogue and plot, and though friendship exists between the two classes, distances are properly observed.

The action takes place on New Year's Day. The valet, André, sets the scene as the play opens:

> V'là encore un jour de l'an arrivé; c'est bon: . . . mais j'sis inquiet: j'entends dire chaque jour, on a supprimé ceci, on a supprimé cela; bon dieu! si on alloit supprimer des étrennes. . . .[111]

Fortunately these gifts have escaped suppression and they form the basis of the plot. Merval and his nephew Dolcy are both in love with Lucile. She and her father visit Merval's house to leave a basket filled with gifts, among which Lucile has hidden Dolcy's letters. On reading them, Merval is to be made aware of the love and respect his nephew feels for him and of the mutual attachment of Dolcy and Lucile. André's mother arrives and leaves her small child in her son's care for a while. He, of course, puts the child in the basket. Merval discovers the child and reads in Lucile's note that she has left a package in the basket:

> Vous y trouverez dans la corbeille que je viens vous envoyer par ordre de mon père, un paquet. . . . Vous y pourrez connoître les sentimens de votre nèveu. . . . Son attachement pour moi, et la manière dont j'y ai répondu. . . .[112]

From this point the dialogue is charged with ambiguities, reaching a peak when Dolcy seeks his uncle's opinion regarding his "enfant nouveau-né,"[113] referring to his play which he has dedicated to Merval as a New Year's gift. All is resolved upon the reappearance of André's mother, and the play has its happy ending.

Le Présent is a short play, its action is lively and its dialogue consists mostly of very short speeches. It offers a sharp contrast to the plays which were popular a few years earlier, such as those previously mentioned in this thesis. It is more robust, showing a more easy relationship between the social classes and less concern with noble sentiments.

The vaudeville which concluded Le Présent, suggests that the author was only too well aware of the contemporary situation and while he was not attempting to ignore it, he wanted to offer a brief respite, an opportunity to see that there was still a humourous side to life, even during a revolution:

On doit marquer la tragédie,
Par la pitié, par la terreur;
Il faut dans une comédie,
Plaire à l'esprit, toucher le coeur.
Ni Melpomène, ni Thalie,
N'ont produit cette nouveauté;
Mais on pardonne à la folie,
Les étrennes de la gaîte.[114]

Another verse has André singing of the changing times, and pointing out how those changes have made life more pleasant for people like him:

Lorsque j'ai quitté not' village,
On se frisoit qu'ça faisoit peur;
Il falloit céder le passage
A ceux qu'on nommoit monseigneur.
On ne met plus de papillottes,
On ne se dérange jamais,
Et les devoirs des patriotes,
Sont les étrennes des Français.[115]

The audience of 1793 would appreciate, and recognise, these sentiments.

The language offers examples of those words to which the Revolution had given new meaning, especially those which express the ideals of fraternity and equality. André calls Dolcy "mon frère de lait"[116] although Dolcy addresses the valet as 'toi' while André replies 'vous':

Dolcy, l'embrassant.
Bonne année, mon frère.
André.
Son frère! C'est ça un patriote? . . .
Dolcy, lui donnant une pièce d'or.
Tiens, voilà pour toi.
André, hésitant.
Le nom de frère que vous venez de me donner est votre meilleure étrenne.[117]

The class barriers still exist though they seem now to be based on social position rather than resulting from the inherent superiority of one class to another. André is a valet, but he has a sense of honour and pride in his position, as he makes clear when he replies to Dolcy's request for his assistance:

Écoutez, mon frère: je suis à vous à la vie, à la mort, mais non pas pour trahir mon maître. . . .
. . . c'est qu'il ne s'agit pas de porter le nom de républicain; il faut être honnête homme pour le mériter.[118]

And Dolcy responds, "le regardant avec satisfaction."[119] The implication of their conversation is that support of revolutionary ideals and of the new morality cuts across the remaining class barriers.

The scene between André and his mother, Margot, stresses popular support of the Revolution and alludes to the contemporary situation, though not its political ramifications. Margot gives her son news of their village:

> . . . c'est comme par toute la France: les jeunes gens sont à la frontière, les vieillards se réjouissent des succès de leurs fils: s'ils en perdont quelques-uns par malheur, ils s'en consolent, en pensant qu'ils sont morts en défendant la nation qu'ils ont sauvée: et nous autres femmes, j'enseignons à nos enfans que c'est en respectant les lois que je pouvons conserver notre liberté, et ça ira.
>
> André.
>
> Mais, mon père, qu'est-ce qu'i dit de moi, de me voir ici tranquillement pendant que les autres se battent?
>
> Margot.
>
> Tout le monde ne peut pas être à la guerre.[120]

And they both sing the 'chanson du départ', in which, no doubt, the audience enthusiastically joined. This episode ends with the sentiment, "en remplissant son devoir d'honnête homme, on sert toujours sa patrie."[121] The audience is given another opportunity to participate in the following scene when André sings, 'Danser la carmagnole', a very popular song at this time.

There are no villains in Patrat's play. Respect and familial duty are evident in the relationships between André and his mother, Lucile and her father, and Dolcy and his uncle. Devotion to patriotic duty is expressed by all the characters, underlining a concept central to the play, that is, the fundamental goodness of the French people, whether peasants or bourgeois.

Le Présent offers its audience, not an unrealistic dream, but some light, topical entertainment which was very probably a balm to

the nerves of a public already frayed by the tensions of their daily life. At the same time, the effect of this diversion would not be marred by worrying about its being a potential weapon in the political battle.

A more important consideration, from the standpoint of this thesis, is that, whereas Laya's play was an example of how the public should think, Patrat suggested how they might behave. On stage, Le Présent produced a little segment of society, people who were ordinary enough, obviously awsre of what was happening in their country, but things could not be so bad, after all, because these people were still able to enjoy life's little pleasures, still able to resolve small anxieties, to respect the family and revere the traditional values. When so many values were shown to be misguided, if not downright dangerous, it was difficult to know how one was supposed to go on, to know what was normal, acceptable behaviour in a revolutionary society, by its nature abnormal. The theatre audience could consider that perhaps Margot was right, they would manage. It would provide a consolation the people of France were going to need as the year progressed.

The king was guillotined on January 23, 1793. The royal heads of Europe trembled in the face of the revolutionary menace as it became evident that 'Fraternité' was not a concept which respected national frontiers. The Revolution became recognised as a class struggle rather than a French problem. The war waged by the young Republic was ideological, forcing many Europeans to redefine their patriotic loyalties. The moderates' cause suffered in this war because discussions in the Assemblée, concerning whose view of the Revolution should prevail, were weakened when the country itself was under attack. The

moderates were forced to choose either liberalism and a divided government, or the dictatorship of radical Jacobins such as Robespierre, Danton and Saint-Just.

These were revolutionaries in the modern sense. They recognised the need for the complete reorganisation of the basal structure of the French state and placed no limit on the means to be used in the achievement of their goal. Faced with 'la patrie en danger', all executive power passed into the hands of the Comité du Salut publique which consisted of twelve Jacobin extremists. Dissidence was unpatriotic, and the Reign of Terror began.

The theatre during this period became even more closely related to the social and political conditions of its society. The leaders of the Revolution realised that the theatre had an important role to play in the success of the Revolution itself. Amanda Binns sets out the problems confronting these men:

> In five turbulent years a semi-starved and war-wracked capital city attempted a total revision of social order, including the means of social communication - language.[122]

The theatre provided the ideal situation for giving meaning to these concepts. But while the theatre was still perfectly able to function as a medium for propaganda, its role as the social art was severely limited. The reflection it was able to offer of its society was being warped.

During the Reign of Terror, 1793-94, the Parisian theatres were under constant threat of closure, while their actors and directors were menaced by the possibility of arrest. Dramatic activity, surprisingly enough, did not diminish, but it did result in works that became much more propagandist as those involved tried to offer what

would be acceptable to the authorities. Most theatres were, in fact, closed for much of this period. When they were open, the audience more nearly resembled a mob, usually sufficiently unruly as to preclude any serious performance. The Richelieu, home of the revolutionary members of the Comédie-Française, was renamed the Théâtre de la Liberté et de l'Égalité, and did not fare so badly, but the Théâtre de la Nation, the former Comédie-Française, suffered a great deal. After a production of Pamela, by Neufchateau on August 1, the actors and the author were arrested. A new theatre, the Cité-Variétés opened, and proved to be very radical.

The theatres became very closely associated with the daily progress of the Revolution. Songs accompanied by actions miming the guillotine were very popular; head counts were announced in the intervals between acts; 'citoyen' was substituted for 'monsieur', the mention of which roused the audience's anger; all reference to the king was forbidden.

In July, 1793, the Comité du Salut publique called for more patriotic plays. The Convention debated the question of the theatres; one member insisted they should be closed because of their frivolity, but another, who supported the Comité's proposal, pointed out the strong influence of the theatre over its public. The Convention agreed with the latter and decreed that the theatres could remain open on the condition that they offered suitably patriotic material. Moreover, certain theatres were selected to perform such plays, like Chénier's Caius Gracchus, one day a week at the Republic's expense.

The plays written in response to this decree fall into three categories: those based on episodes from the history of the Roman

Republic; those with an anti-clerical bias; and plays which dramatised contemporary events.

The Roman influence was very evident during the French Revolution. Pre-revolutionary society had already been influenced by antiquity. The educational system had firmly implanted an adulation of Republican Rome particularly. Schools in Paris followed a fairly uniform curriculum geared to the same examination system and such authors as Virgil, Horace, Ovid and Cicero were basic fare. All educated Frenchmen were well-grounded in these writers and other popular educational texts were found in the works of Livy, Tacitus and Plutarch. The study of classical antiquity was mainly rooted in the works of the Romans (Plutarch, though Greek, lived in Rome). Many of these writers lived after the fall of the Roman Republic aud, finding much to complain about in their contemporary society, wrote nostalgically of the glories and virtues of the defunct Republic. The concept of liberty was understood by the French people and the king to be Roman liberty, which recognised itself as the highest authority.

Republican Rome was, moreover, the place where freedom from slavery, the liberty of the people, could be achieved only by the destruction of despotic rulers. French educational texts were mostly eighteenth-century interpretations of Greek and Roman writers and they tended to minimise the more incendiary aspects of the Roman Republic, emphasising rather the virtues of such a state.

References to Rome abound in all aspects of life during the Revolution. Attacks against the king referred to him as Tarquin or Caligula. Records of speeches given in the revolutionary assemblies are strewn with allusions to Rome. Danton, speaking in the Convention,

refused to be silenced, giving as his authority the freedom of speech granted by the Roman Senate to Brutus and Cato.

The festivals created by David to celebrate the Revolution demonstrate the popular enthusiasm for antiquity. In fact, David used his sketches made when in Rome as inspiration for the tableaux, the musical instruments and the costumes. Statues, triumphal arches and temples were erected imitating the style of ancient Rome and Athens. Paris was often referred to as the new Athens. In the capital could be found the rue de Brutus and the rue de Cato. The extremist Babeuf changed all his christian names to Camillus Caius Gracchus. During the counter-revolution, many plays ridiculed the Jacobins for their adoption of Roman names.

The Republican calendar used Roman numerals as a basis for the new names of the days. David was commissioned by the Republic's leaders to design a costume more in keeping with the republican spirit. His sketch for a republican dress shows the short skirt, cloak and footwear of a Roman citizen and it was intended that civic dignitaries should wear this dress on official occasions. The furniture and decor depicted in David's painting Brutus had an impact on the fashion of the day. The Phrygian cap first appeared in his painting of Paris and Helen which was shown in 1788. By 1790, it was popular as the 'bonnet rouge' and two years later it became a symbol of the Revolution.

The plays which castigated the church were a continuation of the anti-religious views expressed by the eighteenth-century philosophers. A new development was the violence of the attacks on the monasteries and on members of the clergy. Many of these men and women were massacred.

The last category produced plays which were usually full of pageants, constituting, in effect, the equivalent of the modern television newsreel. But in spite of all the restrictions imposed by the Convention, not all theatres showed such patriotic pieces, many of the smaller theatres offered simple entertainment.

With the Fête de l'Être Suprême, June 8, 1794, drama spilled out of the theatre into the streets. All the professional personnel in the theatre were now supported by the government and they were all involved in the festival. It was a great occasion set to the music of François-Joseph Gossec and organised by the painter David. Scenes and tableaux from the festival were later recreated on the stages of the theatres.

On March 10, 1794, the Comédie-Française, which, as the Théâtre de la Nation had been closed a short while previously, now opened as the Théâtre du Peuple and was designated the official people's theatre. Henceforth it was to offer regular monthly performances by artists from all over Paris, of plays chosen from an approved repertoire. The audience was to consist of proven patriots who gained admittance by showing official identity cards. Not only were the theatres being told what plays to produce, what actors could perform in them, but now the audience which viewed them was being selected.

The role of the playwright took on a new meaning. Whereas Chénier and Laya, though writing with a political objective, had written as dramatists, authors of plays were now becoming something closely akin to journalists. Pierre-Sylvain Maréchal's play was typical of this new development. His dramatic work had previously been limited to 'patriotic acts', for feast days, but in 1793, he

wrote a play which conformed absolutely to the ideals the Jacobin government was trying to propagate. Le Jugement dernier des Rois, 1793, was presented on October 18 at the Théâtre de la République in Paris and later it toured the provinces, receiving tumultuous ovations wherever it was shown.[123]

Maréchal's play is written in the vernacular of the lower classes, fused with the moral puritanism and political activism of the Sans-Culotte. From this standpoint, it is a realistic piece. Maréchal was deliberately trying to express the reality of the society created by the Revolution. He gave detailed instructions for the costumes of the characters, particularly the dress of the deposed rulers.[124]

Maréchal called his play a prophecy and it was indeed the utopia envisaged by the radical idealists. One of the major themes of Le Jugement dernier des Rois was the internationalism of revolution. The exhortation, "Fraternisons . . . avec nos amis en raison, en liberté,"[125] is, moreover, a glimpse of pure twentieth century ideology.

The play opens with a tableau showing:

> . . . une île à moitié volcanisée. Dans le profondeur, ou arrière-scène, une montagne jète des flamêches de temps à autre pendant toute l'action jusqu'à la fin.[126]

There is another symbol also representing the Jacobin 'montagne', a white rock used by the Vieillard as a platform when addressing the visiting savages, and inscribed with the words:

> Il vaut mieux avoir pour voisin
> Un volcan qu'un roi.
> Liberté . . . Égalité.[127]

The island is threatened with volcanic extinction, proving that it is ideal for the Sans-Culottes' purpose of ridding the world of "la contagion des rois,"[128] and also that nature approves their actions:

> La main de la nature s'empressera de ratifier, de sanctionner le jugement porté par les sans-culottes contre les rois, ces scélérats. . . .[129]

The Revolution has swept over Europe which is now governed by "une 'convention Européenne' qui se tînt à Paris, chef-lieu de l'Europe."[130] This body has condemned the former rulers to exile, whither they are led by "un représentant de chacune des nations de l'Europe devenue libre et républicaine."[131] This fate was judged more fitting for these, "monstres qui s'en disaient impudemment les 'souverains',"[132] than the quick end of the French king ("nous lui avons tranché la tête, de par la loi.").[133] It was the fear of the Revolution's international appeal that constituted one of the major causes of the war, a fear not unfounded, as evidenced by the mutinies in the British army and navy.

The Sans-Culottes address each other as 'camarade', a term with an international relevance more suitable than the nationalism implied by the word 'citoyen'.

Among the doomed rulers is the Pope, contemptuously referred to as, "le fond du sac. C'est le frétin."[134] Priests are equally reviled:

> Eh! dans quelle trame odieuse, dans quelle intrigue criminelle les prêtres et leur chef n'ont-ils pas pris part, n'ont-ils pas joué un rôle?[135]

They have been eliminated, together with the religion they served which has been replaced:

> Le Dieu des sans-culottes c'est la liberté, c'est l'égalité, c'est la fraternité![136]

Among the names of the enemies of the Revolution are included the Girondists--"les fédéralistes."[137]

The second important theme of this play is the glorification of the power and dignity of the Sans-Culottes. The Vieillard at

first fears the new arrivals to his island but on being assured that, "De vrais sans-culottes honorent la vieillesse,"[138] he welcomes them and asks them to explain what this new word signifies. He is given a definition of the people Maréchal saw as the members of the new society:

> Ce sont des citoyens purs, tout près du besoin, qui mangent leur pain à la sueur de leur front, qui aiment le travail, qui sont bons fils, bons pères, bons époux, bons parents, bons amis, bons voisins, mais qui sont jaloux de leurs droits autant que de leurs devoirs.[139]

The true aim of the Revolution, as understood by the radicals, such as Hébert, was to place the sovereign power in the hands of the people. Robespierre was to find this objective a stage further than he was prepared to go. Indeed the question of sovereignty was continuous throughout the Revolution. Maréchal's play has more in common with the views of Hébert than those of Robespierre.

Le Jugement dernier des Rois represents the highest point of the theatre's involvement in its revolutionary society. It is the affirmation of the principles and ideals of the Revolution, and it offered to the people characters they could use as role-models to create the new society. The play unhesitatingly asserts that this new society can only exist if all traces of the former system are destroyed, and if the new ideology follows closely the principles laid down by the revolutionaries. The government recognised the value of such a play, going so far as to provide gun-powder for the nightly volcanic activity, and this at a time when all available resources were directed toward the war effort. The concept of Le Jugement was of prime importance to its contemporary society, however, it could only be pertinent in such circumstances. Once that society had moved beyond the revolutionary stage, the play became irrelevant.

Maréchal's play appeared during the middle of the Reign of Terror, a time when France had come under the authority of the extremists. It was a time of the dictatorship of those who believed the Revolution was in danger and that all available means should be utilised to protect it. All power was in the hands of the committees, the Comité de Salut public and the Comité de Sûreté national, headed by Robespierre, Danton and Marat. As the Terror continued, all opposition, whether from the Right (the Gironde), or the Left (the Hébertistes), was suppressed. Freedom was subordinate to the needs of the state and the rights of the individual were superceded by the rights of the citizen.

These extreme politics could not endure. The backlash was inevitable. Robespierre was deposed by the Comité de Salut public on July 26, 1794 (8 Thermidor, An II), and in its turn, the Comité was itself replaced by the Convention in what became known as the Thermidorian Reaction. Year 3 of the Republic, September 1794 to September 1795, was a period of hiatus in the progress of the Revolution, a period which lasted until the inauguration of the Directory on October 26, 1795 (4 Brumaire, An III).

Two plays were performed in the months preceding the Directory which offer an interesting glimpse of the mentality of the theatre public during this period.

In March 1795 (25 Ventôse, An III), the Théâtre Molière[140] staged Le Souper des Jacobins, by Armand Charlemagne, a mordant attack on the Jacobins and events which had taken place under their authority.

The action is set in a Parisian lodging house where the surviving members of a Jacobin committee arrive for a secret rendez-vous.

They are confronted by their former victims who represent three aspects of the Jacobins' abuse of power, theft, dishonesty and murder. The contempt which Maréchal poured on the abject figures of the deposed rulers in Le Jugement dernier des Rois, 1793, is here reserved for the Jacobins, as they scuttle about the city, desperately hoping no one will recognise them. Retribution is the theme of Le Souper des Jacobins, 1795, expressed in terms of personal revenge.

The word 'Jacobin' is repeatedly equated with 'coquin', even by the Jacobins themselves:

> Crassidor.
> Vous êtes mal vetu, mon ami Furtifin;
> Vous avez, entre nous soit dit, l'air d'un coquin.
> Furtifin.
> D'un Jacobin au plus.
> Crassidor.
> C'est égal.[141]

The Jacobins are finding life difficult now that they are out of power, though Crassidor has managed to save some of his ill-gotten gains:

> Furtifin.
> . . . mais apprends-moi comment
> Tu pus te procurer, pour vivre, de l'argent.
> Crassidor.
> J'étais du comité révolutionnaire;[142]

Crassidor is thus able to treat his former associates to a meal, associates whose names have a distinctly Roman flavour--Publicola, Platon, Aristide, Solon. At supper, the dejected group sighs over their past glory, "C'étaient là nos beaux jours . . . ils ne reviendront plus."[143] They drink several toasts, ending with:

> Respirons sans témoins dans ce lieu solitaire
> Nous les derniers Romains de la jacobinière.
> Notre règne est passé: notre temps est à bas.
> Pleurons sur ses débris. Hélas![144]

Furtifin blames his companions for the failure of the Jacobin rule, accusing them of having been too lenient with the enemies of the Revolution, of revering Robespierre too much. The others turn on him, saying that the blame lies with people like him who made a hero out of 'saint Marat':

> On te vit comme lui prêcher l'assassinat,
> Et ton mauvais journal fut le fils sanguinaire
> Du grand ami du peuple, et valut bien son père.[145]

They quarrel violently, attracting the attention of the other guests and their division brings about their doom.

The landlord of the lodging house has given shelter to three unfortunates who suffered at the hands of the Jacobins. The first is Déricour, a boy grieving for his father who was a victim of a revolutionary tribunal. His friend Blinville tells the landlord the harrowing tale:

> Fils d'un agriculteur, dans un hameau lointain
> De l'espoir du bonheur il berçait son destin.
> . . .
> Le crime alors régnait, il marqua sa victime.
> Le père et son enfant sont traînés à Paris;
> Et l'on ferme un cachot sur le père et son fils.
> Devant le tribunal. . . .
> Ils paraissent tous les deux . . . Le sang de l'innocence
> Coule, abreuve la terre.[146]

The boy himself escaped because of his youth, but he cannot rid his mind of the horror he witnessed:

> Des ignobles bourreaux, en juges transformés,
> Ivres de vin, de sang, de fureur animés,
> En masse agglomeraient la vieillesse et l'enfance,
> La beauté, la vertu, le luxe et l'indigence;
> . . .
> Mon père . . . sa voix faible a prononcé deux mots.
> 'Tu n'as plus la parole,' a dit un des bourreaux.[147]

Déricour was also stripped of his inheritance, but now that the Jacobins have been ousted, he has hopes of restitution:

C'est un abus cruel: on le réparera,
L'humanité l'ordonne, et sa voix s'entendra.
De nos législateurs l'équité me rassure,
Ils ne seront pas sourds au cri de la nature.[148]

The second guest was doubly victimised. Forlis has just emerged from prison to find that his possessions, which were put under seal, have been stolen. He tells the landlord that his ordeal was alleviated by the company in which he found himself--"D'honnêtes gens la cage était toute garnie."[149] The audience is treated to another example of the Jacobins' abuse of power as Forlis lists the crimes for which he was imprisoned:

Un jour j'ai ri, dit-on, en parlant de Marat.
Un jour, du comité révolutionnaire
Je ne saluai pas, dit-on, le secrétaire.
Je mettais de la poudre, et mon linge était fin,
Et mon écrou porta que j'étais muscadin.[150]

The third victim, a tailor, was bankrupted by the Jacobins' custom of refusing to pay for the clothes they ordered from him. His business had already suffered because of the change in fashions brought about by the Revolution, and when his premises were visited by "un Jacobin, un diable, un monstre"[151] his dog and cat fled in fear and his wife miscarried.

The two groups are brought together as a result of the Jacobins' drunken argument,--"On croirait, citoyens, vu le bruit que vous faites, Que vous tenez un club."[152] Forlis recognises his watch and jewelry now sported by Crassidor; the tailor sees Furtifin wearing his merchandise; Déricour comes face to face with his father's murderers. The Jacobins will now receive their just rewards:

Assez et trop longtemps
Vous avez fait trembler tous les honnêtes gens.
Quand vous et vos pareils vous aviez la puissance
De tout bouleverser, de tout piller en France.[153]

Blinville voices the public's right to vengeance:

> Lorsque la tyrannie est tombée abattue,
> Certes, l'humanité prit un sublime essor;
> Mais on les laisse vivre; on n'a rien fait e[illegible]
> Celui qui de leur poids délivrerait la terre
> Serait le bienfaiteur de la nature entière.[154]

Justice appears in the person of an 'officier public' supported by a detachment of the army. The point is made, though not very strongly, that not all Jacobins were evil. Crassidor asks, "Pour être Jacobin, faut-il être proscrit?" to which the officer replies, "Ce qu'on pensa n'est rien; le tout est ce qu'on fit."[155] This line appears on the title page but the sentiment it contains is overwhelmed by the tone of the play. Only this one line suggests that total elimination of former Jacobins may not be necessary.

The play seems to offer itself more as an opportunity for the audience to sublimate its desire for vengeance rather than as an incitement to revenge. The Jacobins' victims make no attempt to take matters into their own hands, but pass their persecutors over to the law, preferring to believe that "La loi punit, et ne se venge pas."[156]

The play ends on a note of optimism:

> Ainsi puisse tomber le dernier scélérat,
> . . . .
> Vivons pour le bonheur, vivons pour la patrie,
> Pour la franchise aimable et pour l'humanité;
> Compagne de la paix et de la liberté.
> Confions à la loi le châtiment des crimes
> . . . Aimons la république. . . .[157]

The people of France were growing weary of radical politics, even to the point of tolerating the expression of monarchist sentiments that were appearing in some journals and finding favour in certain groups. The Sans-Culottes were rapidly losing their dominance in the Paris section committees, which were increasingly being taken

over by businessmen and even, in some cases, by royalists. In the theatres, audiences applauded references to pre-revolutionary customs.

The Feydeau had always been the theatre favoured by the moderates and after the Thermidorian Reaction of July 1794, it became very popular with the most flamboyant supporters of the counter-revolution. These were bands of youths, most popularly known as the Jeunesse dorée, but also called the Merveilleux or the Muscadins. In deliberate contrast to the rough simplicity of sans-culotte fashion, the Jeunesse dorée roamed the streets resplendent in rich, often bizarre dress, flaunting their long hair and wielding clubs to deal with any who opposed the royalist sentiments they voiced. The gangs were as much a product of the Revolution as the Sans-Culottes they detested, their only merit being that they had no authority.

The plays performed in the Feydeau were lavish productions, usually politically insignificant. The audiences, after the fall of Robespierre, while lacking the sophistication of pre-revolutionary theatre-goers, were better educated than those who filled the theatres during the Reign of Terror. They were suspicious of any sign of the political extremism which had brought Robespierre to power. Indeed, it was difficult to hold the attention of audiences such as the Feydeau's even with the extravagant spectacles since they were vociferous, ill-disciplined and frequently destructive.

Other theatres, however, still produced political plays. The most successful play in the spring of 1795, was Ducancel's L'Intérieur des comités révolutionnaires, 1795, first performed in the Cité-Variétés on April 30 of that year. It constituted a serious accusation against the Jacobin government and rapidly became a 'cause

célèbre' with the Jeunesse dorée. Ducancel had supported the Revolution and in 1791 he had himself been a Jacobin. He lost favour with Robespierre because of his professed atheism and prudently withdrew from his usual haunts, emerging after Robespierre's fall with an obviously changed viewpoint. This play is an exposé of Jacobin corruption, and is one of the plays selected by Moland in his book dealing with landmarks of the revolutionary theatre.[158]

L'Intérieur des comités révolutionnaires, ou, les Aristides modernes, 1795, bears certain similarities to Charlemagne's play. Both portray the Jacobins as self-seeking rogues completely devoid of any saving graces. Ducancel goes even further, he shows them to be illiterate fools whose villainy was able to ruin the lives of decent people by means of the section committees. Their opposition is personified in Dufour, a businessman who is a member of the committee and a loyal republican. The other members find his honesty hampers their depradations of the populace, and plot to have him eliminated.

In his preface, included in Moland's book, Ducancel states his objective in writing this play:

> Si j'ai fortifié l'horreur des bons citoyens contre les anarchistes et les buveurs de sang, j'ai reçu la seule récompense que j'attachais à mon travail.[159]

The list of characters on the title page makes Ducancel's view of these committees even clearer:

> Aristide, ancien chevalier d'industrie, président du comité.
> Canton, ancien laquais escroc, membre du comité, grand aboyeur.
> Scevola, coiffeur, Gascon, membre du comité.
> Brutus, ancien porteur de maison, membre du comité.
> Torquatus, rempailleur de chaises, membre du comité.
> Dufour, père, négociant, honnête homme persécuté, officier municipal et membre du comité.
> Dufour fils, officer de la garde nationale, persécuté.
> . . . .

Vilain, homme contrefait, commissionnaire au tribunal révolutionnaire.

. . .

La citoyenne Dufour mère, persécutée.[160]

The action takes place in the committee room in Dijon. In the centre of the room is a large round table on which are ten "bonnets rouges" and quantities of pens and ink, which are only used in signing warrants since, apart from Aristide, the Jacobins are illiterate. Around the walls of the room are stacked boxes of the confiscated possessions of the committee's unfortunate victims.

The play opens with Aristide congratulating himself on his progress from:

> coursier fringant, éclaboussant insolemment ces pauvres piétons, dont je suis aujourd'hui le très humble adulateur; marquis dans un quartier, duc et pair dans un autre, homme de la première qualité pour tout le monde, et fils d'un chétif bourrelier de campagne pour moi seul; . . . Aujourd'hui le bonnet rouge succède au chapeau à plumet; . . . quoique j'aie changé de costume, je n'ai pas changé de métier. . . . Ma profession actuelle est beaucoup plus lucrative. . . . Président d'un comité révolutionnaire![161]

His fellow members arrive and they discuss the agenda:

> . . . faut-il signer des mandats, incarcérer, opposer des scelles, fabriquer des dénonciations, payer des témoins, faire des motions, sonner le tocsin, battre la générale. . . .?[162]

They have difficulty in deciding what charge to bring against the Dufour family, generally respected in the district as "d'excellens patriotes."[163] Dufour's wife is "le modèle des bons ménages,"[164] his son is regarded as a hero, "Muscadin est trop banal pour un homme qui, comme lui, s'est battu aux frontières, où il a reçu plusieurs blessures."[165] Dufour himself is above reproach.

Dufour's servant arrives, seeking his master. Here Ducancel gives a masterly portrayal of the fanatics' ability to twist every innocent word and turn a harmless statement into a vehement

denunciation. They draw up a list of accusations against Dufour ranging from his insistance on being addressed as 'vous', to his meeting with 'aristos' to conspire against the Revolution. For good measure, they add the theft of confiscated money. There is a certain amount of black comedy in this scene; Scevola speaks with a Gascon accent which would no doubt amuse the Parisian audience; Aristide enters the servant's name on the requisite form as 'Charles-François' Deschamps and when the bewildered man objects, he is offered a choice of Roman names to adopt, as they have, though the tactless Vilain remarks, "J'avais cru, moi, qu'il n'y avait que les filous qui changeaient de noms."[166]

Vilain has brought a letter from the 'accusateur public', but since Aristide has left, no one can read it. He voices his disgust of the committee members:

> Grand Dieu! dans quel siècle sommes-nous? Est-il croyable que trente mille bons citoyens tremblent devant des misérables de cette espèce?[167]

Dufour arrives and reads the letter which asks for evidence against a certain man whom Dufour knows to be a good citizen. He gives Vilain an official reply saying no such papers exist. Dufour fils finds the 'evidence' and is horrified to learn that it could have condemned a man to death. He remonstrates with his father:

> Dufour fils.
> . . . cette lettre ne respire que l'amour de l'humanité
>
> . . . d'ailleurs, elle est écrite quatre ans avant l'existence de la République. Aucune loi. . . .
>
> Dufour père.
> Des lois! il n'en faut plus, mon fils, quand la société n'est composée que de bourreaux et de victimes. La France n'est plus qu'une immense forêt fermée de murs, habitée par des loups qui dévorent et des brébis qu'ils massacrent . . .
>
> si je lève mes yeux sur mon pays, il n'est plus qu'un

> vaste cimetière. Nous ne marchons plus aujourd'hui que sur des cadavres ou des décombres. Le comité est l'antre de Cacus; on n'y respire que les vapeurs du crime et l'odeur infecte du carnage.[168]

Dufour fils finds it hard to believe that while he has been fighting his country's enemies on the borders, more vicious foes are destroying her from within. Dufour père is fully aware that his fellow members must destroy him and he begs his son to return to the frontier, to avenge his family with the blood of his country's enemies:

> N'oubliez pas que la patrie, fût-elle injuste et barbare, est notre mère commune, et que rien dans la nature ne peut légitimer le parricide.[169]

Ducancel's intention was clearly not to offer support to the royalists who would lay their country open to foreign invaders.

The scène following this dialogue is in a much lighter vein. Fanchette, the Dufour's maid, comes to the committee room because she wants to leave Dijon, for which purpose she now needs a passport:

> Depuis que nous sommes libres nous ne pouvons plus sortir des portes de la ville sans un passeport.[170]

Her destination is Bourges, which causes some consternation since the ignorant committee members believe it to be in Belgium. They are confronted with an even greater problem in filling in the required forms when they discover she was born in Barcelona.--". . . mettons . . . canton de Catalogne, district de Madrid, département d'Espagne."[171] They threaten her with deportation because her names are those of Catholic saints instead of the republican saints such as "saint Marat"[172] whereupon she becomes quite insulting. They curb their annoyance because, as one of them reminds his friends, "Ce n'est pas une femme riche. Tu sais bien qu'il faut ménager les sans-culottes."[173]

The members of the committee gather for the meeting which, it is hoped, will end with Dufour's arrest. He refuses to don the red cap, deeming it "un signe de sang."[174] Aristide opens the meeting by urging his associates to be more zealous in their execution of the Jacobins' economic edicts:

> . . . je vous reproche la mollesse avec laquelle s'exécute dans cette commune la loi salutaire du maximum: . . . cette loi vraiment révolutionnaire. . . . Son objet est d'anéantir lentement le commerce, qui par sa nature est incompatible avec une république.[175]

In his response, Dufour proclaims the belief of the businessmen and merchants whose voices were now being heard over the receding ideological clamour:

> . . . je combattrai toujours vos principes, parce qu'ils nous mèneraient de la barbarie à l'esclavage. On ne sert pas la liberté avec les armes qui la détruisent. Quand une paix glorieuse aura scellé notre indépendance, comment occuperez-vous, sans le commerce, tant de bras généreux qui aujourd'hui la défendent? Le commerce, quand il est sagement combiné avec l'agriculture, est le véhicule de l'industrie et des arts; il est la force tutélaire des républiques; il soutient au dehors, par une marine imposante, la dignité nationale; il empêche qu'un peuple libre ne devienne jamais le tributaire de ses voisins; . . . il fait de l'univers entier une seule et même famille dont la philosophie est la mère.[176]

Where Le Jugement dernier des Rois, 1793, had preached the international brotherhood of the revolutionaries, this play suggests the peoples of the world will be united by trade.

The discussion ranges over the opposing concepts of liberty, with Dufour expressing the view of the anti-Jacobins, in which one hears the faint echo of pre-revolutionary paternalism:

> Où tout le monde est souverain, tout le monde est esclave. S'il est vrai que les hommes soient indépendans les uns des autres, pourquoi donc avons-nous des lois et des magistrats? . . . La vraie liberté ne peut exister que sous le despotisme inflexible des lois; . . . Tant que

> l'éducation n'aura point propagé les lumières et la raison dans toutes les classes de la société, le peuple aura toujours besoin d'hommes éclairés et purs, pour diriger son énergie et règler ses mouvements.[177]

Aristide retaliates with the radical view, accusing Dufour of speaking against the Revolution itself, and declaring, "La terreur est à l'ordre du jour. C'est à nous qu'il appartient de l'y maintenir."[178] And the cry goes up, "Oui! Oui! nous maintiendrons la terreur!"[179]

The examination of the Dufour family follows, punctuated throughout with the hated phrase from the revolutionary tribunals, "Tu n'as plus la parole," repeated so often that it becomes as meaningless as the Red Queen's "Off with his head!" in Alice in Wonderland. Dufour fils is asked, "Es-tu jacobin?" to which he answers: "J'aime la justice, je chéris l'humanité, je hais le brigandage," and his interrogator decides, "Ah! tu n'es pas jacobin!"[180]

As Canton shouts, "La patrie est en danger,"[181] the Jacobins decide the Dufour family must be sent before the tribunal but they are saved by Dufour fils who reads a message he has just received from Paris:

> "Nos infâmes triumvirs sont enfin abattus; Robespierre, Couthon, Saint-Just, mis hors la loi, viennent d'expier comme des lâches sur cette place où ils ont fait massacrer tant d'innocentes victimes."[182]

The stupefied Jacobins mourn "Le vertueux, l'incorruptible Robespierre,"[183] and as Dufour tells of the suppression of all revolutionary tribunals, they cry, "la contre-révolution est faite!"[184] The bulletin goes on to state:

> ". . . les partisans de la terreur et les buveurs du sang (seront) poursuivis, la conduite des comités révolutionnaires (sera) sévèrement examinée."[185]

The Jacobins are finally crushed and a minicipal officer is called in to arrest them. Ducancel gives details on how this scene was to be enacted:

> (Les cinq membres en bonnets rouges, consternés et les yeux baissés, font lentement le tour du théâtre, tenant chacun un gendarme sous le bras. Ils passent en revue devant les autres personnages. Deschamps et Fanchette les saluent et les narguent.)[186]

No doubt the audience joined whole-heartedly with Deschamps and Fanchette and it would probably have been some time before they would be prepared to listen to the final speech, by the officer, which exhorts the people of France to put aside thoughts of personal vendettas, but, at the same time, to effect the total destruction of the "vampires" who have devastated their country, thus ensuring that, "la posterité, en pleurant sur les cendres de tant de citoyens innocens, bénira leurs vengeurs."[187]

The Jacobins had indeed been overcome but the Terror had not ended, it had merely changed hands. During the months of May and June, 1795, Jacobins became the victims of 'la Terreur blanche' when hundreds of workers and former sans-culotte leaders were murdered in several towns and cities of France by groups of bourgeois 'moderates' allied with religious bands bearing such names as 'la Compagnie de Jésus'. The perpetrators of these atrocities found justification for their actions in plays like those of Charlemagne and Ducancel.

From today's standpoint, it is difficult, in some respects, to see any difference between Le Jugement dernier des Rois, 1793, and L'Intérieur des comités révolutionnaires, 1795. Both plays urged revenge on former oppressors and foretold the establishment of a new society based on the principles of the Revolution. The only difference lay in deciding who the oppressors were and how those principles were to be defined. Both plays incited their audiences to pursue their enemies with righteous zeal. The government of the day supported Maréchal's play for that very reason. A note on the title page of

Ducancel's play reveals that L'Intérieur was no less effective in its call for vengeance. This note states that after many weeks of successful representation, the play was banned after the authorities had been approached by:

> Quelques personnages influens alors, se croyant mis en scène dans certains rôles de cette pièce, et effrayés par l'effet qu'elle produisait sur le public qui s'y portait en foule. . . .[188]

The major difference was the climate of opinion in which these plays were received. In the summer of 1795, the bourgeoisie was once more dominant. Ducancel's play would have found fervent support in a theatre public which was a true reflection of its society.

The bourgeoisie was emerging victorious from the years of revolution. It had no need to pander to the demands of the lower classes because it had the support of the generals. The prestige of the army had risen with each of its many victories, even in the eyes of the Sans-Culottes. Hobsbawm refers to this army as, "the most formidable child of the Jacobin Republic,"[189] and goes on to point out that:

> . . . (it) was a career like any other of the many the bourgeois revolution had opened to talent; and those who succeeded in it had a vested interest in internal stability like any other bourgeois.[190]

This powerful association of the army and the bourgeoisie was to have tremendous influence on French politics during the next two centuries. One of the more immediate, and remarkable, products of this alliance was Napoléon, whose spectacular career began in the streets of Paris in October 1795.

As the year wore on, the inevitable reaction against revolution and counter-revolution was apparent in the theatres, and political

plays lost their appeal. Satiated by politics, the theatre public sought comedies of manners and lavish, light-hearted spectacles. Once again theatres competed on the basis of finances instead of political affiliations.

In the years which followed, theatres tended to present plays based on themes reflecting aspects of the social condition which could unite the spectators rather than divide them into partisan groups. The plays all offer a reflection of bourgeois customs and values and they lack the excitement generated by the products of "an age whose highest achievement so often belonged to propaganda."[191] But as French society grew calmer, the theatre was able to resume its role, and in these plays are revealed the interests and tastes of post-revolutionary France.

One such play was Collin d'Harleville's Les Artistes, 1796, first produced by the Comédie-Française on November 9, 1796. There is a quotation from the third act on the title page which expresses the author's purpose as well as his hope for his society:

> De la vie humaine égayant le chemin,
> Marchent tous à la gloire, en se donnant la main.[192]

In his preface, Collin d'Harleville refers to his deliberate omission of the word 'comédie' on the title page, explaining that the theme of his play is more serious than such a description would imply,--"C'est un éloge des arts que je présente aux artistes, aux amateurs éclairés. . . ."[193] Such an abstract subject had not been offered in the major Parisian theatres for some time.

The three main characters are a painter, a poet and a composer, closely bound by mutual admiration and affection. In one scene they discuss an example of the poet's work on the subject of "L'Amour, les

Arts et l'Amitié," the last verse of which hints at the blessings of religion, once again an acceptable admission on stage:

> Mais les Beaux Arts et l'Amour même
> Ne rendroient heureux qu'à demi,
> Si du ciel la bonté suprême
> N'y joignoit le don d'un ami.[194]

There is an echo of Beaumarchais in the artists' opinion that art should have a moral justification, as they abjure frivolity and vow:

> De ne rien composer, rien qui ne soit utile;
> D'avoir toujours un but intéressant, moral.[195]

Collin d'Harleville's purpose is to extoll the finer pursuits of his society, and the play is really just the setting for a low-key discussion of the role of art in the new society.

The plot is simple, set in a plainly furnished Parisian house, in the attic of which lives a struggling painter, too shy to express his feelings to the young widow, Emilie, and yet to receive recognition of his genius which he, modestly, doubts. In the name of friendship, he tries to advance the suit of his composer friend who, he believes, is more worthy of Emilie. He is rescued from this act of self-immolation by the poet. The painter's father is a farmer who comes to Paris to persuade his son that he is needed at home. Happily, the painter wins a prize for one of his paintings just in time to satisfy himself that he is worthy of Emilie, and to convince his father that he is indeed an artist. Armand, père, is finally brought to accept that:

> Il faut remplir l'état pour lequel on est né,
> L'art du Cultivateur n'est pas seul nécessaire.[196]

Interestingly enough, the mention of 'l'état pour lequel on est né' has no political connotation in this play and did not cause the reaction it probably would have in earlier days. Armand père goes on to say:

. . . tous, par divers chemins,
Tendent au même but, au bonheur des humains.[197]

The equality here implied is that of one's value to, and not one's position in society. There are no apparent barriers between the peasant and bourgeois characters of Les Artistes. The older characters are addressed as "Monsieur Armand" and "Madame Alix," while the others have no title, though the painter is once referred to as "Citoyen respectable."[198]

Les Artistes contains some interesting allusions. Even though France was still at war with England, Collin d'Harleville felt free to refer to an English writer, Laurence Sterne, the author of The Life and Opinions of Tristam Shandy, Gent., 1760:

Emilie.
Je lisois dans Sterne, auteur que j'aime.[199]

The three friends laud the brotherhood of artists in which they include Corneille, whose name was once anathema to the revolutionaries, Molière, Voltaire, Lulli and Buffon.[200] Armand fils, the painter, later refers to classic painters, like Poussin.[201] The only interpretation of the word 'liberté' is as artistic freedom and the single reference to contemporary events is when Armand père cites his reasons for needing his son on the farm:

. . . ma ferme est comme abandonnée:
J'ai deux fils à l'armée.[202]

Country life is glorified as being hard and healthy; the tasks of the peasants are noble and deserving of as much esteem as the work of an artist or a statesman: "Voyez Cincinnatus" says the poet, he who left his fields to lead Rome.[203]

There is a rather fascinating reference to the expression of romanticism in art. Armand is involved in painting a biblical subject, though his usual topics are historical, and the names of classic artists are constantly on his lips, but his style ranks him with the Romantics:

> Tu peins l'azur du ciel, le bel émail des fleurs,
> Le crystal d'une eau pure, . . .
> Il peint le mouvement, et . . . presque la parole . . .
> Des passions il sait rendre les grands effets;
> Et plein de passion lui-même, il nous entraîne
> De la crainte à l'espoir, de l'amour à la haine.[204]

In fact, Les Artistes is close to the Romantic Age in the way it deals with the intellectual abstractions of art.

Collin d'Harleville's plays are not remarkable for the brilliance of their wit, but this play ranks as the most sober of his works. The characters are humble, dignified and enveloped in an aura of love and mutual respect, reflecting a more earnest morality than is found in his earlier plays, such as the successful Le Vieux Célibataire, 1792. The characters of Les Artistes, 1796, are not realistic, but they move in an environment closely aligned with that of their audience. There is no show of wealth, all the characters strive to produce something useful for their society, whether it be art or artichokes. Even Emilie tries to put her talent for drawing to use, deeming idleness a sin. There are no servants. Madame Alix, the landlady, who serves as housekeeper, is Emilie's close friend:

> Mad. Alix.
> O ma fille! . . . Car j'aime à vous donner ce nom;
> Cela ne vous fait pas, je crois, de peine, oh non.
> Emilie.
> Ah! de peine! . . . il n'est point d'expression plus chère:
> J'ose aussi quelquefois vous appeler ma mère.[205]

The love story is secondary to the theme of art, and although there is a little confusion when the composer makes his bid for Emilie, there is no intrigue to disrupt the noble sentiments of these worthy people. Neither is there the slightest suggestion that the more sophisticated artists feel in any way superior to the farmer or the landlady. An atmosphere of unity pervades the play, the characters exude a gentleness and an affection for people in general which must have been very soothing to spectators who, a little while ago, had to be ready to defend their political views every time they ventured near a theatre.

Collin d'Harleville did have to cut his play, but the reason was not political, simply, the play was too long. The lines omitted were included in the published text. They form a continuation of the three artists' discussion on art and were meant to appear after the reading of the poem, L'Amitié. The musician, Sinclair, goes to the piano to compose a setting for the poem and to the accompaniment of this background music, the poet and the artist discuss a work, L'Artiste which Armand is planning. It is to be symbolic: a painter communing with his muse, his brother the poet nearby, a visual image of music, Apollo or Minerva infusing the whole with light, while the painter, gazing into the distance, catches a glimpse of "le vrai Beau":

> Le Peintre.
> Moi, peindre le vrai Beau, Dorlis! . . . et quel mortel
> Oseroit l'essayer, fut-il un Raphaël?
> . . .
> Sinclair.
> Sans doute, il seroit impossible:
> C'est un être idéal, qui n'a rien de sensible,
> Qui toujours se dérobe à l'oeil observateur.
> L'artiste en a l'image empreinte au fond du coeur:
> C'est un sentiment pur . . . exquis . . . que vous dirai-je?[206]

This search for 'le beau idéal' was to become one of the major preoccupations of nineteenth-century art.

The cordial reception given to Les Artistes, 1796, showed that Collin d'Harleville's audiences appreciated his elegant style and delicate plots. His plays were always assured of a long run at the Comédie-Française, before and after the Revolution. He was not an acute observer of human frailties, nor was he socially or politically committed, but by 1797, the theatre public was ready to welcome again the type of play for which he was famous.

The same year, 1797, saw a revival of Beaumarchais' L'Autre Tartuffe, ou, la Mère coupable, 1792, before an audience more receptive than that of its first production in a more turbulent period.

Cailhava d'Estendoux, a moderately successful writer of lively comedies, wrote Athènes pacifiée, in 1797, but it was never performed on stage, although Michaud says, "elle n'aurait pas été moins piquante qu'à la lecture."[207] An interesting point about this play is its dadication to 'Agatho-Partes' (Napoléon), on his return to Paris fresh from the victories of the Italian campaign:

> A toi jeune Agatho-Partes, toi qui réalises dans moins d'un an, plus de merveilles que l'imagination la plus fertile, la plus exagérée n'en saurait prêter à la vie entière d'un héros fabuleux.
> (Acte III de cette pièce, Scène VII)[208]

During 1796, several plays centring on the character of "Madame Angot" were performed, all very successfully. One of them was by Maillot and in 1797, he followed it with a sequel, Le Mariage de Nanon, ou, la suite de Mme Angot, "comédie en prose et en un acte par le citoyen Maillot, musique du citoyen Leblanc."[209]

This play is devoid of political comment, rather it is a light farce, whose characters, all of the lower bourgeoisie, are embroiled in the type of situation which, in pre-revolutionary days, would have involved the nobility.

Mme Angot is preparing for her daughter's wedding which is to take place that morning. Nanon is upset because her fiancé, François, has been too attentive to her lively cousin, Mlle Bernard. He, in turn, is disturbed by the information that Nanon has a child. All is forgiven when it is revealed that the kind-hearted Nanon has been helping an unfortunate 'rentière' in dire financial straits.

Most of the characters are comic, but good-natured. The dialogue is animated, colloquial, full of quick repartee and little refinement of wit. The characters make no reference to contemporary events, merely general comments on the state of their society, which Mme Angot finds somewhat trying:

> . . . voyez un peu ce que c'est que l'monde d'à présent. Que d'intrigans, bon dieu! c'est que l' pavé d'Paris en fourmille . . . et des jeunes, et des vieux . . . et des gens ruinés, et des gens enrichis qu'on ne sait pas d'où qu'ça vient . . . je n'en ai pas encore trouvé un qui soit content . . . tout le monde critique.[210]

Such a comment could have been appreciated by an audience at any time.

The characters address each other as monsieur, madame and mademoiselle, though, with the exception of Mme Angot, her elder daughter and son-in-law, they are given no titles in the dramatis personae.

The play has lots of songs, one being about the innate greed in everyone:

> Toujours jaloux chacun envie
> Pour soi-même le sort d'autrui.[211]

But none of the people on stage exhibit this unpleasant characteristic, they are all content with their lot. The only discordant note comes in a speech by the wretched mother whom Nanon has befriended, but her miserable situation seems to be exposed in order to show Nanon's good qualities and not to encourage awareness of a social problem:

> Je suis veuve et rentière, c'est vous dire que je ne suis pas heureuse. Sans murmurer contre les circonstances, j'ai vécu pendant long-tems comme beaucoup d'autres, en vendant tout ce que j'avois.[212]

The play is light entertainment, offering an escape from daily pressures, one of the many such vaudevilles popular in France under the Directory. Another successful comedy, performed that same year, was Le Mariage de Scarron, 1797, the outcome of a collaboration between Barré, Radat and Desfontaines.

Pierre Yves Barré was an interesting character who fought for vaudeville against opéra-comique. His earlier plays were written jointly with Piis, and these two, with Rosière, founded the Théâtre du Vaudeville. From its opening, on January 12, 1792, this theatre was to be very successful. The inauguration of a new theatre, producing a new type of spectacle, was made possible by the relaxation of the rules governing theatres and plays in the early days of the Revolution. Barré managed to steer his theatre safely through the stormy days of Revolution. Michaud describes him thus:

> Quoique naturellement vif et brusque, il franchit Avec adresse et meisure des temps orageux et des circonstances épineuses.[213]

Michaud goes on to recount an anecdote of Barré's meeting with Napoléon:

> Je lui ai entendu raconter que peu de temps après le 15 Vendémiaire le général Bonaparte le fit venir et lui dit: "Citoyen Barré, je suis fort mécontent de votre parterre. - Pourquoi général? - À cause des allusions antirépublicaines

> qu'il fait tous les soirs. -Général, j'en suis désolé; mais je ne sais aucun moyen de les empêcher. -J'en sais un, moi. -Lequel, général, s'il vous plait? -Je ferai mitrailler votre parterre."[214]

But if the audience continued to be unruly, it was not given any encouragement from the stage to voice its political views in the theatre.

Barré's play, Le Mariage de Scarron, 1797, is a one act vaudeville, loosely based on the marriage of the poet-playwright Paul Scarron, 1610-60, to Françoise d'Aubigné, who later became Madsme de Maintenon, wife of Louis XIV. In scene VI, Mlle d'Aubigné gives a fairly accurate account of what is known about Mme de Maintenon's childhood:

> Née dans les prisons de Niort, où se trouvoient mes parents persécutés, menée à l'âge de trois ans en Amérique, . . . embarquée à douze ans, . . . ramenée en France, orpheline et sans bien. . . .[215]

Scarron, like the original, is hopelessly crippled, writes plays and is visited by Ninon de l'Enclos who attempts to arrange a marriage for the destitute Mlle d'Aubigné with her own ex-lover, the young Marquis de Villarceaux. The real Ninon was a friend of Paul Scarron. She was a popular, almost respectable courtesan during her long life, 1620-1705, who was acquainted with Mme de Maintenon and Louis XIV. In her will she left money to her attorney so that his son could buy books. The son was Voltaire. Possibly this accounts for her popularity in French plays long after her death.

Reference to Mme de Maintenon's position as nursery-governess to the offspring of Louis XIV and Mme de Montespan is made in the character of Babet, a girl sent to Scarron by his tessing friends. When they hear of his impending marriage to Mlle d'Aubigné, they send Babet to take care of his nursery. As in the case of the real Scarron,

the crippled hero of this play offers the penniless Mlle d'Aubigné a choice between the money to enter a convent, or a marriage of convenience with himself. She chooses the latter, since only to this can she bring something in return--her care and attention.

Barré employs no ridicule in his treatment of these characters from the era of the Sun King. There is one victim, the church, which is treated with scorn, but even this is handled lightly. Since he is to be married, Scarron sells his position in the church, his "canonicat," to Girault, a valet. Girault baulks at the price, so l'Abbé Scarron lists the advantages, ending by pointing out that all the position consists of is:

> Un bénéfice simple qui n'engage à rien; une bague au doigt que tu revendras quand tu voudras.[216]

They haggle over the price, Girault, "l'air hypocrite pendant toute la scène,"[217] giving in when Scarron tells him that the Cardinal would charge more. Girault acknowledges this, "Le Cardinal est un peu Juif."[218] The deal is settled. Scarron invites "Monsieur le Chanoine"[219] to supper, adding that all this new member of the clergy needs to complete his suitability for his position, is the proper attention to dress.

The play is amusing, lively, fast-paced and liberally sprinkled with music. Its allusions to pre-revolutionary characters and customs--"un nom illustre,"[220] "le nom des femmes des rois,"[221]--caused no indignant reaction from the unruly parterre. It does deal rather frivolously with people associated with royalty, but it does not treat them unkindly. Obviously, the audience had progressed beyond debating the political significance of each character and piece of dialogue.

The year 1797 saw the monarchical Directors overcome by a coalition of liberals and radicals, leaving Barras, Rewbell and Larevellière as the acknowledged leaders of the Directory. The excesses of the Revolution, and the counter-movement, were over, but the nation was still divided along lines of class, religion and politics. The dream of equality haunted a population struggling on the edge of starvation barely averted by the good harvests of 1796 and 1798. Under Barras, Rewbell and Larevellière, the government censured the pro-bourgeois press and theatre. The Hébertist campaign against religion was revived. Education was put more firmly into secular hands who were under strict instructions to omit all reference to the 'supernatural'. Marie-Joseph Chénier had, until 1793, been closely involved in the creation of a new educational system and some of his ideas were used now. From 1797-98, almost one and a half thousand priests were deported from France, leaving a large gap in the ranks of educators.

Talleyrand resigned his post as minister of foreign affairs in July 1798, in time to avoid being associated with the increasing internal conflict. The armies of France were rampaging through Europe encouraged by the Directors who knew peace would ruin their government. They had learned from Napoléon's example how profitable conquest, or liberation, could be. While he was in Egypt, the European countries began to increase the pressure on France and the Directory lacked the ruthless determination and discipline with which the Comité de Salut public had so successfully waged war in 1793. The disorder, internal and external, disillusioned the army and drained away its republican spirit.

The people, being only too aware of the chaotic conditions at home, still believed the Revolution's success story held true in the army. Whatever the domestic muddle might be, the army, they felt was in control of its domain.

At the end of February, 1798, a new play by Dumaniant showed military characters as the heroes controlling the action. This was Le Secret découvert, ou, l'arrivée du Maître, 1798, a lively comedy whose intrigue is similar to that of many pre-revolutionary comedies but this time it is the army, not the nobility, at the centre.

Dumaniant was a prolific writer of comedies, melodramas, tragedies, poetry and prose. According to Michaud, he was, "le seul rival de Beaumarchais dans la comédie d'intrigue."[222] He had been an actor and theatre administrator from 1792-98 after which he directed the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin. From 1806-16, he was a leading administrator of l'Odéon. That he was involved in more than theatre is evident from his writings, such as La Mort de Bordier, acteur des Variétés (no date), an article published in Paris on the death of an unlucky actor who was hanged at Rouen in 1789 for being involved in a riot. Dumaniant's last piece of writing was in 1823, when he published, in Paris, a work entitled, De la situation des théâtres dans les départements, et des moyens de prévenir la décadence totale de l'art dramatique.

Apart from its choice of characters, Le Secret découvert, 1798, shows no particular concern for the contemporary situation in French society. Its main protagonists are two young officers who exude nobility of character, loyal friendship and a quick and agile wit. The third military character is the Captain, the 'Maître' of the

subtitle. He does not make his appearance until near the end of the play, when he quickly sees through to the heart of the problem and restores harmony with intelligent wit and admirable efficiency. The object of the young officer, Dercour's love, is Sophie, who, like her aunt, is bourgeoise. Unlike Madame Bertrand, however, she is quick-witted and lively. Madame Bertrand is the jealous older woman who believes Dercour is in love with her, but although she is made to appear rather ridiculous, there is no malice in the portrayal of this character. The rivalry of two civilian suitors enhances the humour considerably but also augments the atmosphere of idle decadence which surrounds the bourgeoisie in this play, always excepting, of course, the military.

The play opens with a monologue by the servant, Lubin, who promises to be a Figaro-like character when it is understood that he is the cause of the intrigue--he has given to Mme Bertrand love letters from Dercour intended for Sophie--but he never lives up to this promise and the action goes on to exclude him.

The officers would reflect a comforting aura of capability to a civilian audience by their intelligence and uprightness. The only reference to the reality of military life, its association with death, is obliquely made in a verse of the song which ends the play. LeFranc, Dercour's friend and fellow officer, points out that the soldier cannot prolong his courting:

> Il doit être heureux le jour même;
> Il peut mourir le lendemain.[223]

Recognition of this hazard might have added spice to the play, but the audience had perhaps lost its taste for realism after the surfeit of recent years.

In the autumn of 1799, the Comédie-Française gave the first performance of Fabre d'Eglantine's play, Les Précepteurs (no date). The play itself is not as interesting as the fact that it was performed at all. Its author, Phillippe-François Fabre d'Eglantine was a poet and dramatist who had been extremely active in politics during the first years of the Revolution. As a deputy in the Convention, he had voted for the expulsion of the Girondists and for the execution of the king. Among other political appointments, he was for a time President of the Club des Cordeliers, and secretary to his close friend, Danton. He was a member of the committee organised to devise a republican calendar and invented many of the new names. On April 5, 1794, he was guillotined together with Danton, Desmoulins and others who opposed Robespierre. At that time, he was known more for his extreme politica than for his artistic offerings. His acceptance by the Comédie-Française as a dramatist reflects a shift in political emphasis in the government.

On June 8, 1799, a strong Jacobin minority in the two legislative chambers brought about changes in the Directory which resulted in the leadership of the police and the treasury being placed in the hands of members of the now defunct Comité de Salut public. Once again the praises of Robespierre and the radical Babeuf were heard in the reopened Jacobin Club of Paris.

Fabre d'Eglantine's Les Précepteurs reflects the reformist trends which were so influential before 1789. Its theme is the conflict between conventional schooling and the 'natural' education proposed by Rousseau. The play achieved popular success in its posthumous performances, much to the surprise of the critics. After seeing

it on May 16, 1802, Julien-Louis Geoffroy remarked that it was a "chef-d'oeuvre unique en bêtise,"[224] and La Harpe expressed astonishment at the play's continued popularity:

> Mais ce qui passe toute croyance, c'est le drame posthume intitulé Les Précepteurs, dont je ne me pardonnerais pas même de parler, tant il est au-dessous de la critique, si à l'heure même où j'écris il n'était joué avec les plus grands applaudissements.[225]

The plot is slight, the point of the play being to show the superiority of Rousseau's theories over conventional practices. The tutor who follows Rousseau's teachings is unappreciated by his pupil's mother. She is beguiled by the shabby tricks of the other tutor, until she finally recognises that goodness and integrity are more valuable than social adroitness.

In reading the play, one is forced to admit that, while its critics exaggerated its deficiencies, they were justified to a degree in their condemnation. The undoubted popularity of Les Précepteurs may, therefore, have been due to its theme. French society had finished, for a while, with revolution, but Rousseau's philosophy of reform remained an acceptable ideal.

The army comes to the rescue again in a play by Gibert, Rozélina, ou, le château de Torrento, 1799. This is a melodrama set in a medieval castle in Lombardy. Rozélina, "fille d'un honnête laboureur"[226] is the pregnant, virtuous wife of the Count Valério, an Italian Othello, whose treacherous friend, Coelino, resorts to force in an attempt to win Rozélina. She is spared Desdemona's fate by the intervention of a military hero. Valério kills Coelino and, believing the worst of Rozélina, claps her in irons in a dark dungeon. Valério's brother Murcio arrives and he shared neither the Count's

autocratic manner nor his fear of public opinion.

> Valério.
> . . . Hélas! que dirait-on? que dirait ma famille? le public! ce tyran qui juge toujours sans appel et sans entendre.

Murcio disapproves of this attitude:

> Murcio.
> . . . tu parais attacher un grand poids à l'opinion publique; mais l'honneur qu'elle ôte ou donne ne consiste pas dans ce que nous savons nous-mêmes, mais dans ce que les autres savent.[227]

Murcio takes charge. His commanding officer finds a letter which reveals Coelino's duplicity and attests to Rozélina's innocence. The calm good sense of the officers contrasts throughout with the over-emotional reactions of the noble count and the passive simplicity of the peasant Rosélins.

Not all plays at this time relied on the army to provide characters of moral strength. Collin d'Harleville found his protagonists in the Paris bourgeoisie. His last play was given its first performance at the Comédie-Française in the summer of 1800. While the plays he wrote before and after the Revolution portrayed the prevailing social customs, they were never strongly reflective of the contemporary situation. Les Artistes, 1796, exploited a revival in intellectual abstractions, but in his final play, he commits himself to the extent of offering a comment on the deteriorating morals of his society.

In his foreword, Collin d'Harleville permits himself a dig both at the critics of his play and at censorship in general. The first attack on Les Moeurs du jour, 1800, was "le reproche d'immoralité"[228] against which he defends himself by pointing out the purity of his intentions and professes himself content to be judged by those arbiters of moral taste, "les mères de famille."[229] As for the censor, "On sait que le poète comique ne poursuit que les coupables que

la loi ne peut atteindre."[230]

Les Moeurs du jour, ou, l'École des jeunes femmes, 1800, is a moral tale where virtue triumphs over the temptations of a corrupt world. The charge of immorality made against the author was based on his portrayal of the decadent society of contemporary Paris which is here continually contrasted with the moral simplicity of rural life.

Formont has come to Paris to persuade his sister to return to the safety of the country while awaiting news of her soldier husband who it is feared, has been taken prisoner. Sophie is reluctant to leave the social whirl of Paris, where, to the consternation of her brother and a devoted friend, she had become involved with the worldly d'Héricourt. Formont bemoans the decadence he sees among Sophie's new friends, "Les femmes . . . presque demi-nues" whose only interest is in seeking pleasure:

> L'honneur même qui perd sa plus solide base,
> Voilà ce qui m'effraie.[231]

The play presents three types of characters: those who possess the bourgeois morality, exemplified by Sophie's mentor, Madame Euler:

> Mon plaisir, mon bonheur, des matins et des soirs,
> C'est que tout simplement, je remplis mes devoirs;[232]

those whose interests are entirely materialistic, like Sophie's uncle Morand; and those who simply want pleasure, to whom Sophie is strongly attracted. This is clearly an attack on the brittle, brilliant world of the social elite under the Directory. The ladies whose dress Formont deplores were immortalised in a painting by David of Madame Recamier, a work which the artist believed to be his masterpiece and which, today, conjures up the essence of Directory society.

Sophie's husband arrives in time to save her from her folly and we learn that he was indeed a prisoner of war, in Germany:

> Un échange à la fin vient de nous délivrer.[233]

This line is the most topical allusion Collin d'Harleville made in any of his plays reviewed in this thesis.

Formont has been shocked by the casual acceptance by his sister's friends of divorce and cannot wait to escape to his rural fastness where, "je cultive en paix mon champ et mon jardin,"[234] a fascinating combination of bourgeois rectitude and Voltairian philosophy.

It is a play which follows some of the ideas propounded by Diderot in that it presents recognisable characters faced with possibly realistic dilemmas. It borders closely on Beaumarchais' ideas in showing bourgeois decadence. Unlike Beaumarchais, Collin d'Harleville does not try to make his audience wipe away sentimental tears, it is no melodrama, but as Diderot suggested, it is neither tragedy nor comedy. In trying to relate his play to the real world, the author points out, in his foreword:

> J'ai reconnu avec délice, que des deux Paris décrits dans ma pièce, si l'un est plus brillant, l'autre est bien plus nombreux.[235]

The army, however, in the person of Sophie's husband, remains aloof from both aspects of Paris.

The reverence with which military characters were treated in the theatre after 1792 is absent from a very popular play by Aude which was first performed early in 1801.

Cadet Roussel aux Champs Elysées, 1801, is centred on a character who appeared in many plays and revues, rather like Madame Angot. In Aude's play, Cadet Roussel is a pompous, vulgar, vaguely

military arrival in the after-life. He is a Parisian connection of Mrs. Malaprop and his thick, uncouth language contrasts vividly with the airy elegance of the other shades, notably Voltaire and Ninon de Lenclos. These two find his presence amusing, but Agamemnon is outraged. Cadet Roussel determinedly courts Ninon who is extricated from her dilemma by the arrival of Cadet's wife. Faced with the choice of remaining true to his marriage vows or descending to hell, Cadet, not unnaturally, keeps his wife. The plot is thin, there are lots of songs and the play is a lively farce.

It does, however, offer a comment on contemporary theatre, the state of which Aude seems to deplore as much as Collin d'Harleville regretted his decadence of his society. This is revealed as the rather bored inhabitants of Paradise attempt to extract news of Paris from the latest arrival:

La Fontaine.
Peut-on avoir quelques nouvelles de la terre que vous quittez?

Cadet, correctly divining that they wait news of the theatre, gives his views:

Cadet.
. . . Tout le monde, fait des pièces de comédie. . . .
Voltaire.
Ah! la litérature (sic) est cultivée?
Cadet.
Je vous parle de ça? Il n'y a pas de littérature là-dédans. Je vous dis qu'on fait des pièces tant qu'on en veut: mais, ça coûte pus que votre tems.
La Fontaine.
Pourquoi cela?
Cadet.
Il faut, pour les décolations (sic), des peintures d'or et d'argent, des châteaux forts, des sorciers, des voleurs, et puis on parle sans rien dire.
Panard.
C'est la pantomime qu'il veut dire.
Cadet.
Oui, la pantomime; c'est ça: ça donne fort pour le quart-d'heure, avec des couplets de chansons pleins d'esprit, et des pointes de calembours.

Voltaire.
Vadé, Panard, entendez-vous?
Panard.
Malgré sa triviale manière de peindre, il me fait présumer le genre de mes successeurs.
Cadet.
Oui, c'est un genre qu'ils ont à eux, et qu'ils ont mis à la place du vôtre, excepté quelques-uns qui ont toujours préféré l'ancienne mode.[236]

They lament the decline of their successors' art but are cheered when they acknowledge that:

Quelques amis d'un meilleur ton,
De Panard chérissant les traces,[237]

will surely revive their high standards, and they heartily applaud Dancourt who goes on to sing:

Je vois Racine, de plaisir,
Presser le sein du grand Corneille.
Les arts retrouvent leurs beaux jours,
Après des orages sinistres:
Vos chef-d'oeuvres vivront toujours,
Dans la bouche de vos ministres.[238]

And Voltaire adds the comment, "Il est conservé, le flambeau qui met nos trésors en lumière."[239]

Cadet refers frequently to the theatre. He was taken with his final illness during a performance of "une tragédie, où est-c'qu'il y a un maroquin de Venise." He accounts for his last days in a passage punctuated by the rhythmical names of the republican calendar:

. . . j'ai joué quintidi, je me suis mis au lit sextidi; j'ai eu une fièvre de cheval septidi, le transport m'a pris octidi, je suis mort nonodi, je suis arrivé décadi soir ici.[240]

Agamemnon's appearance is heralded by the golden trumpets of his impressive entourage. The scene is a pantomime. Cadet tries unsuccessfully to speak to the classic hero over the noise of the "lente et noble" music, finally shattering any vestige of classic dignity left to this scene by swearing, "Que le diable emporte les

musiciens. . . ."[241]

Cadet continues to be unimpressed by the glory of the ancients, as symbolised by Agamemnon:

> Agamemnon! ne diroit-on pas que c'est le Poitou? un petit roi de la Champagne. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> Est-c'qu'il n'est pas celui qui commandoit la ville de Troye, un ancien Grec. Je sais l'Histoire de France, peut-être; il fait le fier à cause qu'on le représente dans les pièces de comédie, à Paris.[242]

Cadet defends his dismissal of Agamemnon's importance by pointing out that is is only the Greek's name that Paris knows, whereas Cadet Roussel represents reality to them and he explains how things have changed, ". . . de votre tems on ne connoissoit la siperfucie (sic). On n'ai fait qu fleurer la chose."[243] He goes on to recount his own achievements in the theatre, as a writer and as an actor, at which the appalled Agamemnon exclaims, "Et les théâtres de la nouvelle Athènes ont vu figurer ce magot?"[244]

Aude is commenting here on contemporary theatre. It appeared that theatre had lost its direction. During the years of revolution, theatre had responded to a social need, revitalising, sometimes electrifying the stage as it communicated changing values as well as political propaganda to the people. But now, in the Revolution's aftermath, the theatre needed to be redefined. In a very short period of time, the theatre, like its society, had undergone an abrupt change. From being the visual aspect of the literary art of drama, it had become a social art, and during the days of intense social change, the artistry seemed to be of secondary importance. Theatre had progressed from classical drama, to political propaganda, to didactic scenes of the new society, and now it was inevitably affected by the hiatus which follows social turmoil.

To be successful, a play must have merit in the eyes of its public, regardless of whether that merit be literary, dramatic or political. The political play, which reached its zenith with Le Jugement dernier des Rois, 1793, had had its day. Contemporary politics were both more complex, now that the black/white concepts of revolution and counter-revolution had receded, and more tedious to the average theatre-goer. Pre-revolutionary classical drama had lost its audience and its appeal was, temporarily, unappreciated by the greater part of the theatre public. Financially, theatres needed popular support to survive. Many inferior plays and actors appeared briefly on stage as the theatre groped to find an answer to the problem of what the public wanted. Nowhere was criticism more lively than in the theatre itself, as Aude's play indicates.

In the late summer of 1801, the Comédie-Française produced a play which gives a rather cynical view of its society. It extolls the virtues of the pragmatic approach and its hero's fondness for philosophical thought is derided. The play was Défiance et Malice, 1801, by Dieulafoy and it was retained in the Comédie-Française's repertoire.

It is a one act play with just two characters. These disguise themselves as their aging servants, one to assure himself that the object of his love has not deteriorated since being widowed, and the other to teach her doubting suitor a lesson. The humour lies in the ambiguity of much of the dialogue and in the often very funny asides. The hero aspires to be a philosopher, a thinking man, and it is this which leads to his downfall. He is finally brought to accept the folly of thinking too much and Céphise ends the play with, "Le plus

sage est celui qui s'en doute le moins."[245]

Dieulafoy's life had more positive aspects than his play. As the clouds of unrest were gathering in the late 1780s, Dieulafoy left France for St. Domingue where he became head of a profitable business. He lost this when the blacks revolted and massacred the Europeans. Dieulafoy escaped and made his way to France where he arrived shortly after the end of the Terror. His past experiences had not engendered in him any sympathy for revolutionaries and in collaboration with Barré, Radet, Desfontaines and others, he wrote plays which directed bitter attacks against the Jacobins, thus acquiring many enemies. In 1798, at Barré's theatre, he produced Le Moulin de Sans-souci, a play which "montrait sur scène, dans ce temps d'anarchie et de licence, un roi qui faisait une bonne action."[246] In 1801, Dieulafoy's Défiance et Malice contained no overt signs of his political beliefs, the politics of the day being more acceptable to him.

France was recovering economically with a rapidity remarkable in a country which had seen such strife. The Concordat of 1801 negotiated an agreement between the state and the Catholic church, pledging financial support for the church and recognition of Catholicism as the religion of the Consuls and the people, though it stopped short of naming it the state religion. The Code Napoléon was being developed and accepted, over-riding the objections of those who saw it as a betrayal of the Revolution. Hobsbawm, writing of Napoléon's achievements, says:

> (Napoléon) had destroyed only one thing: the Jacobin Revolution, the dream of equality, liberty and fraternity, and of the people rising in its majesty to shake off oppression. It was a more powerful myth than his, for

> after his fall it was this, and not his memory, which inspired the revolutions of the nineteenth century, even in his own country.[247]

The theatre reflected this anti-revolutionary mood, showing plays which alluded less and less to the principles that had driven the revolutionaries. The authors too were more in tune with the counter-revolutionaries, possibly because many of them had suffered personally under the Jacobins.

One such author was Martainville, an ardent anti-Jacobin. He was one of the lucky few to be acquitted by the Revolutionary Tribunal. The Tribunal had been established in March 1793 by the Convention to try cases sent to it by the Comité de Salut public. Its principal prosecutor was Fouquier-Tinville who was himself to fall victim to it in 1795 and it was before him that Martainville appeared on a charge of falsifying prices. After this youthful escape from the Terror, Martainville became a convinced counter-revolutionary openly opposing the Jacobins after the fall of Robespierre. He was one of the leaders of the Jeunesse dorée de Fréron, and wrote, around the year 1797, two very successful anti-jacobin plays, Les Assemblées primaires, an attack on the electoral system, and Le Concert de la rue Feydeau, a biting condemnation of the Jacobins. He found it expedient to leave Paris for a while when the Jacobins regained some of their power in October 1795.

He continued to write numerous plays, mostly comedies and in 1802, published an Histoire du Théâtre français in collaboration with Charles-Guillaume Étienne, who will be discussed later in this thesis. Martainville survived Napoléon's rule in spite of writing a rather vulgar song on the occasion of the Emperor's marriage in 1810 to

Marie-Louise of Austria. Napoléon is popularly thought to have forgiven the author because of his wit. Martainville never changed his counter-revolutionary convictions, and in 1814, he was an ardent supporter of the Restoration.

When Napoléon re-entered Paris in 1815, Martainville fled to his house in Pecq, which was looted by the Prussians as Marshall Prince Blücher led them to the capital. Martainville was accused of offering hospitality to the Prussians. This, and other accusations, both literary and political, led to interminable wrangles and he often found himself in danger from the general public. In 1818, he founded a newspaper, "Le Drapeau blanc" to propagate his own views and to castigate those of his opponents. Michaud, not one to hide his own political leanings, describes him as one of the Restoration's wittiest and bravest writers.[248]

On July 24, 1801, the Théâtre de Montansier produced a play by Martainville, La Banqueroute du Savetier, a vaudeville mocking the current rash of bankruptcies. One of the characters, Galopin, explains the principles of bankruptcy to the shoe-repairer, his rival for the hand of Nicette:

> Des personnes ont eu confiance en vous, elles vous ont remis soit de l'argent, soit des effets; eh bien! un beau matin vous déclarez que vous ne voulez leur en rendre que la moitié, je suppose?
> . . .
> . . . on appelle cela faire banqueroute à cinquante pour cent.[249]

Armed with this knowledge, the cobbler attempts to make his fortune by retaining fifty percent of his customer's effects, including his rival's. The two then turn out to be cousins who inherit fifty percent each of an uncle's estate. Thus the cobbler has the necessary finances to marry Nicette. The plot is frivolous, the

dialogue humourous, containing a few mild topical allusions:

> J'ai un état qui ne répond pas à mon éducation; il y en a bien d'autres qui ont eu une éducation qui ne répond pas à leur état.[250]

In 1801, Martainville's counter-revolutionary zeal was being assuaged.

During the early years of the nineteenth century, authors tended to keep their political views out of their plays. Such a writer was Louis-Benoît Picard, who, though he made no reference to social problems, nevertheless infused his work with his own cynical view of his society's less noble characteristics. His first play, Le Badinage dangereux, was presented to the Théâtre Montansier in 1789. It was not successful, possibly because of its timing, or, equally possibly, because it had no particular merit. Picard excluded it from his published collection of plays. He also omitted his second play, Le Masque, which he wrote in 1790. The following year two of his comedies achieved moderate success.

In 1801, Picard took over the management of the Théâtre Louvois and opened with one of his most popular comedies, La Petite Ville, 1801. Set in a small provincial town, the play has no villains, but none of the characters are very pleasant. Desroches has left "ce maudit Paris"[251] to escape "Des intrigans, des fripons, des joueurs, des coquettes et des prudes, voilà ce Paris que j'abandonne...."[252] He believes the country will offer balm to his embittered soul:

> La nature semble avoir pris plaisir à s'embellir, à protéger cette petite ville: c'est peut-être là que se trouve le bonheur.[253]

However, he discovers that Paris does not have a monopoly on immorality and greed, and he is finally glad to return there, leaving "ce maudit pays" as quickly as he can.[254]

Although the play does contain a great deal of humour, the atmosphere is pessimistic. Paris does not seem so bad in the end, not because Desroches rediscovers its virtues, but because everywhere else is the same. The characters trick, cheat and deceive each other. Most of the humour depends on the audience laughing at the clumsy manners of the provincials as they ape the social customs of the capital.

In one scene, a letter is read out, the date being given according to the revolutionary calendar, but apart from this, the play could be set in pre-revolutionary France. The characters are all bourgeois, addressing each other as monsieur or madame. Their social lives centre around card parties, private concerts and morning visits, pastimes that were customary before 1789. One lady does mention that they are to perform, privately, a play which might entertain the visiting Parisians, "nous jouons le Barbier de Séville,"[255] but the statement is made to give the city sophisticates an opportunity to mock provincial pretension.

A play with a more topical theme was Caigniez's Le Jugement de Salomon, first performed at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique in January, 1802. Napoléon had just signed the Concordat, his Code was being planned, his popularity was ascending and his genius, military and administrative, was offering Frenchmen a glorious future. It was not ridiculous to compare him to Solomon, as Caigniez does, and his brilliant campaigns in exotic lands find an echo in Caigniez's lavish setting for his play. Not only is the setting extravagant; Caigniez uses a large cast. Apart from the main characters, there are innumerable extras:

autres officiers
villageois et villageoises
jeunes filles de Jérusalem
Égyptiens et Noirs de ~~la suite~~ d'Azélie
femmes et esclaves de Tamira
gardes et peuple[256]

not to mention the dancers.

Salomon is the ideal ruler. His country is rich and prosperous, for which he is humbly grateful:

> Salomon.
> . . . que d'actions de grâces je dois à l'Éternel pour toutes les faveurs dont il m'a comblé.
> Gareb.
> Tu n'en as point abusé: . . . tu ne lui demandas que la sagesse.
> Salomon.
> . . . Heureuses les nations quand ceux qui les gouvernent suivent constamment les conseils de la sagesse!
> Gareb.
> En t'accordant ce don précieux, Dieu t'a prodigué tous les autres: tu as entendu ton empire de l'Euphrate jusqu'au Nil; tes ennemis sont abattus, Israël est en paix, et toutes les richesses d'Ophir viennent rehausser l'éclat de ton trône.[257]

Gareb could be speaking directly to Napoléon, except that he had not yet acquired his throne. The Revolution has not been completely forgotten, as is evidenced when Gareb reminds Salomon that even so great a ruler as he is bound by the moral laws which govern his people, and Salomon agrees:

> . . . dans le haut rang où le ciel nous a placés, nous devons au monde l'exemple des vertus et des bonnes moeurs. . . .[258]

The colour and richness of this production, the noble birth of its heroes and its monarchist sentiments are a far cry from the harsh setting and unyielding republicanism of Maréchal's Jugement, 1793. Where Maréchal called to the people to flaunt their sovereignty, Caigniez offers a spectacular paean of praise to the new Solomon of France.

Praise for Napoléon and praise for his army remained popular trends in the theatre. Le Pacha de Suresne, 1802, by Pixerécourt was another exotic spectacle inspired by Napoléon's Egyptian campaign. Three months after this play opened in the Louvois, Pixerécourt had another play produced in the Ambigu-Comique. This was La Femme à deux maris, 1802, a play in which the popularity of the army is still evident.

It is a gothic tale of persecuted virtue. The Count is in the service of the German Emperor; before her marriage, his wife Eliza (Clara) was abducted by the evil Fritz and forced into a marriage which brought her father's curse upon her head. Believing herself a widow she wed the Count under an assumed name, and to spare her son the shame of his unworthy parentage, pretends he is an orphan. Her father, now conveniently blind, is settled on the estate, unaware that the Countess is his daughter. The arrival of Fritz threatens to disrupt everyone's life but, in fact, solves all the problems. All is revealed and forgiven, and Fritz's death means happiness for the virtuous Eliza and her faithful Count who can now go back and continue fighting for his country. The most interesting character is Bataille, an ex-corporal, whose intervention saves the Count's life and results in the removal of Fritz. Bataille provides the only humour in this heavily melodramatic play, almost over-burdened with moral dilemmas. He refers to the advantages of a career in the new military structure, obviously referring to the French army:

> N'a-t-on pas vu souvent des hommes, dont à peine on soupçonnait l'existence, s'élancer dans la carrière des armes, s'y distinguer par des actions d'éclat, éclipser dans un instant la gloire des plus anciens capitaines?[259]

An interesting comment from an author whose background was intensely royalist. Pixerécourt's father had been one of the first noblemen to emigrate and to join the army of the Duc de Bourbon. His son René joined him in Coblenz in 1791, but he left the army and returned to Paris before the end of the Terror. Pixerécourt took the name of Guilbert to disguise his aristocratic origins[260] and for five years tried unsuccessfully to have his plays performed. In January 1794, his Marat-Mauger, ou le Jacobin en mission was accepted by a theatre in Nancy, but was, not surprisingly, banned by the local revolutionary committee just before its opening night. Three years later, the political climate had changed and the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique presented his Les Petits Auvergnats in 1797. From this time, the secondary Parisian theatres showed many of his plays. He had one melodrama accepted by the Comédie-Française, Bensarade, ou, une visite de madame de la Vallière, but he withdrew it. It was financially more advantageous to have it staged by the lesser theatres.

Pixerécourt's melodramas were noted for their sentimentality and the victory of moral virtue over evil, in line with Beaumarchais' principles. His characters were either aristocrats or haut bourgeois, whose usual background was a château. They were meant for a prosperous middle class audience who would be intrigued by the trappings of gothic romance. Pixerécourt was not expecting any Sans-Culottes in his audience, nor did he, at that period, have to fear their disapproval.

A year later, even the Bastille could be used as a background for comedy. It provided the setting for Une soirée de deux prisonniers, 1803, a vaudeville by Desprès. The two prisoners of

the title are Richelieu, who is trying to rid himself of his wife, and Voltaire, who occupies his time by writing the Henriade on his cell wall. Richelieu is freed when he is reunited with his wife, a reconciliation brought about by Voltaire. He, in his turn, is released because his Oedipe has pleased the Regent. The many songs are gay, the dialogue more frivolous than witty and there is no hint of gloom, nothing to indicate that a few years earlier, the Bastille had represented intolerable oppression. Parisian society, like the theatre, had undergone incredible changes in attitude.

As Napoléon's reign as Emperor began, the most popular playwright in Paris was a man who, like Collin d'Harleville, wrote comedies of manners and avoided direct references to contemporary events, preferring to write of the lighter side of the social condition. Charles-Guillaume Étienne had an active career in Napoléon's administration, close to the hub of contemporary affairs, but this was never allowed to intrude into his plays.

Étienne was a reluctant participant in the revolt of the Lyonnais against the Convention in 1793. He was starting a career in commerce in Lyon when the uprising occurred and he found himself conscripted, but after the insurrection had been put down, he thankfully relinquished his military accoutrements. After a brief career as a provincial lawyer, Étienne went to Paris to make his fortune. This proved elusive but he managed to publish several articles in minor newspapers and so launched on a career as a playwright. Several Parisian theatres produced his plays and he joined a circle of literary men. However, his financial difficulties still troubled him. He was by this time a firm bonapartist though politics were not

to prove a source of inspiration for him. A chance meeting with an old friend, now a colonel, set him on the path of yet another career as an army contractor. He was stationed at Bruges, Belguim, when his play, Une Heure de mariage, 1804, succeeded in the Théâtre Favart, Paris. This led to his being brought to the attention of the commander of the Army of Boulogne, Marshall Davout, who was looking for a means of entertaining Admiral Verhuel, commander of the Dutch fleet patrolling the English Channel. Davout heard he had a writer in the camp and sent for Étienne to provide a suitable spectacle. Étienne obliged and succeeded so well that he was put in charge of the camp's entettainment. Shortly afterwards, he was called upon to provide a spectacle to amuse an even more illustrious visitor, Napoléon.

Étienne's effort, Une journée au camp de Bruges, succeeded so admirably, that Napoléon recommended him to Maret, and Étienne found himself back in Paris as the minister's private secretary. He travelled over Europe in Napoléon's entourage, being given, while in Poland, the task of producing a newspaper to propagate Napoléon's views. The "Journal des Débats" became the "Journal de l'Empire," and was, in fact, a mouth-piece of the state. By 1807, Étienne's play, Bruis et Palaprat, was performed by the Comédie-Française and his literary and journalistic careers were at their peak. His greatest dramatic success came in 1810 with his comedy, Les deux Gendres, on the strength of which he was elected to the Académie Française. In spite of its acclaim, this play sparked off considerable controversy, but a purely literary one.

The play which set Étienne on the road to success was Une Heure de mariage, 1804. It is a comedy written in a light, witty

style. The plot revolves around a misunderstanding. Constance has to pretend to be Élise, whose rich uncle demands her presence at a time when she is obliged to be elsewhere. Élise has a husband who has to accompany Constance, hence the play's title. In spite of the potentially scandalous scenario, the proprieties are observed and the rich uncle is appeased, because, as Constance's long-suffering fiancé says:

> . . . la jeunesse a ses travers, l'humanité ses foiblesses, l'inexpérience ses erreurs. Les hommes seraient bien à plaindre, si la sagesse n'était pas indulgente. . . .[261]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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260. The title page of La Femme à deux maris, gives his name as R.C. Guilbert-Pixerécourt.

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CONCLUSION

Art enables man to express in tangible form, his thought, passion and perception. A work of art is, in one sense, highly personal and individual and its creation is, to the artist, complete in itself. However, this is not always applicable to the art of the theatre. The central core of dramatic expression is man's conflict with himself, his fellow man, and with the vicissitudes pressed upon him by his society. The representation of this conflict reveals contemporary social trends and thus the theatre of any particular era offers an insight into the forces which shaped the society in which it was produced. It is from this conceptual base that the plays of the revolutionary period in France have been studied.

In order to appreciate the effects of a revolution on the cultural life of a society, it is perhaps necessary to view the political ramifications objectively. This is facilitated when the passage of almost two hundred years separates the event from the evaluator, but political tendencies will still, inevitably, intrude as has been shown by an examination of some of the literature concerning the artistic productions of the French Revolution.

Art that is judged great by succeeding generations is not essentially typical of its age. It has an appeal which extends beyond the time and place of its creation. The plays discussed in this thesis have no claim to greatness. On the contrary, some are remarkable for the mediocrity deplored by Lagarde and Michard.[1]

Despite the indifference of their contribution to dramatic literature, however, these plays suggest three interesting sources of study.

The first is the information they reveal about the people of that time. These plays inform us as to what kind of people were presented as role models, what entertained the audience, what was considered acceptable, what aspects of their own life they liked to see on stage, or what their leaders wanted them to see. As a parallel, one might consider a Somerset Maugham play, The Breadwinner, 1930, which contained two lines of "fantastic callousness"[2] too shocking for the London theatre audience of that year and which were consequently censored before the play's second performance. Today, those lines appear totally innocuous and reveal more about the moral climate of 1930 society than about the play.

The second reason for attributing some importance to these plays is that they demonstrate a practical, though probably unconscious, application of Diderot's theory, that drama should be centred on man and his social condition. It was an irreversible step in the dramatic art which ensured that the theatre could not in future be restricted to the representation of classical tragedy and comedy.

Finally, these plays may be regarded as relevant in the development of theatre as a separate social art form. In contemporary society, this role of the theatre is evident in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador where theatre groups flourish by performing in small communities plays which offer a dramatic commentary on the local social history, relating more and more to the customs, speech and events which the audience knows so well from its own collective experience. This form of theatre fulfills a role of Art in offering

man a view of himself, his environment and his cultural background, showing him the continuity which threads through his present and his past. Many of these groups are funded by the government which thus appears to recognise the relationship between theatre and its society.

Although the changes wrought by the French Revolution meant that the theatre, like its society, would never be the same again, in some aspects, the wheel had turned full circle.

Breaking away from the classic tradition of drama, and from the conventions which governed the theatres of Paris, the dramatists of the early years of the Revolution, 1789 to 1792, reflected the aims of the bourgeois moderates, seeking political changes within the existing framework. The success of such plays as Jacques Boutet de Monvel's Raoul, Sire de Créqui, 1789, and Jean-Nicolas Bouilly's Pierre le Grand, 1790, clearly indicate public support of the belief that the existing system was viable provided the king had the love and trust of his subjects. The revolutionaries exploited the publicity surrounding Chénier's Charles IX at its performance in 1789, using it as a platform to expose their political views to the public. This play went further than the two previously mentioned in that it contained the underlying threat as to what might be the outcome of the sovereign's losing the people's trust.

The division between the two factions of the bourgeois revolutionaries during the Jacobin Republic, which endured from 1792 until 1794, is evident in L'Ami des Loix, 1793, the play by Jean Louis Laya which pitted the moderates against the radicals, on and off the stage. The triumph of the Jacobins over the moderates culminated in the theatre with Pierre-Sylvain Maréchal's Le Jugement dernier des

Rois in 1793.

Following the Thermidorian Reaction in 1794 came the plays representing popular reaction in the theatre. Such plays as Ducancel's L'Intérieur des comités révolutionnaires, 1795, and Le Souper des Jacobins, 1795, by Charlemagne echoed the people's revulsion for the deposed radicals.

As the political fervour diminished during the years of the Directory, the theatres began once again to offer entertainment rather than propaganda and comedies and spectacles became the order of the day.

In the early days of Napoleon's Empire, the theatre seemed to be responding to Diderot's proposals in following his theories of relating drama to society. Because of the theatre's almost total involvement in contemporary events during the years of the Revolution, it had become acceptable, even essential, that the social condition of mankind should provide the inspiration for dramatic representation. But the emphasis during these turbulent years had centred largely on the social situation. Partisan politics, however, no longer offered enthralling, dramatic possibilities, and since the day to day situation was not changing so rapidly, political affairs were losing their attraction as a source of theatrical entertainment. Conditions were now favourable for the theatre to offer its audience dramatic representations of the human, as well as the social condition of man, as Diderot had proposed.

The French theatre audience had undergone as great a change during these years as the rest of French society. It seems apparent that the audience which hailed Collin d'Harleville's play, L'Optimiste in 1788 and caused it to be the Comédie-Française's longest-running

success to that date, was not the same audience which gave such rousing ovations at the performances of Maréchal's Le Jugement dernier des Rois five years later.

Amanda Binns advances the theory that the theatre audience during the Revolution was composed largely of the lower classes whose illiteracy was one of the reasons that the radicals found the theatre such a useful weapon for their propaganda.[3] However accurate this theory may be, it should be borne in mind that literacy is not proof against propaganda and that the audience's lack of elementary education does not fully account for the theatre's popular success at this time. Certain opinions specifically regarding the audience can be formed by observing the changing taste in plays, but to offer a definitive view of the French theatre public is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

It is by studying the plays themselves, by discovering the reactions of the audience, of the public and of the authorities to these plays, that one achieves an understanding of what was unacceptable, or what was popular at a given time. In the plays discussed in this dissertation, an attempt has been made to trace the course of the Revolution in a social context and, more importantly, to follow the development of a society as reflected in its theatre.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Conclusion

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2. Ted Morgan, Maugham.. A Biography, p. 348.
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