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Staging polemics: Charles Palissot, Voltaire, and the "theatrical event" in eighteenth-century France

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STAGING POLEMICS: CHARLES PALISSOT, VOLTAIRE, AND THE
“THEATRICAL EVENT” IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

In

The Department of French Studies

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	vi
INTRODUCTION TEXTS, PERFORMANCES, AND SPECTATORS IN SEVENTEENTH- AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE.....	1
CHAPTER ONE CHARLES PALISSOT’S <i>LES PHILOSOPHES</i>	32
CHAPTER TWO VOLTAIRE’S <i>L’ECOSSAISE</i>	88
CHAPTER THREE THE CRITICAL CONTINUATION OF THE PALISSOT/VOLTAIRE AFFAIR.....	147
CHAPTER FOUR THE “THEATRICAL EVENT” IN FRANCE FROM 1760- 1789.....	201
CONCLUSION VOLTAIRE, “ <i>LE CRI PUBLIC</i> ,” AND THE INTERNET.....	228
WORKS CITED.....	236
VITA.....	248

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the exciting world of eighteenth-century French dramatic writing, performance and criticism from the point of view of the theatrical spectator. Instead of focusing on one single genre or writer, I assemble the textual creation, performance, and criticism of certain “polemical” plays into what I term a “theatrical event.” This optic provides a holistic vision of theater and an accurate view of how drama underwent noticeable change due to playwrights’ political associations, public reactions to performance, and the emerging power of the periodical press. In sum, this project differs from previous studies by focusing on the increasing rhetorical and tangible significance of the theatrical spectator, and more specifically, on how he or she altered normative, established processes in dramatic writing, performance, and criticism.

In the first three chapters of this dissertation, I closely examine Charles Palissot’s *Les Philosophes*, Voltaire’s *L’Ecossoise* (1760), and atypical critical reactions to both polemical comedies. Here, I focus on the way partisan dramatists and their cohorts fashioned “theatrical events” through pre-performance strategies, narrative effects, and performative ruses. Then, I inquire as to why critics emphasized audience reactions to and participation in performance, rather than summarizing the play’s narrative or weighing in on traditional literary subjects.

Switching gears from a more synchronic study to a more diachronic analysis, in chapter four, I highlight a few “theatrical events” from the last years of the Ancien Regime in order to show how playwrights and critics borrowed both processes and themes from the original Palissot/Voltaire affair of 1760. With clear pictures of specific moments and more general shifts in theater history and criticism, this dissertation aims to

reassess the way we think about dramatic production during the pre-Revolutionary period in France.

**INTRODUCTION:
TEXTS, PERFORMANCES, AND SPECTATORS IN SEVENTEENTH- AND
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE**

Theater, Politics, and Society: Texts and the “Theatron”

In this study, I will investigate the dynamic world of theatrical production during the late Enlightenment in France. As the Ancien Regime accelerated into the throes of Revolution, emerging citizens questioned traditional institutions and ultimately closed the political gap between themselves and their leaders. Whether or not citizens ever achieved the egalitarian desires that Revolutionary texts advocate is debatable. Nevertheless, notions of representation and the place of the individual in society changed from 1750 to 1793, and premonitions of this change found their way to the stage, though not in a clear, linear manner.

Theater was an important social event during the eighteenth century, and by analyzing how theater operated during this time, I hope to paint a picture of how some aspects of society worked as well. In his recent monograph on *theatricality*, Samuel Weber argues that theater, unlike painting, music or novels, may best occupy “an uneasy position between ‘art’ and ‘entertainment,’ [or] between discovery and manipulation...” (30). In this study, I hope to bring to light this interstitial zone between “art” and “entertainment,” or, between the artist’s aesthetic concerns and his or her desire to create a social event. Theater, because of its popularity and its ability to bring disparate members of society together at the same time and at the same place, may reveal important practices inside and outside of the Republic of Letters’ literary circles in eighteenth-century France.

Theater has always exercised a significant social and political influence. Harking back to antiquity, Weber reminds us that, “the term *theater* has the same etymology as the term *theory*, from the Greek word *thea*, designating a place from which to observe or to see” (3). Echoing Weber, Florence Naugrette points out that, “le mot même de *theatron*, qui signifie le ‘lieu où l’on voit,’ s’applique originellement aussi bien au site des cérémonies religieuses qu’à celui des assemblées politiques” (18). In Ancient Greece, theater played important theological and political roles, serving as a venue for the metaphysical and day-to-day needs of citizens. It is important not to forget this concept of drama, with the idea that from this vantage point—looking out from the stage onto citizens—we may be able to perceive how certain elements of eighteenth-century society functioned in relation to the dramatic arts.¹

Theater has a myriad of components that, when combined creatively, produce a complex experience for the spectator. For centuries, theater critics have focused both on text and performance when analyzing dramatic genres such as comedy and tragedy.² Today, the notion of “good theater” depends on the dramatic work’s ability to find equilibrium between *à priori* writing (the text) and the performance-based phenomena of

¹ Denis Guénoun also analyses the original meanings of theater and theory in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Guénoun, more than Weber, emphasizes the public connotations associated with the terms in Ancient Greece, arguing that, “le regard des spectateurs est appelé [27] *theôria* à trois reprises (dans la *Poétique*), et l’adjectif présente l’avantage d’une proximité avec le théâtre, puisque *théâtre* et *théorie* partagent cette référence au *voir*—le théâtre, c’est le lieu d’où l’on voit” (26-27).

² If not for millennia, when we take Aristotle’s *Poetics* into account. But it was not until at least the seventeenth century that critics lamented a rift between the theatrical performance and the dramatic text. In 1677, Charles de Saint-Evremond wrote that, to the detriment of drama, theater had become, “une sottise chargée de musique, de danses, de machines, de décorations...une sottise magnifique, mais toujours sottise...” (qtd. by Pruner, *La fabrique du théâtre* 126).

a live, audio-visual event.³ As Jean-Jacques Roubine indicates, “le théâtre est à la fois une pratique d’écriture, et une pratique de représentation” (1).

Dramatic performance is inherently different from a textual analysis of a play or even an oral “reading” of a script. Theater is wholly dependent on voices, movements, lighting, sounds, and especially, a live audience. Michel Pruner gives a more precise definition of the dramatic arts in his introduction to *La fabrique du théâtre*, specifying that theater is an:

Alchimie complexe et polymorphe qui mêle le culturel et l’économique, le sérieux et le ludique, la littérature, l’architecture, la musique, la danse et la peinture—ou plutôt le son, le mouvement et la couleur—sans jamais se réduire à un seul de ces aspects, c’est une entreprise qui oscille entre la réalité la plus palpable et l’abstraction la plus totale. (1)

Twenty-first century drama critics emphasize both textual and non-textual aspects of theater, and in contemporary eyes, the stage director’s mise-en-scène is just as important as the original author’s construction of the text. We can see this fact in the way present-day critics refer first to the play’s director rather than its author, such as in the cases of Olivier Py’s *Tristan und Isolde* (Wagner), Peter Sellers’ *Ajax* (Sophocles), or Christian Schiaretti’s *Coriolanus* (Shakespeare).

As twenty-first century critics, our desire to put text and performance on an equal footing is a relatively modern idea that would have been unimaginable to most writers

³ This conception of “good theater” is however called into question by contemporary directors such as Ariane Mnouchkine. In *L’Âge d’or, 1789, 1793*, Mnouchkine directs a play, “où la notion même d’auteur disparaît, et, avec elle, la possibilité de rejouer le texte ainsi produit dans d’autres conditions que celle de la création-événement du spectacle initiale” (Naugrette 39). Nevertheless, for the majority of performances at popular venues in both France and the United States, the actors perform a play that is originally grounded in a text. For more information on Mnouchkine or “collaborative theater” in general, see David Williams’ (ed.) *Collaborative Theatre: Le Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*.

before the 1700s. During the seventeenth century, for example, theatrical works were judged against classical standards, and cornerstone theoretical texts from Antiquity such as Aristotle's *Poetics* served as the paradigmatic base for dramatic criticism. Writers like Georges de Scudéry, Jean Chapelain, and François d'Aubignac judged both comedy and tragedy on the playwright's ability (or not) to keep in line with unities of time, action, and place.⁴ Moreover, the theatrical work was viewed as a static text and writers either downplayed or belittled scenic considerations such as the actor's role, the play's staging, or the public's reception of a live performance.

“La Querelle du Cid” and the Emergence of a *public*

The critical reception of Pierre de Corneille's *Le Cid* provides an interesting though somewhat ambiguous example of the seventeenth-century disregard for public reception. Despite an overwhelming number of ticket sales and a warm reception by the public at performances, critics of the work constantly attempted to downplay the importance of theatrical spectators and bolster their own reflections on the play.⁵ In her groundbreaking work on the emergence of a literary public during the seventeenth century, Hélène Merlin-Kajman writes that the disdain shared by Scudéry and Chapelain stemmed from their narrow definition of and overt distaste for theater spectators. She writes that “les adversaires du *Cid* cherchent à démontrer que ce succès n'est pas *public*,

⁴ In his work on seventeenth-century tragedy, Christopher Braider defines the three unities as: “The singular French insistence not only on maintaining the tightly focused dramatic necessity of the plot, but on observing a rigid singleness of place and a narrow span of time commensurate with those in which the play is heard and seen” (30).

⁵ I will be using the following edition of Corneille's tragedy throughout this dissertation: *Le Cid (1637-1660) et L'Illusion comique*. Ed. par Georges Forestier et Robert Garapon. Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 2001.

c'est-à-dire qu'il ne concerne pas le *public*, mais qu'il s'agit d'un succès *populaire*, au sens négatif du terme, au sens d'une force informe menaçant toujours le *public*" (169).

Merlin-Kajmin argues that the relationship between performance and dramatic text emerged as one of the most divisive issues among participants in the quarrel over *Le Cid*. To illustrate her point, Merlin-Kajmin examines Scudéry's vituperative letters against Corneille and Chapelain's authoritative response to the dramatist as representative of the newly established Académie Française. Both Scudéry and Chapelain underline seventeenth-century prejudices against live performance:

Avant [la] publication, la pièce [selon Chapelain et Scudéry] n'est rien qu'un amusement, et ses spectateurs ne constituent pas un *public* au sens ontologique du terme. Pour commencer à exister dans le registre des belles-lettres, elle doit trouver écho dans la faculté de juger des honnêtes gens, c'est-à-dire d'un collectif de personnes disposant d'un cabinet et de la faculté rationnelle de juger un texte par sa lecture...L'espace public du théâtre forme un espace favorable à toutes les « tromperies », tant par les effets propres à la scène que par les mouvements désordonnés du peuple : là où l'espace public du théâtre publie en aveuglant, l'impression, elle, publie en éclaircissant les défauts du *Cid*. (174).

According to Chapelain and Scudéry, spectators enjoyed Corneille's tragedy because they were caught up in the play's tricky staging effects and blind to its literary faults—an unfortunate *tromperie* and easily rectified with a silent reading of the dramatic text by a learned member of *le public*.

In his own reading of the *Querelle du Cid*, Christopher Braider argues that “Scudéry's point is that theatrical illusion, the overwhelming affective presence of dramatic action and delivery, disables judgment by actuating sensuous appetite and unconscious identificatory response” (36). According to the newly established order at the Académie Française, people enjoyed *Le Cid* because of the “eventful” nature of

theatrical performance rather than the play's narrative or Corneille's reflections on themes such as unrequited love, obligation, and transgression.

Not all members of the seventeenth-century theatrical world shared this disdain for the play's effect on spectators. Most importantly, the anti-performance construct was at odds with the play's author, Pierre de Corneille, and his concept of theater.⁶ Corneille, in an effort to rectify his reputation after Scudéry's vicious attacks,⁷ underlines a different idea of theater—a more ludic construction of the dramatic arts—and a concern for the theatergoing public that was shared by some playwrights during the classical era. After being accused numerous times of not following Aristotelian rules in the strictest sense, Corneille wrote a letter to the Académie Française arguing that his goal as a dramatist should be to please the audience with a good performance (“représentation”) and only follow the rules “s’il se peut” (“Préface,” *Le Cid et l’Illusion comique* xiv).

What emerges, then, is a sharp divide between some dramatic writers and theoreticians over the meaning of the term “public.” Aside from Corneille and a few of his followers, most dramatic theoreticians bolstered the agency of a reading public that viewed the written document's adherence to theatrical laws as the *sine qua non* condition

⁶ But in general, when seventeenth-century writers analyzed the effect of theater on spectators, they rarely made any laudatory remarks. For example, Blaise Pascal wrote about the dangerous effect of theater on the spectator, especially in comedy: “Tous les grands divertissements sont dangereux pour la vie chrétienne; mais entre tous ceux que le monde a inventés, il n’y en a point qui soit plus à craindre que la comédie. C’est une représentation si naturelle et si délicate des passions, qu’elle les émeut et les fait naître dans notre cœur, et surtout celle de l’amour ; principalement lorsqu’on le représente fort chaste et fort honnête” (304).

⁷ Braider highlights Scudéry's variety of attacks, as well as his motive: “Goaded in part by envy at *Le Cid*'s spectacular popular success, Scudéry launches an avalanche of furious accusations, alleging everything from incompetent plotting and flagrant breaches of plausibility and decorum to sexual depravity, hypocrisy, *lèse-majesté*, and plagiarism” (35).

of successful drama. Jean-Jacques Roubine's analysis of seventeenth-century drama goes beyond battles surrounding *Le Cid* and discusses literary criticism in general during the period. Roubine writes about an almost institutional disregard for spectators during the seventeenth century, attesting that "le seul public 'légitime' aux yeux des 'doctes', ces 'connaisseurs' qui savent les règles ou ces 'honnêtes gens' qui ont des lumières de tout, constituait davantage *un lectorat* que le vrai *public* des théâtres" (41 *emph. added*).⁸

According to seventeenth-century *doctes*, tragedies and comedies were first read by the appropriate readership, and then judged strictly on their poetic construction. At no point do spectators or their reactions to performance enter the *doctes*' critical equation. In theater criticism from this period, the economic or public success of the play pales in importance to its ability to stay within a framework of dramatic rules. Despite the fact that spectators received *Le Cid* with open arms and that the tragedy amassed significant sums of money, a powerful critical circle nonetheless judged Corneille's work only on its merits as a literary text. The *doctes* focused uniquely on poetics and their criticism avoided any discussion of consumption (ticket sales, printed copies of the text) or the popular taste of Parisian audiences.⁹

⁸ In his *Troisième dissertation concernant le poème dramatique* (1663), D'Aubignac slightly widens the narrow construction of public criticism at the time. Nevertheless, the abbé's definition of 'peuple' is a far cry from the same term one century later: "Le peuple est le premier juge de ces ouvrages; ce n'est pas que je les commette au mauvais sentiment des coutaids de boutique et des laquais, j'entends par le public cet amas d'honnêtes gens qui s'en divertissent et qui ne manquent ni de lumières naturelles, ni d'inclination à la vertu, pour être touchés des beaux éclairs de la poésie" (qtd. by Roubine 19).

⁹ William Howarth argues that so many people wanted to see Corneille's *Le Cid* that rich patrons, for lack of important loges in the theater, paid for expensive seats *on the stage* at the Théâtre de Bourgogne. This practice, or "cantonnade," lasted until 1759, when Voltaire, Diderot, and other dramatic authors—realizing the dramatic constraints

Over the next few chapters, I hope to show that eighteenth-century theatrical concerns paralleled and diverged from this important seventeenth-century debate among *doctes*, playwrights, and spectators. Seventeenth-century literary and dramatic criticism is qualitatively and quantitatively incongruent with criticism during the eighteenth century. With a relatively small number of gazettes and newspapers (in comparison with the eighteenth century), seventeenth-century theater critics used prefaces, letters and speeches—critical media that had less social impact because of their reduced circulations. For example, Scudéry and Corneille battled each other mostly in letters to the Académie Française or in prefaces to their own literary works from the 1630s and 1640s.¹⁰ Due to publishing norms, literacy rates and ideals such as the *docte* paradigm, literary criticism from the seventeenth century, notwithstanding a few exceptions, was not the *social* event that it would become a generation later.¹¹

Even so, the evocation of the public during the *querelle du Cid* in both positive and negative terms ushered in ideas that would blossom and even become institutionalized during the eighteenth century. In her analysis of intellectual battles

associated with having dozens of extra people on stage—finally convinced the theater to outlaw the practice (*Beaumarchais and the Theatre* 58).

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of the *Querelle du Cid*'s chronology and social impact, see chapter 5 of Merlin-Kajman's *Public et littérature en France au XVIIe siècle* (pp. 153-190), or Armand Gasté's collection, *La querelle du Cid, pièces et pamphlets publiés d'après les originaux avec une introduction*.

¹¹ Although it focused on the reception of a novel and not a theatrical work, the *querelle* surrounding the publication of Madame de LaFayette's *La princesse de Clèves* (1678) shows a significant link between judgment and *le public* during the seventeenth century. Unlike the use of letters and prefaces in Corneille's *Le Cid*, participants in this battle used early newspapers such as the *Mercure galant* to criticize their rival side (Lafayette's supporters on one side and detractors who thought her character compositions were too indecent and unrealistic on the other side). For more information on the reception of *La princesse de Clèves*, see Merlin-Kajman's chapter 9 (pp. 307-334), Maurice Laugaa's *Lectures de madame de Lafayette*, or Gérard Genette's famous article about the quarrel, "Vraisemblance et motivation."

during the end of the seventeenth century, *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle*, Joan DeJean argues that critical discourse surrounding Corneille's *Le Cid* evoked *le public* in an unprecedented manner. DeJean writes that,

The participants in the quarrel of *Le Cid* may have been the first to use on occasion the term *querelle* to refer to the controversy in which they were engaged, thereby inventing the usage later by literary history...The Quarrel that was played out came closest to reaching a more general audience. It was during this dispute that the phrase *the public* appears to have acquired for the first time its modern meaning of “an audience. (7)

DeJean's analysis of *Le Cid* moves forward the chronological discussion of the public, and what is more, her study is an erudite refusal of the traditional notion that the public remained an abstract, enigmatic force until the late eighteenth century.¹²

My study will in part follow this notion of an emerging public, and especially one of theatergoers, into the pre-Revolutionary years in order to see how it gained visibility in theatrical discourse.¹³ But I also hope to make clear the important difference between after-the-fact evocations of the public—uses of the term after the work's publication or performance—during the seventeenth century, and *à priori* considerations of the public— notions of their needs during the creative process—just one century later. During the eighteenth century, playwrights integrated the desires of spectators into their dramaturgy and demonstrated an acute attention to contemporary fads, social changes, and political concerns.

¹² In his oft-quoted *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Jürgen Habermas makes a clear distinction between Stuart England (1603-1714) and the corresponding period in France, arguing that the former allowed for an early adoption of the public sphere that the latter could only muster during the middle-to-late years of the eighteenth century.

¹³ By “theatrical discourse,” I mean any writing that focuses on theater, including plays, prefaces, reviews, pamphlets, and letters.

Eighteenth-Century Theaters: A Period of Proliferation

During the eighteenth century, theater attendance consistently increased as France moved toward the Revolution.¹⁴ The theater historian William Howarth attests that in 1700, “Paris theatres provided between them accommodation for some 4,000 spectators; around 1750, this figure is thought to have increased to 6,000 or more; and on the eve of the Revolution, to 12,000 or 13,000” (58). Over the course of the eighteenth century, venues such as the Comédie-Française brought in spectators from multiple economic levels in French society, which gave theater a relatively heterogeneous social character when compared to other cultural outlets such as the Royal ballet or the Opera.¹⁵ Before the French Revolution, theater was an important socializing event, and possibly even “le seul lieu où la Nation pourra prendre conscience d’elle-même” (Roubine 66).

In his exceptional work on theater audiences during the long eighteenth-century,¹⁶ Jeffrey Ravel illuminates a world of boisterous performance on and off the stage—including cabals, fights, thefts, and murders.¹⁷ Ravel specifically links the heightened

¹⁴ So did the number of theaters. In 1700, only the Comédie-Française and the Opéra were in operation. By the Revolution, Paris had three main stages in the CF, Opéra, and Comédie-Italienne, as well as smaller theaters like the Odéon, St. Laurent, St. Germain, and more. For more information on the development of theaters during the eighteenth century, see Pruner’s *La fabrique du théâtre*, chapter 2.

¹⁵ Although not every social order could afford a *parterre* ticket, prices remained relatively low so that servants, valets, and students could afford to see plays. For more information on ticket prices and the socioeconomic makeup of audiences, see John Lough’s paramount study, *Paris Theatre Audiences in the Seventeenth & Eighteenth Centuries*, ch. 1.

¹⁶ Ravel uses the term “long eighteenth century” to focus on theater audiences from the establishment of the Comédie-Française in 1680 until the deregulation of theaters and abolishment of the censorship in 1789.

¹⁷ Cabals were raucous groups of partisans that were usually paid by an interested party to cause a scandal. Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* defined them as “concert[s] ou conspiration[s] de plusieurs personnes, qui par des menées secrètes & illicites, travaillent sourdement à quelque chose d’injuste, comme à perdre un innocent, à sauver

energy of theatergoers to performance, and he argues that “playwrights require bodies, voices, movement, and gestures to animate their ideas, and eighteenth-century audiences responded to performance in a vivid, often visceral fashion” (6).

Ravel’s inquiry into the behavior of eighteenth-century spectators will forever stand as an important breakthrough in the history of theater performance. In his work, Ravel admirably describes the emerging visibility of theatergoers throughout this period. Building on Ravel but departing from him as well, I will consider how “visceral” reactions by spectators originated in writing that *preconditioned* those reactions—textual sources in circulation before the audio-visual event—as well as in the live performances that Ravel and witnesses during the eighteenth century describe. This triangular relationship among pre-performance strategies, theatrical performance, and dramatic criticism converge in what I call a “theatrical event.” When studied as an ensemble of interdependent elements, the “event” shows us how audiences gained a level of visibility and influence in pre-Revolutionary France that is incomparable to the relatively minor importance granted to the spectators that fill the seats of theaters at present.

Eighteenth-century theatrical production differed from today’s collaborative *artistic* effort among writers, directors, actors, and an audience: during the eighteenth century, other factors came into play such as the royal censure, aristocratic patronage, and politics. Because of its social importance during the middle of the eighteenth century, theater sought to *convince*, *educate*, and *persuade* the spectator about a variety of

un coupable, à décréditer une bonne marchandise, un bon ouvrage, à ruiner quelque établissement utile, ou à faire éclore quelque projet préjudiciable à l’état ou à la société (article: Cabale, <http://diderot.alembert.free.fr/>).

psychological, social, and political matters.¹⁸ Playwrights and political officials used theater as a means to communicate vital issues both internal and external to the Republic of Letters, and eighteenth-century dramatists staged such disparate concerns as the Salic law for royal ascendancy¹⁹ and contemporary reflections on what it means to be an attentive father or an obedient child.²⁰

Most importantly, and in greatest contrast to today's theater, eighteenth-century drama sought to teach a broad segment of society about issues such as political history, proper sexual roles, and ethics. I do not mean to belittle the importance of dramatic production at present, nor do I believe that theater has shied away from confronting vital social issues such as stem-cell research,²¹ the AIDS epidemic,²² or political injustices.²³ In fact, some theaters, such as the *Théâtre des ateliers* in Lyon, France have made social awareness through the dramatic arts their chief enterprise.

Rather than address the declining importance of theater in our everyday lives owing to the advent of cable TV, Netflix, Youtube, and other audio-visual outlets; I

¹⁸ Eighteenth-century theater inherited an important social status from Ancient Rome, where “le théâtre et les jeux constituent un organe idéologique puissant du pouvoir impérial, qui en fournissant au peuple, aux plus forts moments d’absolutisme, du pain et des jeux (*panem et circenses*), achète sa soumission par le divertissement” (Naugrette 20).

¹⁹ Charles Collé’s *Le parti de chasse d’Henri IV* (1774).

²⁰ Denis Diderot’s *Le père de famille* (1762).

²¹ Catherine Hargreaves staged the debate over stem cells in *Un grand nombre* (Théâtre des ateliers, November 2008, Lyon, France), a recent adaptation of Carol Churchill’s English play, *A Number*.

²² For example, the *AIDS Theater Project*, launched in 1987 by Chris Freedman aims to inform urban children from Los Angeles and New York about the AIDS epidemic through the dramatic arts.

²³ Although the list of “politically charged” plays is long, Sophia Linden’s tragedy, *I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given to Me by a Young Lady From Rwanda*, which was staged as recently as 2007 in San Diego, California, serves as an obvious example of this genre.

want to underline the historical and quantitative difference between theater as a medium during the eighteenth century and the role of drama today.²⁴ In this study of the texts, performances, and critical receptions of certain plays during the second half of the eighteenth century, I hope to locate specific forms of dramaturgy, spectatorship, and criticism inspired by changes in cultural practices and inherent to a tumultuous, pre-Revolutionary epoch.

Theatrical and Non-theatrical Considerations from the Eighteenth Century

First, it is essential to note the difference between attending a performance during the eighteenth century and our contemporary notion of a night at the theater. In a recent monograph on political and literary representations during the Enlightenment, Paul Friedland writes that “the passive and silent individual, seated in the darkness, obsessed with the action on the lighted stage, did not exist in the middle of the eighteenth century” (23), and Ravel reminds us that, “...eighteenth-century parterre practices resulted in a theatergoing experience vastly different from the quietly contemplative aesthetic event with which we are familiar today” (54).

In short, theater was a participatory event during the eighteenth century. Audiences responded vigorously to performances, and the dramatic arts played a significant role as a persuasive tool inside the Republic of Letters and as a cultural practice among Parisians from many different walks of life. By understanding the social characteristics of eighteenth-century theatergoing, we may best be able to locate how the

²⁴ Pruner shows that theater attendance has steadily declined during the twentieth century to the point that only 7% of the French public saw a theater performance of any kind in 1987 (239). Although the number may not have been that much higher during the eighteenth century (although it probably was), the social impact of theater, or what Pruner calls *théâtromanie*, reached its peak during the eighteenth century.

spectator played a role not only in the performance, but also in the creative dramaturgical process as well.

Parterres were locations of boisterous energy that could “make or break” a performance (sometimes literally) throughout the eighteenth century.²⁵ As we shall see with a few examples, writers of the time recognized the critical power of the parterre and incorporated its tastes into their dramaturgy. But these authors also reached out to more privileged members of the audience in the *loges*—no doubt in order to secure personal gains and make references to previously circulated literary works inside the Republic of Letters.²⁶

Through textual preconditioning *and* theatrical performance, authors such as Charles Palissot (1730-1814) and François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire) (1694-1778) targeted members of the audience for the dissemination of their own theatrical theories, philosophical viewpoints, and social opinions. This hostile philo-literary atmosphere inspired a dramaturgy, which, as we shall see, diverged from contemporary norms of playwriting: the persuasion of the spectator by the writer emerges as the dominant goal of the dramatic text. Rather than strictly following classical predecessors with traditional situations and characters, playwrights incorporated contemporary eighteenth-century

²⁵ For examples of how dangerous theater attendance could become during this period, see chapter 4 of this dissertation, and specifically the eyewitness testimonies of spectators at the premieres of Beaumarchais’ *Le Mariage de Figaro* and Marie-Joseph Cheniér’s *Charles IX*.

²⁶ The *philosophe* Jean-François Marmontel’s article “Farce” in the *Encyclopédie* provides a clear image of how *philosophes* viewed eighteenth-century society as stratified. He writes that the “public comprend trois classes: le bas-peuple, dont le goût et l’esprit ne sont pas cultivés et n’ont pas besoin de l’être ; ce monde honnête et poli qui joint à la décence des mœurs, une intelligence épurée et un sentiment délicat des bonnes choses ; l’état mitoyen, plus étendu qu’on ne pense, qui tâche de s’approcher par vanité de la classes des honnêtes gens, mais qui est entraîné vers le bas-peuple par une pente naturelle” (qtd. by Saint Victor 1058).

cultural practices and personalities into their dramaturgy in an effort to render spectators intellectually comfortable with the events on the stage and to close the distance between everyday life and theater.

The energized atmosphere at the Comédie-Française parallels a general feeling of social turmoil during the second half of the eighteenth century. Previously accepted modes in criticism and reception changed to incorporate a more raucous relationship between spectator and stage, critic and play, and even subject and sovereign. By 1751, the famed statesman and friend of Voltaire, René Louis d'Argenson, prophetically pointed out that, “tous les ordres sont mécontents. Les matières étant partout combustibles, une émeute peut faire passer à la révolte, et la révolte à une totale révolution” (in Descotes, *Histoire de la critique*, 135).

However, to connect raucous theater attendance with Revolution is too simple a view of French society's complexity at the time. In order to make a few documented, tangible observations about cultural changes during this period, I will stay inside the realm of theater and theater criticism. But what caused powerful reactions to performance by spectators during the Enlightenment? Or more generally, what caused a noticeable “change” in the “atmosphere” surrounding theater at the mid-century point (Descotes 135)?

One reason for this qualitative change in audience reception depends on a blend of texts and performance, i.e., between previously written works (a process of *preconditioning* the audience) and specific phenomena inherent to the audio-visual event of theater. Through the lens of on-stage literary debates during the middle of the eighteenth-century, we will perceive how the norms of dramaturgical construction and

performance changed to include notions such as contemporary polemics, public opinion, and new forms of cultural production.

Over the next few chapters, I will show a complex relationship between written materials such as philosophical treatises, prefaces, introductions, and (most importantly) polemical pamphlets on the one hand; and performative phenomena such as pantomime, dramatic narrative, and staging techniques on the other. The cross-pollination of these two discursive modes developed a theatrical spectator who differed from his seventeenth-century predecessor as well as from his equivalent during the nineteenth century and later. With close readings of the texts, the criticisms and the performances of a few pre-Revolutionary plays, I hope to show how playwrights conditioned theater audiences with polemical pamphlets and other written materials.

In addition, I hope to illuminate the fact that some plays, which are often deemed “petty” examples of “théâtre de circonstance,” caused important changes in both theater and its criticism. *Les Philosophes* by Charles Palissot and Voltaire’s *L’Ecossoise* were produced within a polemical atmosphere of nasty literary quarrel. These two plays put contemporary writers, philosophers, and critics on the stage in order to “prove” the inadequacy of the rival cohort: *philosophes* in Palissot’s case, anti-*philosophes* in Voltaire’s. Throughout this study, it will be important to keep in mind the battles between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* that influenced literary and critical production during the late 1750s and early 1760s in France. During this period, writers such as Claude-Adrien Helvétius, Denis Diderot, Voltaire Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Jean Rond D’Alembert published various works that questioned established mathematical, scientific, religious, and aesthetic principles. These publications, from biological treatises to

reflections on poetry, caused a backlash among more traditional or conservative writers from various backgrounds. Besides provoking harsh criticism from established religious orders such as the Jesuits or the Papacy, *philosophes* also drew ire from writers such as LeFranc de Pompignon, Elie-Catherine Fréron, and Charles Palissot—writers who lacked ardent religious opinions, but nonetheless questioned the *philosophes*' claims to novelty, truth, and Enlightenment. Palissot's *Les Philosophes* and Voltaire's *L'Ecossoise*, more than any other dramatic works created during the eighteenth-century, sought to persuade the spectator to adopt a literary and social attitude in concert with the play's author and further his respective cause of either promoting an Enlightenment project of Encyclopedic reason or asserting opposition to that plan.²⁷

The plays that I analyze in the first few chapters of this dissertation cannot be found in the current repertoire of the Comédie-Française, the Théâtre d'Odéon, or the various prestigious regional theaters around France, such as the TNP-Villeurbanne or the National Theater of Strasbourg. Nevertheless, they were “theatrical events” in Parisian society during the eighteenth century, and more importantly, they exuded a potent, but ephemeral energy that moved among the stage, spectator, and society. In short, *Les*

²⁷ My study hopes to show the theatrical arm of what Darrin McMahon has identified as a powerful cultural war in his recent monograph, *Enemies of Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity*. In his work, McMahon points out that while it is difficult to study these two opposing groups as actual opposing organizations, their polarization emerges as a rhetorical concept. Writers simply wrote either in support of *philosophes* or against them. For more information, consult the introduction to McMahon's work.

Philosophes and *L'Ecossaise* demonstrated a power to affect and persuade, and emerge as dynamic examples of a true “littérature engagée.”²⁸

In order to further their respective causes, Palissot and Voltaire treated spectators as active agents in the process of creating good theater. This recognition parallels a more general rise in the value of the spectator, and his’ or her’s emergence as a critical force during the eighteenth century. In her recent monograph on spectatorship during the Enlightenment, Suzanne Pucci highlights the importance of spectators in criticism, and attests that “the Spectator is integral to a crucial shift: normative and prescriptive criteria used to judge, for instance, the value of an art work give way to less formal and more empirical criteria based on individual Spectator experience” (14).

Pucci’s study shows how more “objective” criteria for judgment during the seventeenth century (unities, adherence to Aristotle) ceded to a more subjective experience one century later for the spectator-critic. Whereas writers like Scudéry and Chapelain linked judgement to paradigms and norms, eighteenth-century critics began to focus on the literary work’s effect on the reader-spectator. What is more, Pucci’s capitalization of the word Spectator is an important marker of the newfound agency with which theatergoers and salon members operated during this precise period.

Pucci explains the phenomenon of spectatorship chronologically and brings the discussion closer to the middle of the eighteenth century, arguing that the idea of the “Spectator” eclipsed during the reign of Louis XIV, when the court itself metonymized critical power in the Republic of Letters (5). By increasing both censorship and

²⁸ It is no surprise that Jean-Paul Sartre, writing shortly after the second World War, bolstered the power of the *écrivain engagé* and found his or her origins in the eighteenth century, and more precisely, in Voltaire (cited in Goulemot, *Adieu les philosophes* 76).

patronage, the Sun King surrounded himself with literary cronies, reduced the power of less royally established critics, and thus, sought to control every aspect of cultural production, from the genesis of the work to its performance and review. During this time, any idea of a judging “public” hid behind a powerful cultural and political monarchy.

Providing the other bookend to her study, Pucci points out that during the Revolutionary period, the spectator disappeared into the less distinct notions of mass culture. The heterogeneous nature of spectators morphed into a uniform bloc: *le peuple*, and individual differences among audience members disappeared. Thus, “somewhere between these periods the Spectator garnered real and symbolic interest as an intermediary figure that would enjoy new prominence” (5). But how and why did representations of the spectator increase at that precise moment in history?

In an attempt to locate the rise of the spectator’s influence on cultural production and criticism, we could follow the debate into such disparate media as Denis Diderot’s *Salons* on painting, or epistolary novels by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Françoise de Graffigny. However, there is no place where the spectator is more natural, necessary, and visible than in the theater: thus, “it is no surprise in an age where the Spectator gained new ascendancy in these different arenas that theatre should acquire a special status” (Pucci 134). Even though the majority of close readings in the following chapters will concentrate on dramatic works from the middle of the eighteenth-century, I will rely on other writings such as criticisms, prefaces, and pamphlets to most accurately describe a unique atmosphere inside the Republic of Letters at this time.

The spectator’s rise in importance is inextricably linked to an increased awareness by dramatic writers and critics to theater audiences’ tastes and expectations. In his work

on reading and interpretation, Hans Robert Jauss develops what he calls the reader's "horizon of expectations," and writes that "one cannot understand any work of art without bringing to it a past" (19). In the following few chapters, I will study the "pasts" of theatergoers to reveal how theater audiences responded to different performances because of the events on stage and because of their intellectual backgrounds—personal histories that included previous readings and theater performances, but also political, economic, religious, and social concerns.

In order to understand how playwrights attempted to effect spectators, I will broaden the scope of my discussion at times to indicate historical, political, and social factors that might have been in the "ideological toolboxes" of theater spectators at various times during the eighteenth century. Jauss, as well as other scholars who take into account the "pasts" of readers and spectators, will undoubtedly nuance and render more complete the portions of this study that focus on reception. However, Jauss' corpus consists primarily of novels and other purely "textual" works by Rabelais, Goethe, Balzac and other writers, while my study focuses on theater, which is not a mere branch of literature. Thus the performative vein of this study precludes a theoretical "application" of reception theory in its strictest sense.

In her work on spectatorship in theater, Florence Naugrette posits a logical way to make Jauss' construct relevant in the dramatic arts. Naugrette provides a "theatrical" definition of the "horizon of expectations:" "Il s'agit du jeu avec ses connaissances et ses attentes préalables, dont l'étendue constitue ce que le critique Jauss a appelé son « horizon d'attente ». Selon lui, la manière dont l'horizon d'attente du public est traité conditionne la qualité de l'œuvre" (140). Jauss' "horizon," as well as the discussions of

his theory in the realm of drama by Naugrette, Anne Ubersfeld, and Patrice Pavis will aid in delineating the various ways the public is incorporated into dramatic texts and criticisms: these analyses will provide a logical way to examine how dramatic authors fashioned “theatrical events” with an intense focus on their audiences’ reactions.

The Case: Palissot, Voltaire, and Fréron—Staging Philosophical Debate

During the middle of the eighteenth century, and notably after the first volumes of the *Encyclopédie* were published in 1750, the debate between *philosophes* and members of a powerful Counter-Enlightenment movement reached its zenith. As we shall see in the pages that follow, events such as the *Cacouacs* and the Pompignon affairs spawned a litany of polemical pamphlets, and epistemological or literary debates quickly degraded into nasty personal attacks.²⁹ As the war continued between the two sides, partisans used any media at their disposal, voicing their opinions in prefaces, letters, novels, short stories, and most importantly, illegally-printed (or at least, covertly-allowed) pamphlets. In his monograph, *La Fureur de nuire*, Olivier Ferret follows these polemical *échanges pamphlétaires* between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* from 1750 to 1770. In a study that attempts to establish a triangular relationship among texts, theater, and society, Ferret’s erudite analysis of the literary landscape in France during this period will prove an invaluable resource.

At the center of this period, 1760, the debate between *philosophe* and anti-*philosophe* partisans reached its climax. Commenting on the atmosphere of the *belles*

²⁹ The Pompignan affair refers to LeFranc de Pompignan’s vituperative induction speech at the Académie Française, in which the anti-*philosophe* criticizes Voltaire, Diderot, and D’Alembert; and the *Cacouacs* affair saw a litany of anti-*philosophe* pamphlets published against Voltaire and Diderot. I provide a detailed analysis of these important quarrels between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* in chapter one of this dissertation.

lettres at this time, Diderot's colleague, Jean Rond D'Alembert, summarized 1760 as a year which saw Palissot's *Philosophes*, Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise*, and the Pompignan affair—or in short, a literary landscape marked by nothing but *querelles*.³⁰ During this tumultuous period, polemics dominated the Parisian *salons* and involved the most well-known personalities of the time, including Diderot, Voltaire, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau—the latter of whom officially cut ties with his *philosophe* friends just two years earlier, in a letter condemning their call to legalize theater in Geneva.³¹

But in addition to these famous *lumières*, lesser-known writers such as Elie-Catherine Fréron and Charles Palissot emerged as critical participants in an intellectual battle. Although they may at first seem ancillary to a study on the ambiguous relationships between texts and performances, the pamphlet wars during the middle of the eighteenth century altered traditional motives for theater production and served as intermediary objects between dramatic scripts and audio-visual performances.

In this study, I hope to show the short-term and long-lasting significance of on-stage battles during the summer of 1760. For example, in 1765, five years after the staging of *Les Philosophes* and *L'Ecossaise*, Diderot describes the public reception of Pierre Buirette De Belloy's tragedy, *Le Siège de Calais*:

Le succès de la tragédie du *Siège de Calais* est un de ces phénomènes imprévus et singuliers qu'il serait, je crois, impossible de voir ailleurs qu'à Paris. Cette pièce a fait réellement un événement dans l'État, et depuis *Ramponneau* et la comédie *des Philosophes*, je n'ai rien vu dont le public se soit occupé avec autant de chaleur et d'enthousiasme. Ceux qui ont osé, je ne dis pas la critiquer, mais en Parler froidement et sans admiration, ont

³⁰ For D'Alembert's full quotation on the cultural atmosphere in 1760, see Ferret's *La Fureur de nuire*, p. 81.

³¹ This occurred with Rousseau's "Lettre sur les spectacles" in which the famous *genèvois* attacked *philosophes* for their disparaging remarks against ministers in Geneva and for their insistence that the city lift its ban on theater.

été regardés comme mauvais citoyens, ou, ce qui pis est, comme philosophes. (*Correspondance littéraire*, VI, 243)

Neither Palissot's nor Voltaire's comedy found its way to the stage of the Comédie-Française during the early spring of 1765. Nevertheless, Palissot's *Les Philosophes* serves as Diderot's example *par excellence* of a "theatrical event." The *philosophe* uses the terms "chaleur" and "enthousiasme" to describe the public's *reception* of De Belloy's play rather than the tragedy's dramaturgical construction or poetic value.

Melchior Grimm's review, paralleling Diderot's, also reflects a change in the locus of criticism from the stage to the public:

Un orage imprévu éclate presque aussitôt qu'il se forme : une catastrophe subite porte la combustion dans le parterre, dans les loges, dans la salle entière ; et, après avoir fait lever brusquement *le Siège de Calais*, ce feu se répand en dehors de proche en proche avec la même rapidité, se glisse dans tous les cercles, gagne tous les soupers, et communique à tous les esprits une chaleur qui produit un incendie universel : tel, au dire des poètes auvergnats et limousins, le nocher, trompé par un calme profond, se trouve assailli par la tempête sans même en avoir soupçonné les approches. (*Correspondance littéraire*, IV, 256)

In De Belloy's case, critics no longer hark back to the Aristotelian paradigm for theater criticism. Rather than emphasizing the lyric qualities (or lack thereof) of De Belloy's poetics or whether or not the playwright adheres to the three unities, Grimm, like Diderot, underlines the public's avid reception of the tragedy. With evocations of "tempêtes" and "incendies," Grimm's rhetoric seems more in line with a contemporary description of an earthquake in Lisbon or a fire in Le Havre, than with any piece of literary criticism.

In his analysis of *Le Siège de Calais*, Grimm uses a vocabulary that is similar to eyewitness accounts of the opening night of Palissot's *Les Philosophes*. For example, the *avocat* Barbier notes in his *Journal*:

Comme cette pièce [*Les Philosophes*] était connue et qu'elle avait fait du bruit avant d'être représentée, l'empressement et le concours du public ont été jusqu'à l'extrême le jour de la première représentation. On n'a point vu un pareil tumulte : j'y ai assisté aux premières places. Elle a été applaudie et critiquée tout à la fois. (qtd. by Masseau, 143)

Later in this dissertation, I will analyze in detail Barbier's account and other eyewitness testimonies of the premiere of Palissot's play. But for the moment, we can draw out two important inferences from Barbier's review. First, the audience was prepared to act in a certain way before the curtain was raised on opening night ("avant d'être représentée"). Palissot's audience was preconditioned through the use of pamphlets, letters, and other texts. Secondly, the critic uses a terminology of *tumulte* and *bruit* to describe spectator behavior at the debut. Paralleling Grimm's focus on audience reaction, Barbier shifts his critical lens to show the response of the public instead of the action on the stage.

De Belloy's tragedy is dramaturgically different from either Palissot's Molière-inspired *Les Philosophes* or Voltaire's *drame*-like *L'Ecossaise*. It would be impossible to show any natural affinity between the genre and the storyline among these three plays. But criticisms of all three plays radiate a polemical energy that surpasses the traditional experience of theater attendance. Each play bolsters the spectator's participation in the dramatic construction of the work as well as in journalistic-like critical responses. The spectator, as we shall see, finds her voice inside of the theatrical space as well as in critical pieces about the dramatic works. Lastly, all three cases caused an irrefutable "theatrical event"—a constellatory phenomenon that incorporates visceral reactions by audience members to performance, an increased dependence on extra-theatrical texts, and an often militant, polemical discourse on the stage and in the subsequent criticism.

Over the next few chapters, we will examine the genesis and the *suite* of the theatrical staging of philosophical debates during the summer of 1760. This analysis will uncover the reasons behind a marked illumination of the dramatic spectator. In order to persuade more easily members of French society into agreeing with *philosophe* or Counter-Enlightenment ideals, writers from both camps used every rhetorical tool or media at their disposal in order to garner more critical support. This proliferating battle to denounce and persuade reached its social pinnacle with Palissot's *Les Philosophes* and Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise*.

This study will not reveal the complex nature of French society on the eve of the Revolution, nor will it provide an account for aesthetic changes in one specific version of theater during the eighteenth century. We probably will not find another cultural or ideological reason behind the French Revolution nor attest that Palissot and Voltaire forever altered comedy as a genre. This study treats aesthetics and society as they were examined during the Enlightenment—inseparable and irrefutably important. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the following texts—because we will analyze comedies, *dramas*, and tragedies, as well as pamphlets, critical works, and philosophical dialogues—this study can serve as a window into the complexity of the Republic of Letters.

Although the plays that make the core of this study have long been forgotten by the troupes of most contemporary playhouses, they were important enough to shock audiences at Comédie-Française, encourage critics to denounce theater as a medium, and convince Voltaire, France's most prolific living dramatist, to postpone more "serious"

works in order to focus on literary polemics.³² The polemical theater of 1760 may best reveal answers to important questions such as: *a)* Who determined good theater during the eighteenth century—and with what criteria? *b)* How did critics negotiate between textual and performative aspects of theater? And, *c)* How did members of the Republic of Letters consider the rising power of the spectator?

In chapters one and two, I zoom in on the “theatrical event” and provide close readings of two comedies: Palissot’s *Les Philosophes* and Voltaire’s *L’Ecosaise*. In addition to describing the action on stage, I underline how both dramatists depended on “ancillary” texts for the genesis of the theatrical works, as well as how and why strategists published pamphlets during each play’s run at the Comédie-Française.

For example, we examine Voltaire’s pamphlet, *À Messieurs les parisiens*—a satirical work that was published the night before the first performance of *L’Ecosaise* in an obvious attempt to precondition spectators and effect the way they received the audio-visual event. By looking at one comedy from each “team,” we can discern how both *philosophes* and members of the Counter-Enlightenment used similar and different methods to convince and cajole theatergoers at the Comédie-Française. As France’s critical circle opened to include less prominent members of society, writers such as Voltaire worried about the effects of this phenomenon on literary creation and criticism.

In chapter two, I take a look at how Voltaire’s ambivalence towards public judgment echoed a larger *philosophe* inconsistency vis-à-vis literary criticism. For example, in his speech about how one should judge a successful piece of theater, D’Alembert harks back to the ancient disparity between performance and text:

³² For instance, Voltaire’s decision to postpone the debut of his tragedy *Tancrède* in order to work on and stage *L’Ecosaise*.

Aussi ses ouvrages, applaudis d'abord par le parterre, et lus ensuite avec plaisir dans le silence du cabinet, ont trouvé grâce devant ces deux tribunaux également redoutables, l'un parce qu'il est tumultueux, l'autre parce qu'il est tranquille ; succès d'autant plus flatteur pour un écrivain dramatique, que le tribunal tranquille semble affecté d'être plus sévère à proportion que le tribunal tumultueux a marqué plus d'enthousiasme ; l'inexorable lecteur se refuse le plus qu'il peut aux éloges que le spectateur a voulu lui prescrire, et se sent toujours bénévolement disposé à casser en dernier ressort les arrêts favorables trop légèrement rendus en première instance. (*Éloges lus dans les séances publiques de l'Académie française*, 384)

On the one hand, the public is the deciding factor, a status best illustrated by the heightened level of importance given by D'Alembert to its most visible agent: the parterre. On the other hand, the parterre (and the public's opinion in general) is perhaps too quick to judge, influenced by ephemeral fads and trends, and possibly not even educated enough to form an accurate opinion on aesthetics. This two-sided image of the public will invite us to consider questions such as, "Is it better to let the reading, erudite public judge the aesthetic work?"

D'Alembert's reflections on the public echo Scudéry and Chapelain's remarks from one century earlier. As we delve into a few theatrical examples from the middle of the eighteenth century, we will keep in clear focus the delicate tension between an emerging desire to give the spectator the agency necessary to judge cultural materials, and a competing drive to close the circle only to those inside a literary group, or, to those who pledge their allegiance to either the *philosophes* or their rivals.

Chapter three examines the energetic atmosphere that characterized the receptions of *Les Philosophes* and *L'Ecossoise* during the summer of 1760. Here, we look in depth at theater criticism, and more specifically, at a raucous language of denunciation in order to draw out a few conclusions as to why critics wrote about these two works with such

urgency. With literary battles at an all time high, critics of both pieces use exaggerated rhetoric to convert the reader to “the right camp.” Instead of describing actual theater reception, critics fictionalized public responses and denounced pre-conditioning texts in order either to bolster the “reception” of their side’s play or to describe the other cohort’s theatrical work as a failure.

In criticisms of both plays, writers move past the mere reporting of facts, peppering their reviews with calls for mobilization against the enemy, evidence of audience-stage interaction, and comments on the effect of pamphlets and other “extra-theatrical” materials on performance. Critics such as Elie-Catherine Fréron stage theatrical performance inside of their literary criticisms and create a sort of extra-scenic dramaturgy—a critical composition of bodies, voices, and movements that combines both factual and fictional elements. In *Les Philosophes* and *L’Ecossoise*, textual elements intrude on theatrical performance to produce new relationships between written document and audio-visual representation.

After the tumultuous summer of 1760, members of a literary elite grew tired of the nasty battle between *philosophes* and anti-*lumières*. With parodies of both plays at every major theater and *foire*, Paris was effectively suffocated by the quarrel between *philosophes* and Counter-Enlightenment writers. A few months after the initial performances of Palissot’s and Voltaire’s comedies at the Comédie-Française, voices on both sides of the fence began to call for a ceasefire. Europe’s main stage had been “tainted” by extra-scenic problems and subjected to the tastes of polemical pamphleteers—it was time for the *overt* theatrical battle to retreat to the alcoves and for more traditional tragedies and comedies to fill the playbill at the Comédie-Française.

But playwrights never forgot the “events” from the summer of 1760. In chapter four of this dissertation, I investigate how later dramatists sought to (re)create visceral public reception using elements from the Palissot/Voltaire affair, specifically, with pre-conditioning tactics such as pamphleteering and with more “performative” strategies like the staging of living people from French society. Here, we follow the debate into such disparate genres as historical tragedy and *comédie plaisante* in order to prove that Voltaire’s and Palissot’s lesser-known theatrical works influenced a more canonical dramatic corpus that includes Pierre Caron de Beaumarchais’s *Le Mariage de Figaro* and Marie-Joseph Chénier’s *Charles IX ou l’école des rois*.

The Palissot/Voltaire affair, although only on stage for a short time, helped change the theatrical atmosphere in Paris and urge dramatists from that point on to *persuade* and *convince* theater spectators. This historical event paralleled theoretical movements inside the Republic of Letters. Diderot is often credited with closing the distance between the spectator and the stage by urging playwrights to choose a subject that resonates easily with his audience, create a “fourth wall” between the parterre and the stage, and demand that actors adopt a more “natural” language in their roles.³³ However, as we shall see, this exact theoretical concern paralleled the *actions* of writers during the summer of 1760: Diderot’s dramatic construct was further disseminated by

³³ Diderot reflected at length on more “practical” aspects of acting and theater, beginning in 1757 with his *Entretiens sur le fils naturel* and culminating with his *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, which he wrote during the late 1760s and early 1770s. One key element in Diderot’s “poetics” of acting is the *philosophe*’s insistence that actors adopt a more “everyday” language rather than assert a declamatory style inherited from Renaissance rhetoricians. For example, he lauds the actress Dumesnil because of her nonchalant speech and ability to “monter sur les planches sans savoir ce qu’elle dira” (Diderot, *Paradoxe* 40). For more information on Diderot’s ideas on acting, see Derek Connan’s *Innovation and Renewal: A Study of the Theatrical Works of Diderot*.

facts like Voltaire's temporary attachment to the *drame* and Palissot's desire to convince spectators of the "crimes" committed by *philosophes*.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and certainly as performance asserted itself as equally important as the dramatic text, the audience emerged as vital to the dramaturgical process. Very few writers could argue that the dramatic genre exists without either actual or imagined spectators in the theater's seats. In her erudite, three-part semiotic analysis of the performing arts, Anne Ubersfeld describes the paramount importance of the theatrical spectator:

Il y a dans ce *procès* qu'est la représentation théâtrale, dans cet événement à multiples personnages, un personnage-clé, quoiqu'il n'apparaisse pas sur scène et semble ne rien produire : c'est le spectateur. Il est le destinataire du discours, le récepteur dans le procès de communication, le roi de la fête ; mais il est aussi le sujet d'un *faire*, l'artisan d'une pratique qui s'articule continuellement avec les pratiques scéniques. (*Lire le théâtre*, II 253)

For Ubersfeld, the audience is not a mere witness to the result of the dramaturgical process: authors, actors, stage directors, and critics integrate the public into every step of theater—from creation, to rehearsal, to performance, to criticism. Nowhere does this modern pattern of dramatic construction emerge more clearly than in the following dramatic works from the eighteenth century. Instead of adhering to strict rules of dramatic poetics or even to the status quo of literary acceptability, Palissot's *Les Philosophes* and Voltaire's *L'Ecossoise* went right to the heart of drama's new *docte*—the paying customer.

Because of the interdependent, multi-modal, and communicative nature of theater, it is perhaps the most efficient way to portray everyday experiences such as family discussions, interactions at the workplace, and social gatherings. Alan Read reminds us

that “theatre begins from a point of coalescence, not a polarity”—theater is inherently inclusive and not exclusive—and theater, like everyday life, is comprised of sounds, movements, emotions, and events (11).

As French society began to examine its political, literary, and social underpinnings—as France started to take “conscience d’elle-même”—it most often did so with the efficiency and power of theater and theatrical discourse. Theater’s natural affinity for dialogue, bodies, and movement confronted a gradual rise in importance of the written text that culminated during the eighteenth century.³⁴ Reading texts and attending theater performances were two of the most important pastimes of the very same Parisians who either incited groups to storm the Bastille in 1789 or took the prison apart themselves. In order to achieve even a small glimpse of the cultural world of pre-Revolutionary France, what better location is there to study than the complex spaces between texts and performance?

³⁴ Roger Chartier studies the rise of literacy and textual production in a number of his works: for more information on the increasing importance of written materials during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see *Lectures et lecteurs dans la France d’Ancien Régime* and *Les Origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française* (see *Works Cited* for complete bibliographic information).

CHAPTER ONE: CHARLES PALISSOT'S *LES PHILOSOPHES*

“Bruit” and “Tumulte”: The Premiere of Palissot’s *Les Philosophes*

Describing the premiere of *Les Philosophes* by Charles Palissot, the well-known polemicist and literary critic Elie-Catherine Fréron wrote: “Depuis la fondation du théâtre on n’a peut-être point vu...un concours du monde aussi prodigieux,” and that, “Les ouvrages des Corneilles, des Racines, des Molières, des Crébillons et des Voltaire n’ont jamais fait autant de bruit, attiré autant de spectateurs, armé autant de cabales (*AL*, III, 214).

Echoing Fréron, Pierre-Louis d’Aquin argued that Palissot’s play had “excité[e] une curiosité et une rumeur qui n’ont jamais été portée à ce violent degré pour les drames les plus célèbres” (qtd. by Ferret, “Introduction” 10). According to Fréron and d’Aquin, Paris had not seen an event like this in some time—if ever. Palissot’s play had caused a noisy public reaction that surpassed some of the best efforts by Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire—in short, by some of the most prolific dramatists in French history.

In his satirical comedy, Palissot pits *philosophes* against “bons citoyens” on stage in order to draw distinct lines between two opposing worldviews. Even though they disagreed on the merits of Palissot’s work, partisans from both ideological camps had to agree that audience members reacted to *Les Philosophes* with an intense fervency that bordered on overt chaos.

The eyewitness testimony that we first encountered in the introduction to this dissertation confirms the tumultuous reception of *Les Philosophes*, and at the same time, it provides more detail on the cause of the event:

Comme cette pièce [*Les Philosophes*] était connue et qu'elle avait fait du bruit avant d'être représentée, l'empressement et le concours du public ont été jusqu'à l'extrême le jour de la première représentation. On n'a point vu un pareil tumulte : j'y ai assisté aux premières places. Elle a été applaudie et critiquée tout à la fois. (qtd. in Masseau, 143)

Barbier's testimony warrants a close examination: we can discern three important elements in his account. First, he points out that the *bruit* did not occur because of the performance, but rather, that it began beforehand and then culminated at the premiere of Palissot's comedy. Energy surrounding the play reached its climax during the day of the play's first performance, thus indicating the existence of a fermenting energy already in place in and around the Comédie-Française.

Next, Barbier argues that the premiere added to an already energized atmosphere, which turned the Comédie-Française into a veritable *tumulte*. The witness distinguishes *Les Philosophes* from other eighteenth-century plays by arguing that the spectators reacted uncharacteristically to Palissot's comedy ("on n'a point vu un pareil tumulte"). Lastly, Barbier writes that the play was both "applaudi" and "critiqué" at the same time by spectators—a statement that spins the energetic mood of theatrical performance into the realm of divisive partisanship.

Why did eighteenth-century theatergoers react so viscerally to Palissot's comedy? Or, (and maybe a more pertinent question) why did writers portray spectators in such a manner? The answer to these questions, as we shall see, incorporates both writing and performance. In this section, I will investigate events occurring on the stage and in French society to highlight a complex but powerful relationship between written texts and audio-visual performances of Palissot's *Les Philosophes*. As we shall see, Palissot incorporates arguments and citations from Counter-Enlightenment pamphlets and other

written documents into his dramatic composition; but also, he uses narrative twists and specific strategies that are inherent to the performing arts. This multifaceted strategy surpasses the mere mise-en-scene of polemical texts and invites us to consider Palissot's effort as a true theatrical event—or otherwise stated—as a tumultuous series of connected moments that highlight changes in dramaturgy, spectatorship, and theater criticism.

Following Olivier Ferret's example in his monograph, *La Fureur de nuire*, I will focus on the genesis and manifestation of attacks surrounding the *philosophe*/anti-*philosophe* debate in mid-eighteenth-century France. Whereas Ferret concentrates mainly on polemical pamphlets during this period, I hope to widen the general discussion by including an analysis of attacks in the theatrical genre. In his work, Ferret pays acute “attention à l'organisation rhétorique des textes pamphlétaires, rhétorique qui serait à définir comme une agonistique particulière qui n'est pas celle, par exemple, des autres types d'écrits polémiques” (*La Fureur de nuire* 13). In this chapter, I will delve into theater, one of those “autres types d'écrits polémiques,” with the hope of differentiating between a dramaturgical effort like Palissot's, and the litany of anti-*philosophique* pamphlets that littered Paris during the 1750s and 1760s.

An analysis of Palissot's arguments against the *philosophes* coupled with a study of how those attacks were manifested may reveal a sophisticated blend of socio-economic, political, literary, and philosophical issues, and provide an accurate picture of the interdisciplinary nature of the Republic of Letters during this precarious pre-Revolutionary period. By demonstrating his knowledge of previously written Counter-Enlightenment and *philosophe* works, and by understanding the specific, ephemeral qualities of performance, Palissot recognizes a strong correlation between pedagogy and

theater.³⁵ In so doing, the playwright brings to light two symbiotic tensions in the theatrical genre, providing a powerful example of how theater is, “à la fois une pratique d’écriture, et une pratique de représentation” (Roubine 1).

Critics of *Les Philosophes* highlight spectator reactions to the performance, rather than the play’s dramatic composition or aesthetic features. This emphasis on audience participation in the theatrical event (as we shall see in chapter three) diverged from norms in literary criticism of the time and might have been caused by Palissot’s own departure from more “normal” ways of playwriting. Palissot’s dramatic text was not an effort in “pure dramaturgy”—it was not the result of a linear process such as:

“Playwright’s idea”>>Manuscript>>Performance>>Publication

In Palissot’s case, Counter-Enlightenment pamphlets and *philosophe* works altered this standardized practice.

Although he relied heavily on non-dramatic texts, Palissot did not ignore previous examples from inside the theatrical genre, and borrowed extensively from playwrights such as Aristophanes and Molière. In fact, Palissot lifts at least seven lines directly from Molière’s *Les Femmes savantes*.³⁶ But what truly makes Palissot’s effort unique is the fact that the playwright gleaned most of his ideas from quarrels between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* during the 1750s. Besides stealing from theatrical predecessors, Palissot

³⁵ Palissot’s pedagogical plan seeks to illuminate the fallacy of *philosophe* thinking. Paradoxically, his notion of comedy *cum* didactic tool parallels Voltaire’s notions. In a letter to the Marquis Capacelli on 23 December 1760, the *philosophe* ponders this precise link between learning and theater, stating: “Qu’est-ce, en effet, que la vraie comédie ? C’est l’art d’enseigner la vertu et les bienséances en actions et en dialogues” (qtd. by Lever, *Théâtre et Lumières* 10). Although the content of his message contrasts with Voltaire’s, the use of comedy to persuade, convince, and teach emerges as Palissot’s course of action in *Les Philosophes*.

³⁶ For a complete list of lines that Palissot lifts directly from Molière, see Ferret’s “Introduction” to *Les Philosophes* (2002).

also incorporated ideas from at least ten years of polemical pamphleteering that sought to denounce *philosophes* like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot, and Claude-Adrien Helvétius. These non-canonical texts—ephemeral and poorly circulated *libelles*—thus came publicly into fruition by reaching a larger audience at the Comédie-Française during the summer of 1760 with Palissot’s *Les Philosophes*, and then, with Voltaire’s *L’Ecosaise*.

1750-1760: The Origins of Palissot’s “Théâtre anti-philosophique”

Before delving into Palissot’s play, it is first important to describe the charged atmosphere that marked Palissot’s career, French theater, and the Republic of Letters during the years leading up to 1760. Opportunism characterizes the life and works of Charles Palissot de Montenoy (1730-1814). After finishing his studies in philosophy at the Université de Pont-à-Mousson at the precocious age of twelve, the young attorney’s son from Nancy briefly flirted with careers in the religious orders and the family law practice, before moving to Paris in 1750.³⁷ Unhappy in the legal field, Palissot was drawn to the *belles lettres*, and during this period, he penned two mediocre tragedies: *Pharaon*, which never saw a single performance, and *Zarès*, which was performed just three times in regional theater.

Besides his early attempts at tragedy, Palissot wrote several *brochures*—short pamphlets with modest circulations and with subjects that moved back and forth, between art and politics, and between literary criticism and overt attacks on writers’ personalities. Most interestingly, many of Palissot’s early pamphlets praised the same *philosophe* works that Palissot would later harshly criticize in his *Les Philosophes*.

³⁷ See D. Delafarge’s *La Vie et l’oeuvre de Palissot* (1912) for a more detailed description of Palissot’s early biography.

For example, in his *L'Histoire des Rois de Rome* (1753), Palissot extols the writings of both Montesquieu and Voltaire, and specifically, Montesquieu's cyclical notion of history to explain the rise and fall of Rome. Palissot's warm remarks for Voltaire and Montesquieu would continue into the 1760s and later—a fact that blurs any overt claim that Palissot was an immutable partisan of the Counter-Enlightenment. Nevertheless, sometime during the late 1750s and as the two sides of an ideological and institutional battle crystallized, Palissot formed relationships with well-known anti-*philosophes* such as Lefranc de Pompignan, the duc de Choiseul, and Elie-Catherine Fréron. As the decade (1750s) progressed, he forged strategic friendships with Counter-Enlightenment writers, and his once congratulatory remarks vis-à-vis the *philosophes* took on a more negative spin.

Part of this abrupt change in opinion is probably due to the association of terms between *philosophe* and *encyclopédiste* that solidified during the 1750s. After the first entries of Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* were published in 1751, learned academies throughout Europe were forced to take sides and either support *philosophes* like Melchior Grimm, Diderot, D'Alembert, Helvétius, Jean-François Marmontel, and Charles Duclos; or condemn them in the name of religion, morality, or even good taste.

During the second half of the 1750s, the term “*philosophes*” gradually became associated with the members of the *Encyclopédie* project, whether or not a *philosophe* had contributed in any part to editing or writing the hefty volume.³⁸ As a political ally of

³⁸ Palissot's staging of Diderot and Rousseau on the same stage is, then, the most egregious example of the new practice of combining *philosophes* into one “type.” During the 1750s, the opinions of these two intellectuals diverged considerably, especially after

the conservative Duc de Choiseul and literary protégé of the anti-*philosophe* critic Fréron, Palissot naturally fell into a philo-literary style of critiquing the *Encyclopédie* for its pronounced theories on politics and art. Differing from other staunch enemies of the *Encyclopédie*, however, Palissot never took up a religious hard-line against the *philosophes*, choosing instead to parallel Fréron's conservative views on art and literature.³⁹

As his relationship with Fréron took shape, Palissot's opinion of *philosophes* turned overwhelmingly negative (except for Voltaire, whom Palissot continued to admire and Fréron started to single-out critically). In a 1758 letter from Palissot to Fréron, the young polemicist highlights how close his and Fréron's feelings were: "Si j'ai quelque valeur, c'est par la conformité de nos façons de penser, et je n'en veux avoir d'autre à mes yeux que mon attachement pour toi" (qtd. in Balcou, *Fréron contre les philosophes* 136). Palissot's relationship with an overt *feuillettiste* and enemy of the philosophic party aided the young playwright's literary apprenticeship in both content and form. Armed with Counter-Enlightenment ideas and a pamphleteer's style, Palissot soon began to produce theatrical works marked by the denunciatory tone of polemical pamphlets.

Palissot, however, still found himself on the fringe of two mobilizing groups. By the middle of the 1750s, Palissot was neither a member of the powerful Counter-Enlightenment, nor was he a proponent of *philosophe* ideals. He continued to respect the work of "vrais *philosophes*" like Montesquieu and Voltaire, while at the same time

Rousseau's *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* in 1751 and even more with his *Lettre à M. D'Alembert sur les spectacles* in 1758. Dena Goodman provides an excellent account of the battle between Diderot and Rousseau in chapter one of *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*, pp. 33-44.

³⁹ Contrary to the Jesuits and their *Journal de Trévoux*, Palissot steers clear of obvious religious criticisms of the *Encyclopédie*.

harshly criticizing Diderot, Marmontel, and Helvétius.⁴⁰ However, in 1756, an episode at the Polish King Stanislas' court taught Palissot a lesson in *philosophe* exclusion and personal vendetta, fuelling even more his budding Counter-Enlightenment sentiments.

La comédie des Philosophes was not Charles Palissot's first attempt at ridiculing the principles, works, and people associated with the encyclopedic movement, nor would it be his last.⁴¹ A few years before the debut of *Les Philosophes* at the Comédie-Française, Palissot "a déjà fait scandale en faisant représenter sur la scène du théâtre de Nancy...Rousseau, le 'philosophe'" (Ferret, "Introduction to *Les Philosophes*" 7). This short comedy, entitled *Le Cercle ou les originaux*, was staged at Stanislas' court and originally intended to parallel the Polish king's (himself an enemy of Rousseau) own Counter-Enlightenment opinions, which most notably included a refutation of Rousseau's *Second Discourse*.⁴²

Palissot believed that he was placating a largely anti-*philosophique* audience in Nancy with his play. But what the young playwright failed to recognize was the emerging schism between Rousseau and the rest of the *philosophes* as well as the close proximity between the Polish King and *philosophes* such as Grimm and Voltaire. Stanislas' agents forced Palissot's play off the stage, and the young playwright quickly escaped Lorraine for Paris.

⁴⁰ From 1755-1760, Palissot wrote scathing critiques of Marmontel's *Wenceslas* (see chapter 3), Hélivétius' *De l'Esprit*, and Diderot's *Le Fils naturel*.

⁴¹ See Ferret's *La Fureur de nuire* for a chronology of Palissot's polemical works against the *philosophes* from 1750-1770.

⁴² See D. Delafarge's *La Vie et l'oeuvre de Palissot* for a more detailed description of the controversy surrounding *Le Cercle* and *Les Petites lettres sur les grands philosophes*.

Powerful members of the Nancy Academy viewed Palissot's play with scorn and subsequently tried to expel the young playwright from their organization.⁴³ Undeterred, Palissot continued to criticize Rousseau and other *philosophes*, publishing *Les Petites lettres sur de grands philosophes* two years later.⁴⁴ In this pamphlet, Palissot pokes fun at a few *philosophes*, including Grimm, but only attacks Diderot and his *Fils naturel*⁴⁵ with any real fervor. *Les Petites lettres* was a popular success with a wide readership, an important milestone in Palissot's career, and a first example of the playwright's notion of theater criticism.

In *Les Petites lettres*, Palissot argues that Diderot's conception of the *drame* is little more than a pastiche of a certain strain in classical theater, and not a modern form of dramatic representation as the *philosophe* claims. This brief excerpt, from Palissot's "Seconde lettre," summarizes the author's critique of *philosophe* claims to novelty:

Ne croirait-on point, Madame, que ces Législateurs du goût avaient prévu l'ouvrage dont je vous parle ; et s'ils ne l'ont point prévu, de quel front ose-t-on nous donner, comme une découverte, ce genre sérieux déjà connu dans l'ancienne Rome ; mais traité par des mains habiles, et tant de fois ébauché sans succès parmi nous. ("Seconde Lettre," In *Petites Lettres* 42)⁴⁶

This *libelle* was important in helping escalate the pamphlet battle between anti-*philosophes* and Diderot's circle, and in fact, the famous *philosophe* responded to the

⁴³ Palissot was only allowed to stay in the Academy after Jean-Jacques Rousseau (the very same that Palissot mocked in *Le Cercle*) wrote a letter on Palissot's behalf (see Delafarge, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Charles Palissot*, ch. 2).

⁴⁴ In fact, according to Paul Benhamou, Palissot's exit from the Nancy's Académie was at Grimm's urging, which no doubt ignited Palissot's dislike of *philosophes* (18).

⁴⁵ Diderot, Denis. *Le Fils naturel*. (1757) Paris: GF Flammarion, 2005.

⁴⁶ Palissot's *Petites lettres sur les grands philosophes* was later published as an addendum to his *Les Philosophes, comédie, en trois actes en vers. Représentée pour la première fois par les Comédiens François ordinaires du Roi, le 2 Mai 1760*. Paris : Duchesne, 1760. (Bibliothèque Richelieu, 8-RF-12496).

“Seconde lettre” by calling Palissot *Bleichnar* (*Pâle-sot* in German), and then by publicly attacking Palissot’s two royal protectors, Mme. de la Marck and Mme. de Robecq. The publications of *Les Petites lettres* and the subsequent responses by *philosophes* created a “point of no return” between the two rival cohorts, and from the end of 1757 on, all ties between Palissot and the dramatic arm of the encyclopedic clan (Diderot, Marmontel) were effectively severed.⁴⁷

Palissot’s Construction of a Theatrical Event

On May 2, 1760 Palissot’s criticism of *philosophe* personalities and practices shifted from regional theater and polemical pamphlets such as *Les Petites lettres* to the biggest French stage of all, the Comédie-Française. Audience members were keen on the fact that Palissot had been at war with *philosophes* for years before his play’s 1760 debut, and pamphlets kept reader-spectators up to date about the latest battles inside the Republic of Letters. By bringing his literary quarrel with *philosophes* from the printed text to major theater, Palissot also moves the debate into a different field of reception—an important change that has both qualitative and quantitative effects on the dissemination of Counter-Enlightenment ideals.

In his study on the pamphlet wars between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes*, Olivier Ferret points out the qualitative change in moving from text to live theater:

Le théâtre ne constitue-t-il pas un lieu particulier où l’on s’adresse de la sorte au ‘peuple assemblé’ ? les observateurs s’accordent en tout cas à reconnaître que la diffamation publique qui affecte les encyclopédistes lors de la représentation des *Philosophes* constitue en événement qui fait date et qui donne lieu à une tonitruante querelle marquée, non seulement par une suite de ‘comédies satiriques’, mais aussi par un déluge de pamphlets. (Ferret, *Fureur de Nuire* 72)

⁴⁷ For a detailed account of the 1757 squabble between Diderot and Palissot, see Balcou’s *Fréron contre les philosophes*, pp. 132-135.

Les Philosophes is the result of—and results in—a plethora of pamphlets and satires. Palissot's play was an important moment that surpassed the traditional theatergoing experience to “faire date” in French letters. As indicated by the eyewitness accounts that introduce this chapter, contemporary and posterior critics of *Les Philosophes* noticed the play's “eventful nature,” or, how the play caused a *bruit* and *tumulte* similar to a natural disaster or rowdy public meeting.

In this section, we will discover how the energized atmosphere of theater reception was due to Palissot's attempt to persuade different spectators with different strategies. Palissot combines an acute knowledge of “which group wants to see which criticism” with an intelligent manipulation of external political and literary phenomena such as favorable censorship rules and an unfavorable climate for members of the encyclopedic project. The spectators who went to see Palissot's play had been preconditioned to expect to see on stage the same live people they read about in Counter-Enlightenment pamphlets: and they were not disappointed. Palissot uses his theatrical work to build on the excitement caused by polemical pamphlets to move from strictly *written* sources with modest circulations to performative practices inherent to theater and which helped cause “visceral” reactions among spectators.

Palissot shows a dramaturgical consideration toward persuading the spectator that is traditionally attached only to *philosophes* in his rival camp. For example, in the article “Parterre” from the *Encyclopédie*, Jean-François Marmontel urges writers to persuade spectators into adopting more “enlightened” views. The famous *philosophe* and close friend of Voltaire writes:

Le *parterre* est donc habituellement composé d'hommes sans culture et sans prétentions, dont la sensibilité ingénue vient se livrer aux impressions qu'elle recevra du spectacle, et qui, de plus, suivant l'impulsion qu'on leur donne, semblent ne faire qu'un esprit et qu'une âme avec ceux qui, plus éclairés, les font penser et sentir avec eux. (Article : "Parterre" in the *Encyclopédie*, qtd. by Veysman 158)

According to Marmontel, the *parterre*'s lack of philosophical or literary knowledge allows it to judge a theatrical work by "impulsion" rather than cool reflection. Palissot recognizes a need to denounce members of the Republic of Letters by disproving their opinions and ideas, but at the same time, he also wants the *parterre* to support, enjoy, and agree with the arguments in his comedy. With a desire to convince and persuade through theater that parallels advocates of the emerging *drame*, Palissot, as we shall see, exhibits a dramatic "souci de prendre en compte les conditions concrètes de la représentation et de tirer parti de toutes les ressources que pouvait offrir la technologie contemporaine de la scène" (Roubine 52).

With the following close reading of *Les Philosophes*, I hope to show that Palissot's concerns for the dramaturgical elements of his performance and for persuading the spectator parallel theatrical projects by contemporary rivals like Diderot, Voltaire, and later, Beaumarchais. While *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* strongly disagreed on the subject of their debates, both parties nevertheless relied on similar strategies of pamphlet publication and theatrical persuasion. During literary war, both camps sought to enlighten the spectator and persuade him or her into adopting either *philosophe* or anti-*philosophe* worldviews.

Palissot's theater draws examples from contemporary society and "non-literary" texts just as much as it finds origins in Molièresque comedy or Ancient Greek satire. In addition, this "lowly" playwright manifests a new representational strategy with the

staging of personalities, works, and important cultural practices of his time—a cross pollination of writing and performance which results in a visceral response by both theater critics and the audience, or, a veritable “theatrical event.” *Les Philosophes*, like Voltaire’s *L’Ecossoise* (which we will see next), emerges as an important cultural artifact and indicator of changing norms in various fields such as theater, literary criticism, and journalistic media. Because of the inherent need to *persuade* spectators to adhere to a philo-social paradigm, Palissot and Voltaire, as we shall see, diverge from “normal” dramaturgical writing practices, production methods, and publication strategies of the eighteenth century.

Through close readings of both plays, I hope to underline the complex manner by which the *philosophe* vs. anti-*philosophe* debate moves among pamphlets, theatrical, and literary works. This turn towards more “aesthetic” representations of polemics, however, was not linear. While it is important to differentiate among the multiple modes with which adversaries carried out this debate, it is also vital to note the ambiguous, ever-changing relationship between pamphlet and dramatic work, text and performance, or polemicist and *homme de lettres*.

The following two close readings should reveal a fragile dialectic between aesthetic works and social practices during the middle of the eighteenth-century, rather than a simple reflective mirror between art and society. These dramatic works do not represent historical exactitudes or the precise social situations in which they are disseminated. Nevertheless, a deep look into the subtle lines that interconnect and separate art with society during this period might, as Terry Eagleton (borrowing from Pierre Macherey) argues, still be able to reconstruct a mirror that is “placed at an angle to

reality, a *broken* mirror which presents its images in fragmented form, and is as expressive in what it *does not* reflect as in what it does” (46). With this notion in mind—the idea that art and society are linked, but not necessarily in a way that we can consciously grasp one hundred percent of the time—let us delve into Charles Palissot’s *comédie des Philosophes*.

The Curtain Rises on Palissot’s *Les Philosophes*

Les Philosophes is a farcical comedy that borrows its plot, tone, as well as direct lines, from Molière’s *Les Femmes savantes* (1672). The play follows a traditional comedic format with a predicable restoration of the *bons* (the anti-*philosophes* in this case) over the *méchants* (Valère, the lead *philosophe*, and his cohort). Rosalie, a young and beautiful aristocrat, is set to be married to Valère (read: Molière’s Trissotin), who has convinced Rosalie’s mother Cydalise (read: Molière’s Philaminte) that he and his philosophic ways would provide an enriching future for her daughter. However, Rosalie is in love with Damis, a local boy, and can’t stand the pompous rhetoric and overt proselytizing of Valère, Dortidius, Carondas, and the other *philosophes*. Over the course of the play, Palissot shows that “*philosophes*” are nothing more than lying opportunists and hopes that the audience will sigh with relief when Valère’s hypocritical personality is revealed, the *philosophes* are sent packing, and Cydalise agrees that Damis is the best choice for Rosalie to wed.

Palissot’s attempt to denounce literary enemies and “move” the parterre into agreeing with Counter-Enlightenment principles comes forth throughout the entire comedy. In fact, Palissot’s first criticism of the *philosophes* occurs during the initial scene of the play, which introduces the audience to Marton, a servant, and Damis, the

young “hero” of the story, patriotic military officer, and chief critic of encyclopedic thought. Damis has just returned from what is probably a long tour of war duty and soon finds out that the woman he was destined to marry (Rosalie) is now set to wed Valère.⁴⁸ As the discussion between Damis and Marton reveals, the *philosophe* is uninterested in respecting engagements between departed soldiers and their betrothed. Here, the playwright implies that *philosophes* are benefiting from the hard-work and duty of good citizens:

Marton:
Mais encore, vous êtes officier;
Notre projet n’est pas de nous mésallier.
Nous voulons un mari taillé d’une autre étoffe;
En un mot, nous prenons un mari philosophe.

Damis:
Que me dis-tu, Marton?

Marton:
Je vous étonne fort;
Mais ne savez-vous que les absents ont tort? (1.1)

According to Marton, Cydalise wants to choose a *philosophe*—a social type that he distinguishes from the military ranks (“d’une autre étoffe”)—to be Rosalie’s groom. Throughout the play, Palissot’s criticisms become more severe; the audience will later learn that the *philosophes* not only refuse to fight during wartime, but also view politics and patriotism as useless in general.

The criticism of *philosophe* disinterest in national affairs was already a major *topos* in Counter-Enlightenment rhetoric by 1760. The theme was vigorously employed

⁴⁸ Not only does Palissot’s first criticism of *philosophe* attitudes occur in very beginning of his play, but also his first reference to contemporary events in France. 1760 marked the middle of the Seven Years’ War (French and Indian War) and saw many French men leaving and returning from battle. Here, Palissot may be trying to establish a parallel between his hero and spectators of the play who had served in the war.

by the abbé Moreau and Fougere de Monbron against Voltaire and Diderot during the *Cacouacs* campaign in 1757. Through this series of nasty pamphlets, Counter-Enlightenment writers accused *philosophes* of cosmopolitanism, and more specifically, of an unpatriotic attraction to England.⁴⁹ This is a first example of how Palissot recognizes a variety of different spectators in his dramaturgical construction. By raising the “patriotism” issue so early in the play, Palissot immediately evokes the *Cacouacs* campaign for members of the audience who followed the exciting pamphlet battles of 1757. At the same time, he charges the *philosophes* with crimes of unpatriotic sentiment—a claim that undoubtedly struck a visceral chord among any group of French spectators during wartime, and not just learned members of the audience who kept up to date on literary polemics.

Shocked at the possibility of losing his betrothed simply because he fulfilled a patriotic duty, Damis tries to reason with Marton, evoking the importance of law, and more specifically, the legal status of a marriage promise (“un hymen conclu”). Unfortunately for Damis, the ideological atmosphere at the estate has changed since the hero’s departure, and Marton responds apologetically that, “Quelque temps, dans le cercle, on parla politique;/Enfin tout disparut sous la métaphysique” (1.1). At Cydalise’s estate, socially engaged behavior (and discussion) has been replaced by detached “métaphysique”—a change that jars with the young hero’s patriotism, and later, passion for Rosalie.

Later in the first scene, Palissot introduces the audience to Cydalise, Rosalie’s mother and chief decision-maker. Cydalise is also a “*philosophe*-in-training” under

⁴⁹ For more information on the *Cacouacs* campaign, see Ferret’s *La Fureur de nuire*, pp. 81-129; or, Russel Goulbourne’s *Voltaire comic dramatist*, p. 205.

Valère's tutelage, and she has recently written her first book, which emerges over the next few scenes as a pitiful novel and nothing more than a grouping of paltry philosophical platitudes.⁵⁰ But on a narrative level, we might be able to understand Cydalise's novel as a sort of *tabula rasa* on which Palissot, through the citation of titles and authors, paints a unsightly picture of *philosophe* works such as Diderot's *Les Bijoux indiscrets*⁵¹ and Helvétius's *De l'Esprit*.⁵²

Palissot uses "Cydalise's novel" as a theatrical location to discuss philosophical modes of literary criticism, and over the course of the play, the audience realizes that when the characters begin speaking about the book, Palissot is about to cite *philosophe* works from the 1750s. For example, a discussion about Cydalise's novel hides Palissot's criticism of *philosophe* hypocrisy in judging merit:

Damis:
Je lui conseille fort de garder l'anonyme [the book].
Mais, dans ces beaux esprits que Cydalise estime,
N'en est-il aucun assez droit, assez franc,
Pour lui montrer l'excès d'un travers aussi grand;
Pour la désabuser?

⁵⁰ According to some contemporary critics, Palissot's character Cydalise could be a nuanced dig at Madame de Graffigny. For more information on this possible link, see English Showalter's article, "'Madame a fait un livre': Madame de Graffigny, Palissot et *Les Philosophes*" (see works cited for complete bibliographic information). However, most contemporary scholars, as well as writers at the time of *Les Philosophes*' first performances, agree that Palissot aims his attack more at the *salonnière* and friend of Diderot's, Madame de Geoffrin, rather than at Madame de Graffigny—especially given the fact that Graffigny had died two years earlier, in 1758.

⁵¹ A libertine novel published anonymously by Denis Diderot in 1748, *Les Bijoux indiscrets* allegorically depicted Louis XV under the guise of Mangogui du Congo. Because of this book and other scandalous writings, Diderot was sentenced to prison for several months in 1749.

⁵² In *De l'Esprit* (1758), Helvétius, who rivaled Condillac as the quintessential philosopher of senses, argues that the self-interest of human beings to strive for what is pleasurable and avoid pain leads to correct judgment and the general amelioration of society.

Marton:
Eux! Ils se moquent d'elle:
Ils ont tous conspiré de gâter sa cervelle;
Surtout votre rival. Comme il connaît son goût,
Il ne se borne pas à l'applaudir en tout;
Il la fait admirer par messieurs ses semblables
Tous charlatans adroits, et flatteurs agréables,
Ravis de présider dans sa société. (1.1)

Here, Palissot asserts that *philosophes* only praise literary works or philosophical ideals to attain personal goals. Valère understands perfectly well the difference between good and bad literature, as indicated by the fact that he and his friends “se moquent d'elle” and her philosophical ideas. But Valère chooses to lie to Cydalise and cover her in flattery in order to secure his position as Rosalie's fiancé. This argument emerges as Palissot's most nuanced critique of the *philosophe* program. Rather than merely contesting *philosophe* ideas, the playwright chooses instead to put into play polemically the constellatory bonds among members of the *philosophe* cohort as well as the way that their ideas are disseminated into society.⁵³

Throughout the rest of the play, Palissot will emphasize how *philosophe* literary allegiances to one another are little more than ephemeral bonds that are subject to abrupt fissions and personal disagreements.⁵⁴ In addition, Palissot harps on the fact that

⁵³ This criticism harks back to late 1750s pamphlets which portrayed *philosophes* as a tightly-knit, dangerous sect. For example, in Abraham Chaumeix's 1758 pamphlet, the *Préjugés légitimes contre l'Encyclopédie*, the counter-enlightenment critic warns his reader about a group of “pernicious” charlatans who are trying to ruin traditional French values of family, religion, and royalty. For more information on Chaumeix's pamphlets, see O. Ferret's *La Fureur de nuire*, chapter II.1, pp. 92-96.

⁵⁴ Palissot's insistence on discordance inside the *philosophe* circle is possibly a reference to the 1758 strife between Rousseau and other Encyclopedistes over D'Alembert's article “Genève.” According to Frank Kafker, D'Alembert's controversial claim that Genevan pastors more closely resembled deists than 16th century Calvinists prompted several important contributors to quit the *Encyclopédie* project and eventually led to D'Alembert's own resignation as editor of the volume in 1759 (107).

philosophes fail to look at a work with “disinterest” and merely boost mediocre literary pieces from inside of their circle. Instead of measuring works to verifiable aesthetic standards or against previous examples from French history or antiquity, *philosophes* favor their friends’ paintings, novels, and ideas—no matter how pompous, bland, or detrimental to society those works may be.

Palissot criticizes the enclosed circle of *philosophe* favor and their “gentlemen’s club” methodology of literary criticism. Shifting the debate from works to modes of production, Palissot goes beyond an attack on the *Encyclopédie*, *Les Bijoux indiscrets* or *De l’Esprit*, and argues against cultural practices of intellectual patronage and non-merit based methods for judging artistic value—thus attacking the entire *philosophe* literary product. With this example, Palissot seems to stage his personal disdain at the schools and academies under *philosophe* tutelage—a personal anger which may date back to his 1757 near-expulsion from the Nancy Académie or earlier. Palissot tips his hat here to the “grub” writers and lesser-known dramatists who may have been discarded by the *philosophes* as nothing more than “literary hacks,” and barred from entry into a number of regional academies that were increasingly controlled by *philosophes* during the middle of the eighteenth-century.

With this scene, Palissot foreshadows a possible literary hegemony that would become a reality later in the century. Palissot feared a domination by *philosophes* over the Academies, and saw first-hand in Lorraine what could happen when they achieved this influence. Writing about the Académie-Française during the 1770s, the famous socio-literary historian, Robert Darnton, attests that “It became a sort of clubhouse for them [the *philosophes*], an ideal forum for launching attacks against *l’infâme*,

proclaiming the advent of reason, and co-opting new *philosophes* as fast as the old guard academicians would die off. This last function, virtually a monopoly of the philosophic salons, assured that only party men would make it to the top” (Darnton, “High Enlightenment” 89).⁵⁵

However, in 1760, the war had yet to be won, and *philosophes* were still in a fierce battle for control of the Académie-Française and the various regional literary societies that dotted France. In March of that year, the selection of the Voltaire-hating Le Franc de Pompignan to replace Philippe-Louis Maupertuis at the Académie-Française highlights the precariousness of the *philosophes*’ plight at this time. An avid anti-*philosophe* and enemy of both Diderot and Voltaire, Pompignan’s election must have felt like a dagger in the side of *philosophes* who did not yet have their own *fauteuils*, such as Diderot, Marmontel, and Michel-Jean Sedaine. Over the next ten years, *philosophes* secured a majority at the *Académie*, but at the time of Palissot’s play, they were still in the midst of a vicious war against their rivals for writers’ stipends, titles, and prizes.

Philosophical Considerations: Taking On Helvétius, Diderot and the *Encyclopédie*

During the first act, Palissot criticizes the *philosophes*’ motives for literary production as well as their literary and philosophical sources. For example, in scene 4, Cydalise is in need of inspiration for her novel and asks her servant for some reading material:

Cydalise:
Retirez-vous, Marton.

⁵⁵ Other writers paralleled Palissot’s critique of *philosophe* exclusion of those who didn’t tow a party line. For instance, Gregory Brown paints an interesting picture of how this group came into fruition during the second-half of the eighteenth-century in “The Counter-Enlightenment and the Low Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France” (1998).

Prenez mes clefs, allez renfermer mon Platon.
De son monde idéal j'ai la tête engourdie.
J'attendais à l'instant mon *Encyclopédie* ;
Ce livre ne doit plus quitter mon cabinet...(1.4)

Palissot masks a nuanced dig of the *philosophes*' belief in their own novelty behind a more overt criticism of the encyclopedic project. Palissot wants the audience to realize the ridiculousness of discarding Plato in order to adopt a completely new philosophical standpoint. Palissot criticizes the iconoclastic nature of encyclopedists and hints that their work is only modern in its publication date rather than in its ideas. The playwright slowly builds a case against the lead female character, showing that Cydalise's idolatry of the *philosophes* has skewed her literary tastes toward lauding only the extreme contemporary. It is clear that here, Palissot, for the first of many times, associates Cydalise's favor with his own disapproval.

In the second act, Palissot criticizes the *philosophes* from a more interdisciplinary position and continues to make precise attacks against specific *philosophes* and their works. During this part of the play, the "good" characters mount a counter-attack against the *philosophes*, and Palissot shows a three-pronged strategy against Valère, Dortidius, and their cohort. First, he uses Helvetius' *De l'Esprit* as an example of *philosophe* self interest, emphasizing the vain disagreements inside their group. Then, he furthers his argument against the apolitical nature of some *philosophes* and increases the intensity of this criticism with denunciations of treason. Lastly, Palissot condemns the overt didacticism of some *philosophe* works such as Diderotian theater and Rousseau's philosophical discourses.

From very early in the play, and before Palissot condemns Helvétius' idea of *intérêt*, the playwright shows that Valère and his *philosophe* cohort are moved by very

little besides a self-centered desire for personal gain. Valère's reasons for courting Rosalie and staying at the estate are more financial than romantic: one doubts if he has any feelings at all for Rosalie, his bride-to-be. This was not the first time Palissot made disparaging comments about how *philosophes* define "love." In one of Palissot's pamphlets from 1757, which also happened to be a one-scene parody of Diderot's play *Le Fils naturel*, Palissot harshly criticizes Diderot's idea of romantic love through Constance's "own voice." She laments how, "Il est vrai, mon projet dans la tête; c'était d'amener Dorval insensiblement à m'aimer: mais j'avoue que jusqu'à ce jour je n'avais conçu aucune espérance de succès; Dorval me témoignait de la confiance, de l'estime, et rien de plus" (Palissot, *Supplément d'un important ouvrage* 5).

In his pamphlet, Palissot argues that *philosophe* notions of love touch upon esteem and friendship, but lack important visceral connections between two people. This Diderotian conception of rational love contrasts with Palissot's demonstration of romantic sentiment in his comedy. In *Les Philosophes*, Damis loves Rosalie, and through the dénouement, Palissot will show that weaker, and possibly more "logical" *philosophe* sentiments are no match for the powers of physical and emotional love.

Placing the Blame: Palissot's Criticism of Claude-Adrien Helvétius' *De l'Esprit*

In act two, the playwright condemns what he sees as hypocritical behavior by integrating citations from *philosophe* works into his dramatic narrative. In scene iii, Valère discusses a recently published work by Cratès, a member of the *philosophe* circle, and intellectual rival to Valère. From his name alone, we could associate Cratès with Socrates and discern a parallel criticism with the Plato/*Encyclopédie* jab: *philosophes* wrongly hope to replace important pillars of Western thought with their own recent and

dubious works. However, it is difficult to make the leap between Cratès and any known *philosophe* in 1760. But when the title of the book is revealed as *De l'Esprit*, the obvious connection is clear to Claude-Adrien Helvétius, the author of a materialist work of the same name. Valère gives his own “reading” of Cratès’ work:

Valère :
Comment! sur des rochers on plaçait la vertu ?
Y grimpait qui pouvait. L’homme était méconnu.
Ce roi des animaux, sans guide et sans boussole,
Sur l’océan du monde errait au gré d’Éole ;
Mais enfin nous savons quel est son vrai moteur.
L’homme est toujours conduit par l’attrait du bonheur,
C’est dans ses passions qu’il en trouve la source.
Sans elles, le mobile arrêté dans sa course,
Languirait tristement à la terre attaché.
Ce pouvoir inconnu, ce principe caché,
N’a pu se dérober à la philosophie,
Et la morale enfin est soumise au génie.
Du globe où nous vivons despote universel,
Il n’est qu’un seul ressort, l’intérêt personnel ;
À tous nos sentiments, c’est lui seul qui préside ;
C’est lui qui dans nos choix nous éclaire et nous guide.
Libre de préjugés ; mais docile à sa voix,
Le sauvage attentif le suit au fond des bois,
L’homme civilisé reconnaît son empire ;
Il commande en un mot à tout qui respire. (2.3)

Valère and his band act out of sheer personal interest and back up their behavior with philosophical justification. For Valère and his associates, “intérêt personnel” trumps more interdependent ideas such as “la morale,” and individual “génie” emerges as their clear goal in both action and philosophy. Palissot’s reading of Helvétius, and more specifically, of the former’s definition of “intérêt,” is a far cry from the Lockean ideal of private interest or Helvétius’ conception of the term in *De l'Esprit*. In those works, personal interest leads to the overall amelioration of society because of mankind’s desire to preserve private gains through fear of losing individual goods. The creation of public

institutions such as the legal system then naturally flows from this fear of private loss. But in his biased reading of Helvétius, Palissot equates the term with little more than greed.

In *Les Philosophes*, nuances in Enlightenment texts are reduced to superficial digs and “l'intérêt” connotes nothing more than *philosophe* trickery and facetious rhetoric. Valère asserts his own “intérêt” but condemns others who try to manifest the same principle. Throughout the play, the idea is used and misused on a whim and personal interest emerges as more of a way to justify hypocrisy than a legitimate social plan.

Palissot cleverly points to the fallacy of *philosophe* self-interest through the actions of his characters *and* through staging works by members of the encyclopedic movement during the late 1750s. By providing textual examples from the *philosophe* circle itself, and then by attaching those ideas to the nasty behavior of the “*philosophe*” characters in his play, Palissot provides bibliographical “evidence” that the *philosophes* are to blame for certain undesirable elements of society. This strategy confronts the popular *topos* of the persecuted *philosophe cum* Socrates, which both Diderot and Voltaire employed in various plays, pamphlets and prefaces during this exact period.⁵⁶ By theatrically staging people who behave in a despicable manner, then by rooting the reasons for their actions in *philosophe* texts, Palissot provides a tightly linked representation of cause-and-effect.

⁵⁶ *Philosophes* were never shy to use the victim topos in describing their relationship with French society, especially after the interdiction of the *Encyclopédie* in 1759. One commonplace theme was Socrates’ trial, where the famous Greek philosopher was wrongly condemned by a group of “anti-*philosophes*.” Voltaire wrote an unpublished play that tells Socrates’ story, but could have easily been read in a contemporary context during the late 1750s. I will revisit Voltaire’s philosophical dialogue/play in the next chapter, but for a complete analysis of the work, see Russel Goulbourne’s *Voltaire comic dramatist*, pp. 187-203.

Here, we see the emergence of a Counter-Enlightenment didactic strategy.⁵⁷ Palissot teaches the audience the precise ways in which *philosophes* are a detriment to society. In so doing, the playwright puts forth a plan to mitigate the effect of pedagogical works by *philosophes* such as Diderot and Rousseau (*Le Fils naturel*, *Emile*, etc.). Once again, Palissot's criticisms come forth through dramatic, narrative elements in the play (such as Valère lying to Cydalise) as well as through bibliographic citations of *philosophe* texts from the late 1750s.

Palissot then moves from his attack on *philosophe* self interest to an offensive against their organizational structure and cohesion as a group. If, as he argues, *philosophes* act only with their own goals in mind, then, unity among them is impossible and one will always try to vie for the social status of another. When Cratès' "*De l'Esprit*" receives critical acclaim, Valère becomes jealous of its author and seeks to bring him down a peg by forcing critical acceptance of his protégée Cydalise's work:

Valère :
Cydalise aura plus de faveur.
On ne juge jamais son sexe à la rigueur.
Quelques-uns de ces traits qu'on se dit à l'oreille,
Au public hébété feront crier merveille !
Je veux que Cratès même en devienne jaloux,
Et rien n'est plus aisé, nous la protégeons tous. (2.4)

Due to his own desire to render Cratès jealous and assert himself as the most influential *philosophe*, Valère throws his weight into the critical ring. The *philosophe* hopes that his

⁵⁷ With his on-stage "didactic strategy," Palissot hopes to show audience members how to be socially responsible, good-natured citizens. This attempt to instruct normal social behavior through theater is a vital part of Diderot's dramatic theory as well as a pertinent issue today. Following Judith Butler's analysis of performance in *Bodies That Matter*, Martin Puchner argues that "theater, more than any other art form, replicates the social world in a particular human interaction through real humans on stage, it can therefore be considered the art form that is most directly tied to social normativity" (Puchner 17).

circle will praise Cydalise's work because Valère says it is good (and because Cydalise's sex precludes her from criticism) and not because it has any aesthetic or moral merit of its own. Later, we will see how *philosophes* rally, fuse, and combine allegiances in the wake of Palissot's comedy. But here, it is important to note the playwright's unconscious foreshadowing of an important mobilizing event, which will attach *philosophes* to one another (nous la protégeons tous) in binary opposition to Palissot, Fréron, and other Counter-Enlightenment voices.

With attacks against different voices inside the same "secte," *Les Philosophes* struck the nerves of the *philosophe* circle. Palissot combines *philosophes* under one umbrella and blurs nuances among personalities like Diderot, Rousseau, and Helvétius. This combinatory strategy, although initially successful in generating publicity for *Les Philosophes*, will prove detrimental as *philosophes* that were once bitter rivals join forces to form a united (or at least more united than ever before) front against Palissot and his Counter-Enlightenment colleagues.

Europeans or Frenchmen? Palissot's Critique of Cosmopolitanism

Returning to the comedy, it is clear that, according to Palissot, *philosophes* could not care less about politics, society, or any issue of national importance. In the second act, Palissot intensifies the scope of this argument by placing the locus of attacks on the detached metaphysical nature and foreign allegiances of his rivals. Again, the playwright uses a systematic method of quoting from "*philosophe*" works and using narrative strategies to debase *philosophe* viewpoints. In act II, scene v, Palissot distinguishes between two eighteenth-century philosophical notions. Damis argues that Dortidius (a

Latinized anagram of Diderot) and other *philosophes* cannot even speak about truth because their maxims and dissertations refuse to focus on human experience:

Damis :
Ils vous ont donc appris de grandes vérités.
Je ne le croyais pas. Ils ont l'art de détruire,
Mais ils n'élèvent rien, et ce n'est pas instruire.
Quel fruit attendez-vous de leurs vains arguments ?
Je n'en prévois que trop les effets affligeants.
Vous irez sur leurs pas de sophisme en sophisme,
Vous perdre dans la nuit d'un triste pyrrhonisme... (2.5)

Damis argues that *philosophe* principles exhibit a dangerous rhetorical nominalism (“vains arguments,” “sophismes”), or, a refusal to attach words to concrete human experiences and a linguistic construction that raises abstract principles and broad generalizations to the level of the law. This philosophy contrasts with Damis’ less universalizing tendency to trust what he feels and form a plan accordingly—a process Palissot evokes through Damis’ plan to rid the estate of *philosophes* during act III.

Over the course of the play, it becomes clear that Damis detests two *philosophe* ideals more than any others: their tendency to ground reasoning in abstraction, and their cosmopolitan views of a more international society. To some *philosophes*, ideas surpass national borders and patriotic sentiment—a notion clearly expressed by D’Alembert in his *Discours préliminaire* of the *Encyclopédie* (1752). The famous mathematician and academician attests that:

L’histoire de l’homme a pour objet, ou ses actions, ou ses connaissances;
et elle est par conséquent civile ou littéraire, c’est-à-dire se partage entre
[25] les grandes nations et les grands génies, entre les rois et les gens de
lettres, entre les conquérants et les philosophes” (*Discours* 65).

D’Alembert makes a distinction between powerful nations and powerful minds, and between kings and “gens de lettres”. For the *philosophes*, ideas surpass borders and

political associations—a notion that renders problematic and doubtful any sort of patriotism or overt support of a certain political regime.

In his play, Palissot cleverly picks up on his rivals' proclivities towards internationalism and exaggerates their putative skepticism toward monarchies. According to the character Damis, the *philosophes* could not care less about France—a maxim that taints their reputation and categorizes them as “bad citizens”:

Damis :
Pour les défauts d'autrui marquer plus d'indulgence,
Consoler le mérite, en chercher les moyens,
Devenir, en un mot, de meilleurs citoyens ;
Et pour en parler vrai, ma foi, je les soupçonne
D'aimer le genre humain, mais pour n'aimer personne. (2.5)

Instead of loving individual people (like Damis loves Rosalie), *philosophes* love the idea of humanity in abstraction (“le genre humain”). Here, Palissot draws a clear distinction between *citoyens* and *philosophes*. The author presents Damis as a model citizen who demonstrates a clear intelligence, a desire for stable family life, and a love for France. On the other hand, Palissot's *philosophe* manifests a detached and selfish hypocrisy with international tastes and a fondness of ideas from beyond the French border that are ungrounded in tangible, human experience. Damis once again disparages the lackluster citizenry of *philosophes* by exposing their “dangerous” internationalism: “Louant, admirant tout dans les autres pays,/Et se faisant honneur d'avilir leur patrie:/Sont-ce là les succès sur lesquels on s'écrie?” (1.5).

By precisely criticizing *philosophes* for their disinterest in national politics during a period of war, Palissot is trying to “affect” an audience that included veterans and

relatives of veterans from the Seven Years' War.⁵⁸ Through characters' dialogues, overt denunciation and citing texts, Palissot shows that *philosophes* care less about French politics than about detached metaphysics or international philosophical principles. Palissot takes the "horizon of expectations" of his audience into consideration. By dotting his text with patriotic themes, and by emphasizing this feature during a time of war, the playwright finds a psychosocial (pain of war) commonplace among his spectators.

However, not all of the playwright's considerations stay inside the socio-political frame—we can easily apply many of Palissot's critiques to the domains of literature and theater. It is clear that, during the middle of the play, some of Palissot's harsh words focus on the relationship between *philosophes* and the sociopolitical issues in France at the time of the performance. However, the playwright also incorporates stylistic arguments into his repertoire, and never relinquishes his disapproval of the didactic tone employed by *philosophe* writers. Palissot despises the overtly pedagogical nature of some *philosophe* writing and critiques writers such as Rousseau and Diderot for their use of bombastic and persuasive rhetoric instead of more subtle aesthetic formulations.

At times in his play, Palissot concentrates on two popular forms of contemporary writing on which *philosophes* relied to disseminate their ideas: the *drame* and philosophical treatises. And in a similar vein with most of his other criticisms, we can find roots of his disdain for *philosophes* in Palissot's pamphlets from the 1750s.

For example, Palissot had already applied the "didacticism" argument to Diderot's theater in 1758. In his *Supplément d'un ouvrage important*, Palissot writes in a mocking tone that, "...nous aurions heureusement ignoré pour jamais cet étalage de

⁵⁸ Ravel includes military personnel as one of the chief represented groups in his "List of Spectators in Paris Parterres by Social category and Theater, 1717-1768" (229-237).

sentiments, ces développements de caractère, ces sentiments qui arrachent de l'âme des pensées si inutiles, ces coups de Théâtre (*a*) qui ne sont presque que des enfantillages; enfin tous ces discours suivis qu'on n'aurait jamais dû se permettre" (56). Palissot's tone drips with sarcasm as he criticizes Diderot for attempting to suppress strong feelings and purgative, cataclysmic moments in theater.

In *Les Philosophes*, Palissot gives his audience an attack against Diderot through the lens of Cydalise's idiocy. In her search for a proper way to introduce her novel, Cydalise comes up with the following idea: "Enfin j'ai trouvé: j'y suis./Vite, écrivez, monsieur: *Jeune homme, prends et lis./Jeune homme, prends et lis*. Le tour est-il unique?" With this reference to St. Augustine's famous "*Tolle, lege*," it seems that Palissot is poking fun at the *philosophes'* desire to assume the roles of established philosophers (like with his Plato/*Encyclopédie* dig). But with the help of Ferret's critical edition of *Les Philosophes*, the modern reader understands that Cydalise could have lifted the line from Diderot's preface to his *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* (1754). In the scene that follows, Palissot ridicules Diderot's passage, and equates the pedagogical feeling to a storytelling session between a parent and her child (1.5).

One might argue that spectators would have had to possess a profound knowledge of Diderot's *Interpretation de la nature*, or at least of one of the Counter-Enlightenment pamphlets that littered Paris after its original publication, in order to understand the subtle dig at the *philosophe's* style.⁵⁹ However, this very same phrase, "Jeune homme, prends et lis" dotted polemical pamphlets later in the decade, especially in 1758 and 1759—

⁵⁹ For example, Pierre Leclerc's, *Religion vengée des impieties de la these et de l'Apologie de M. l'abbé de Prades, ou Recueil de neuf écrits contre les deux pièces et contre les impieties des libertins de notre siècle* (1754).

pamphlets that circulated the Parisian scene shortly before *Les Philosophes*. For example, the line was used by polemical authors of the *Nouveau mémoire pour servir à l'histoire des Cacouacs* (p. 27) and the *Discours du patriarche des Cacouacs* (page ix).⁶⁰ The twenty-first century reader, who obviously was not around during the tumultuous 1750s, might read this bit of dialogue as an example of Palissot's criticism of Diderot's philosophical corpus. But theatergoers at the time—the very same theatergoers who found themselves subjected to pamphlet wars just two years earlier, could have viewed this dig as an on-stage continuation of a common topos in contemporary pamphlets.

Pamphlets aside, with this example, Palissot makes an attack on *philosophes* for members of the literary elite who were present at the performance—an “inside joke” aimed at *philosophes* or Palissot's own cohort. In addition, he may have foreshadowed the publication of his play, as it would have been easier to understand the above criticism during a silent reading than during a character's quick utterance on stage. When we take the effect of the *Cacouacs* pamphlets on the audience into consideration, *Les Philosophes* becomes even more poignant and contemporary because of the “bruit” from previous Parisian literary strife.

Parterre vs. Balconies, Spectator vs. Reader: Palissot's Dramaturgical Strategies

The publication of Palissot's play reveals a receptive enigma. On the one hand, the performance caused an uproar and *Les Philosophes* enjoyed a long run at the Comédie-Française (14 performances). On the other hand, pamphlets at the time reveal

⁶⁰ For more information on these two anti-*philosophe* pamphlets, see O. Ferret's “Introduction” to *Les Philosophes*, p. 20. Diderot's line, “Jeune homme, prends et lis” was specifically used by the abbé de Saint-Cyr in his *Catéchisme et décisions des cas de conscience à l'usage des Cacouacs, avec un discours du patriarche des Cacouacs pour la réception d'un nouveau disciple*. Cacopolis (Paris), 1758; and by Jacob-Nicolas Moreau in his *Nouveau Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire des Cacouacs*. Amsterdam, 1757.

that Palissot's popularity was only due to the fact that his play was quickly published. In *Les Qu'est-ce à l'auteur de la comédie des Philosophes*, an anti-Palissot pamphlet from 1760, the author (possibly Voltaire) mockingly urges Palissot to publish his comedy quickly, attesting that, "Cet Imprimeur est singulier, il me soutient même qu'il est déjà tard. Selon lui votre pièce est déjà presque oubliée, et il faut se dépêcher ou on court risque de tout perdre" (32).⁶¹

According to *Les Qu'est-ce*, Palissot needed a readership. By placing subtle citations inside his narrative, Palissot perhaps switches his efforts from spectators of the live performance to the readership of the play's printed version. Palissot's (and later, Voltaire's) publishing techniques indicate that both dramatists wanted Parisians to understand every jibe and dig in their works. Palissot published *Les Philosophes* during the weeks following its premiere and while performances of the play were still taking place at the Comédie-Française. With this strategy, it is clear that Palissot hopes that spectators who had missed quick references to contemporary works might subsequently catch the joke in the written text. What is more, this split between live event and written document may also highlight certain considerations about spectators that eighteenth-century writers rhetorically took into account when creating their dramatic works.

In his study on French theater publics, Maurice Descotes points out that eighteenth-century playwrights differentiated between the potential reactions to performance of the parterre and more privileged members of the audience in the balconies. Using the example of Charles Collé's comedy, *La Veuve*, Descotes argues that

⁶¹ Indeed, Palissot did not wait too long to publish his play. O. Ferret indicates that Palissot sent copies of *Les Philosophes* to Voltaire and Rousseau as early as mid-May, 1760 ("Introduction" 7).

Collé and others often made distinctions between different “types” of spectators. For example, Collé “advient que le parterre ne comprend pas les discrètes allusions, par conséquent qu’il n’entend rien à la pièce; les loges, elles, devinent parfaitement l’intention de l’auteur” (*Le Public de théâtre et son histoire*, 185).

The parterre, according to Collé, could not comprehend the same level of dramaturgical innuendo that more privileged members of the audience could grasp. Thus, when creating a dramatic work, eighteenth-century playwrights had to differentiate between two distinct publics—both of which needed the attention of the writer. But what is special about Palissot’s play is his desire to give both publics the same overall message: *Philosophes* are evil and it is up to France’s brave citizens to rid society of their pernicious works.

Charles Collé’s conception of audience comprehension is certainly applicable to Palissot’s case: in fact, it is not difficult to see parallels between Collé and Palissot. While Collé enjoyed a much more powerful status in French society, both shared a similar tight-knit bond to conservative members of French nobility,⁶² and both playwrights never gained access into *philosophe* circles—sometimes, much to their dismay. But Collé was an upper-class writer for France’s nascent *théâtres de société*, and unlike Palissot, he rarely took into account the heterogeneous makeup of more public venues such as the Comédie-Française.

It is doubtful that Collé’s socioeconomic slight on theater comprehension is an accurate depiction of Parisian theater audiences during the eighteenth-century. Descotes’ own *Le Public de théâtre*, as well as Jeffrey Ravel’s more recent *A Contested Parterre*

⁶² The Duc de Choiseul in Palissot’s case, and the Orléans family in Collé’s.

show that parterres comprised educated students and young lawyers, and not just a mass of ignorant vagabonds. A literal, binary opposition between the parterre and the balconies seems oversimplified and ignorant of the heterogeneous makeup of theater audiences. Nevertheless, Collé's distinction retains value when studied as a rhetorical concept, or belief, that influenced playwrights' dramaturgical compositions.

It is possible that dramatists like Palissot, Voltaire, and Marmontel believed this stark separation was true, thereby writing for two different audiences. By inscribing a distinction similar to Collé's in his dramaturgy, through dialogue and action, Palissot tips his hat to less philosophically prone spectators; and through citation, he jabs subtle blows at members of the audience from the Republic of Letters.⁶³ And as we shall see, Palissot uses this tactic of "separate but equal attention" to two audiences later in the comedy with a harsh attack on Diderot's theater and philosophy.

Although Diderot's work on natural phenomena differs from his *dramas* or his theoretical writing on theater, Palissot finds a common theme to criticize in all three styles: Diderot's overtly pedagogical and repetitive style. Palissot had already addressed this criticism as early as 1757. In *Petites lettres sur les grands philosophes*, Palissot criticizes Diderot's tone, writing that, "L'humanité, les mœurs, la vertu, le goût de l'ordre, etc. ces mots combinés en mille manières, répétés en lieux communs, à chaque ligne, cette superfétation philosophique, tient ici lieu d'intérêt, de style et même d'esprit"

⁶³ Palissot's concentration on both learned members of the audience and less-educated spectators in the parterre demonstrates his keen knowledge of the important place of the latter group in determining the success of a play. Once again his strategy, but not his ideological posture, approaches Diderot's. Paraphrasing writings by Diderot and Marmontel, Maurice Lever notes that *philosophes* wholly believed that, "C'est du parterre, et de lui seul que dépend le succès ou l'échec d'une œuvre dramatique" (25).

(26). According to Palissot, Diderot's writing is boring, unclear, and nothing more than a grouping of repetitive, metaphysical concepts.

In his on stage criticism of Diderot's theater, Palissot focuses on the *philosophe's* 1757 and 1758 *dramas*: *Le Fils naturel*⁶⁴ and *Le Père de famille*,⁶⁵ citing both works during the second act. He once again uses Cydalise's favor of the two *dramas* as an overt condemnation of their aesthetic value, and at this point in the play, it is quite obvious to the spectator/reader that Palissot ridicules works and authors by having Cydalise shed a favorable light on them. Up until now, it appears that Palissot addresses theater as merely another vehicle used by *philosophes* to disseminate their pernicious ideas. However, as the narrative of the play unfolds, the debate between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* focuses more and more on theater as characters depend on performance-based trickery and narrative ploys to accomplish their goals. Culminating with a complex *mise-en-abyme* and a powerful pantomime scene, Palissot uses the dramatic genre to its fullest extent, hoping to educate his audience through dramaturgical techniques and an acute attention to currents in contemporary theories on theater.

Palissot and the Comedic Genre: Theatrical Sources and Considerations

Eighteenth-century writers, as well as later critics, hesitate in giving Palissot any praise for the theatrical elements of his comedy.⁶⁶ Critics at the time of the performance called the play a blatant rip off of Molière's *Les Femmes savantes*, and nothing more than a "compilation d'épigrammes" (Coyer 87). During the nineteenth century, the French

⁶⁴ Diderot published *Le Fils naturel* in 1757, but the play was only performed in regional theater at the time, finally making its way to the Comédie-Française in 1772.

⁶⁵ *Le Père de famille* was originally published in 1758, and subsequently performed at the Comédie-Française in February, 1761.

⁶⁶ Chapter three of this dissertation provides more detail on the critical reception of Palissot's comedy.

literary historian Gustave Desnoiresterres was even more blunt, writing that the apparition of *La comédie des Philosophes* was “au grand dommages des mœurs, des lettres et de la philosophie” of the time (135). More recently, Olivier Ferret has questioned the association of the term “dramatic comedy” with Palissot’s *Les Philosophes*. In *La Fureur de nuire*, Ferret discusses both Palissot’s play and Voltaire’s *L’Ecosaise*, arguing that:

Le fait que ces comédies soient effectivement représentées ne semble pas un critère discriminant suffisant, le texte des pièces faisant souvent l’objet d’une impression. Il faudrait donc juger de l’éloignement relatif de telle pièce par rapport au genre en s’intéressant aux éléments poétiques constitutifs de la comédie : telle pièce, qui remporte d’abord un succès de scandale, se soutient-elle par ses qualités propres, ou ne peut-elle survivre à l’effacement, dans la mémoire du public, des circonstances qui seules permettent d’en percevoir les ‘personnalités’? (73)

Ferret poses a delicate question. Did Palissot’s *Les Philosophes* endure the test of time and measure up against other comedies from the middle of the eighteenth century? The answer to this question, as I hope to show, is partially yes, and partially no. It is true that the on-stage longevity of Palissot’s comedy pales in comparison to other writers of the genre, and most notably, Marivaux (but then again, do theaters nowadays stage any eighteenth-century plays besides Marivaux’s, or the occasional Beaumarchais?).

The reasons for Palissot’s relative failure in “staying power” could include his repetitive style or the fact that the majority of jokes in his play were heavily grounded in contemporary events such as the publication of *De l’Esprit* and the ongoing battle over Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*. Historical events inevitably changed the urgency of Palissot’s criticisms. For example, when the *Encyclopédie* resumed publication without governmental contestation in 1765, or when France no longer viewed England as an immediate aggressor after the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War (1763),

spectators may have had trouble locating the enduring relevancy of Palissot's theatrical work.

But also, Palissot's inability to continue performing *Les Philosophes* could be rooted in the increasing institutional domination of the *philosophe* clan, previously discussed in this chapter and about which Robert Darnton, Gregory Brown, and Darrin McMahon have written extensively.⁶⁷ But Palissot's *Les Philosophes* was a popular play that dialogued with other dramatic works from both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As eyewitness testimonies suggest, the synchronic importance of Palissot's comedy rivaled that of any play put up on the boards of the Comédie-Française during the middle of the eighteenth century. In this section, I will change registers in order to give a few inter-theatrical arguments—reasons why Palissot's comedy is a unique example of theater and how the author demonstrated a keen awareness of contemporary trends in the dramatic arts. Rather than bolster a mediocre writer, I hope to merely present the synchronic argument that, at least one time, Palissot created an exceptional, theatrical work with his *comédie des Philosophes*.

Palissot never relinquishes his harsh criticisms of the *philosophe secte* throughout the play. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that not all of the playwright's castigations come forth as serious criticism. *Les Philosophes* is a comedy, and it was received by a public that burst at the seams with laughter during the initial performance. In fact, the moment of the play which drew the most laughter, according to the witness M. Hennin, was when “la vieille Dumesnil,” an actress at the Comédie-Française, “a

⁶⁷ Most notably in Darnton's “High Enlightenment” and “Two Paths”; Brown's “Low Life” and *A Field of Honor*; and McMahon's *Enemies of the Enlightenment*. See works cited for complete bibliographic information.

trouvé le secret de s'habiller et coiffer comme Mme Geoffrin (who was at the performance), ce qui a fait beaucoup rire ceux qui connaissent cette dame" (qtd. by Showalter 110).

Most critics pass over the comical aspects of Palissot's work, choosing to focus instead on the philosophical or polemical aspects of Counter-Enlightenment discourse.⁶⁸ Cydalise's refusal to see any merit in older works (when she orders Marton to "ranger Platon") is a form of literary criticism that jars so much with any known eighteenth-century idea of judgment. This ridiculous scene (cited above), in combination with innovative acting and costume techniques, comes forth as one of the play's most comical aspects. Palissot's draws many arguments from Counter-Enlightenment pamphlets that were in circulation during the 1750s, but one cannot forget that Palissot's *Philosophes* was destined for a live audience at the Comédie-Française, and not only the hands of eager readers at the Tuileries or the Café Procope.⁶⁹

While many of Palissot's criticisms specifically attack the encyclopedic project or *philosophe* treatises, some of his comments pertain exactly to the theater. The comical example of the actress Dumesnil dressed as Mme. Geoffrin also has a more serious, profound implication. By dressing up an actor as an actual, living person, Palissot breaks through the fictive wall (what critics refer to as the "quatrième mur" developed in Diderot's *Entretiens sur "Le Fils naturel"* and *Discours sur la poésie dramatique*) that separates the action on stage from the spectators in the audience. Palissot's decorative

⁶⁸ In fact, Christophe Cave is the only contemporary critic who discusses the comical nature of Palissot's play in his article, "Le Rire des anti-philosophes".

⁶⁹ Parisian socialites went to the Tuileries to purchase the latest *brochures* and *pamphlets*, probably on their way to the Café Procope (which happened to be next to the Comédie-Française) to discuss the latest issues in theater, politics, and society.

concerns take a theoretical spin when the attention of spectators breaks away from the narrative and focuses on the extra-scenic correlation between the actress Dumesnil and the real-life *salonnière*, Geoffrin. Here, Palissot challenges Diderot's theories on theater, showing that he prefers a Moliéresque penchant towards ridicule to the *philosophe's* calls for more subtle comedy.⁷⁰

In their erudite history of performance, Christian Biet and Christophe Triau summarize Diderot's theory of the "fourth wall," pointing out how "L'esthétique du quatrième mur...constitue à la fois un outil dramaturgique destiné à l'auteur et une consigne de jeu pour le comédien, qui doivent tous deux s'efforcer d'oublier la présence du public" (229). Palissot was certainly no great fan of Diderot's theories on drama. During the two years before *Les Philosophes'* debut (1758 and 1759), Palissot wrote extensively against Diderot's emerging theories on staging techniques and the *drame* genre. By staging *philosophes* and by writing pamphlets like *Un Supplément d'un grand ouvrage*, Palissot goes in precisely the opposite direction as Diderot and bolsters "la présence du public" by blurring the lines between spectators and actors and by influencing the public through pamphlets before the performance: two strategies that Palissot hopes will further even more his evisceration of the rival camp.

Palissot brings the ideological or theoretical debate between two diametrically opposed groups inside the theatrical world (the narrative of his play) when he argues that *philosophes* wrongly seek to replace traditional concepts with new ones. But also, he

⁷⁰ Molière employed the same "extra-scenic" correlation strategy in his criticism of the abbé Cotin in *Les femmes savantes*. In his comedy, Molière dressed up the character Trissotin in Cotin's traditional religious garb. For more information, consult "Les Femmes Savantes" in Claude Bourqui's *Les sources de Molière: Répertoire critique des sources littéraires et dramatiques*, pp. 334-336.

implicitly makes this point by choosing Moliéresque comedy as the theatrical motor in *Les Philosophes*. Contemporaries such as Voltaire and the abbé de LaPorte were quick in noticing that Palissot lifted lines directly out of Molière's *Les Femmes savantes*.⁷¹ And it is important to note that to "Défendre une conception moliéresque du caractère, du portrait, et de la fonction morale et sociale du théâtre...c'est donc aussi une manière de refuser une idéologie nouvelle" (Cave 237).

By borrowing extensively from Molière's seventeenth-century comedic examples, Palissot asserts a relatively "normal" Counter-Enlightenment argument against *philosophe* ideas of theater: i.e. classical, French style vs. new dramatic ideas from a broader, European mold. But also, by copying from the most performed comedic dramatist during the eighteenth century, Palissot gives the audience a theatrical model with which they must have been accustomed as theater spectators.⁷² This familiarity possibly facilitated an easier transfer of Palissot's Counter-Enlightenment message from the stage to the parterre.

Rather than worrying about a complicated plot, spectators understood that the *philosophes* would eventually be ousted in a traditional restoration of the *bons* over the

⁷¹ Voltaire quickly noticed the link between Palissot and Molière in a June 28 letter to the author of *Les Philosophes* (cited in the *Recueil des faceties parisiennes pour les six premiers mois de l'an 1760*. pp. 260-264 [publ. Par A. Morellet avec préface de Voltaire] Unknown Publication. COTE : Richelieu 8-RJ-2111], and the abbé de La Porte commented on the play's resemblance to *Tartuffe* and *les Femmes savantes* in the *Observateur littéraire* (Paris: t.III, 1760, pp. 120-121)

⁷² Molière's enduring influence during the eighteenth century cannot be understated. Voltaire himself modeled several comedies after the great classical playwright, including *L'Indiscret* (1725), *L'Envieux* (1738), et *La Prude* (1739). In addition, the Comédie-Française continued to keep several Molière comedies in their current repertoire, including *Tartuffe* and *L'Ecole des femmes*.

méchants.⁷³ This acquaintance with a known narrative framework allowed spectators to then concentrate more on the comedic and polemical dialogues of the play: if the audience is not required to focus on the overall outline of the narrative, individual scenes and precise citations easily draw more attention. This tactic bolsters the overall importance of the particular, live event and facilitates the “transfer of the text into a unique product”—a phenomenon that characterizes theatrical performance (Eagleton 48).

When Cydalise chooses to read contemporary sources instead of Plato, Palissot keeps his enunciated argumentation inside the philosophical frame (sources of knowledge from antiquity vs. the eighteenth-century *Encyclopédie*). But we can turn from epistemology to theater and argue that Palissot’s criticism applies equally to the *philosophe* abandonment of the Molièresque tradition in comedy, the Racinian form in tragedy and the adoption by Diderot and others of the *drame* and the *comédie larmoyante*. Palissot criticizes new playwrights for trying to break away from the pillars of the dramatic arts. Here, we can see where Palissot’s work detaches from pure philosophical *querelle* and enters into the dramatic realm. Throughout the rest of the play, Palissot parallels his staged pamphleteering of anti-*philosophe* social principles with more nuanced digs inside the world of theater—a tactic that exemplifies the close relationship between society and the dramatic arts during this time.

The Power of Love: Palissot, Diderot, and Marivaux

The battle between classical theater and emerging notions of the *drame* continues during the last two scenes of the first act. Here, Palissot once again pits two competing

⁷³ Naugrette points out that eighteenth-century audiences would not have imagined any other type of ending, and that, “le spectateur, sachant qu’il assiste à une comédie, sait aussi que l’équité sera rétablie *in fine*, que le vice sera puni, que les barbons seront joués et que les jeunes premiers parviendront à leurs fins” (146).

philosophies against each other and asserts the vision of theorists from outside of the *philosophe* camp. In Palissot's play, there is a very fine line between criticisms of philosophy and criticisms of drama, and if we keep in mind Palissot's stark demarcation between Molière's and Diderot's visions of comedy, we can see how, once again, theatrical arguments emerge from more explicitly philosophical subjects. In the following example from scene v, Cydalise contrasts her own manifestation of detached *raison* against her daughter Rosalie's uncontrollable romantic feelings:

Cydalise:

Vous êtes belle et sage,
Rosalie, et pour vous j'eus toujours des bontés.
Je vais connaître enfin si vous les méritez.
Je ne consulte point ce sentiment vulgaire,
Amour de préjugé, trivial, populaire,
Que l'on croit émané du sang qui parle en nous,
Et qui n'est, dans le fond, qu'un mensonge assez doux,
Une faiblesse...

Rosalie:

Hé quoi! la voix de la nature,
Quoi! cette impression si touchante et si pure,
Ce premier des devoirs, cet auguste lien,
(Je définirai mal ce que je sens si bien,)
N'importe, se peut-il que le cœur de ma mère,
Méconnaisse aujourd'hui ce sacré caractère? (1.5)

This philosophical disagreement on love between a mother and her daughter highlights important tensions in Palissot's play; and once again, the playwright's criticism shows both inter- and extra-theatrical elements. First, Palissot favors Rosalie's philosophy of the senses ("la voix de la nature") over Cydalise's (and the *philosophes*') physically detached *raison*.

For a third time, Cydalise's support of a concept connotes Palissot's disapproval. Despite her inability to master linguistically how she feels ("Je définirai mal ce que je

sens...”), Rosalie’s physical sensations determine how she solves problems and interacts with those around her. Conversely, Cydalise favors a logical determinism that favors the sublimation of physical sensations into academic reasoning, creative processes (like writing a novel), and self-interest. Cydalise warns Rosalie against her daughter’s “sentiments vulgaires,” and implies that love is nothing more than a dangerous lie. With this discussion between his two female characters, Palissot draws a binary picture of the mid-eighteenth-century woman: on the one hand there is the detached, (and ultimately) wrong logician; and on the other hand, the passionate and sensitive virgin who understands what is right but must rely on others to resolve her problems.

Palissot’s demonstration of love’s complex tensions might have its origins in the theatrical realm. Throughout the play, Palissot lambastes both Diderot’s *Le Fils naturel* and the *philosophe*’s theoretical works on the *drame*. The playwright draws an implicit parallel between Cydalise, the powerful and *raisonnable* female character, and Diderot’s Constance, who serves a similar role in *Le Fils naturel*.⁷⁴ Although there are clear differences between the two (in Diderot’s work, Constance is overwhelmingly portrayed in a positive light whereas Palissot’s Cydalise is consistently ridiculed), both characters direct the moral course of the estate and favor the sublimation of physical desire into a reasonable plan.

During the *dénouement* of the play, Palissot will prove that Cydalise’s thoughts on love are incorrectly slanted because of *philosophe* influence and that Rosalie’s more physically determined idea of sentiment catalyzes characters into making the right

⁷⁴ Although the characters differ radically in their enunciated dialogues, both focus on organizing a successful family structure. Moreover, both Constance and Cydalise care for a less-powerful female character named Rosalie.

decisions. Damis formulates the plan to rid the estate of the *philosophes* because he loves Rosalie, and not because of any hopes to teach a different form of philosophy, or because of any strong socioliterary concerns. Once again, Palissot's criticisms emerge on both enunciated (philosophical quarrel on reason and love) and more hidden levels, or, as obvious citations of works, pamphlets, and personalities on one hand; and nuanced theatrical phenomena on another.

An eighteenth-century theatergoer would have been accustomed to seeing the theatricalization of binary arguments about love on stage. Palissot's argument that the physical spark of love catalyzes the successful dénouement of the comedy strongly parallels Marivaux's conception of romantic sentiment. Historically, we know from Palissot's critical edition of Voltaire's *Oeuvres complètes* (1792) that the former anti-*philosophe* (always the opportunist, Palissot had since switched "teams") enjoyed Marivaudian comedy. In his "Critical Edition" of Voltaire's *L'Ecossoise*, Palissot praises one of the protagonist's (Lindane) lines from act I, scene vi because it sounded like it was lifted directly from Marivaux (qtd. by Duckworth, "Introduction" 383).

Another link between Marivaux and Palissot comes forth in the latter's 1757 pamphlet against *Le Fils naturel*. In the *Supplément d'une importante ouvrage*, Palissot ridicules Diderot's play for failing to exude primordial passions such as grief and love. In a diatribe on Diderot's *drame*, Palissot mockingly renames *Le Fils naturel*, "*Le Triomphe de l'enthousiasme*" (44)—a fact that possibly indicates Palissot's desire to satirically contrast Diderot's *drame* with Marivaux's *Triomphe de l'amour*. But most importantly, we can perhaps bring to light the philosophical affinity between Palissot and Marivaux, best illustrated in Marivaux's *Le Triomphe*, and more specifically, when Léonide, the

female protagonist, organizes an entire social plan around her original romantic feelings for the prince, Agis.⁷⁵

In Marivaux's comedy, Léonide wages her faith in the power of love against the cold reasoning of Hermocrate, a local *philosophe*, and ultimately wins at the end of the story.⁷⁶ In a similar fashion, Palissot's Rosalie refuses to relinquish her love for Damis and overcomes adversity from the rival *philosophe* camp. Analogously to how Léonide proves that Hermocrate's cold reasoning is nothing more than a hypocritical farce, Damis and Rosalie show that their romantic bond—a link that escapes linguistic mastery—is stronger than Cydalise's "false" call to a more cooled and explainable logic.

Palissot's use of Marivaudian themes once again bolsters his pedagogical mission to debunk *philosophe* ideas. Through his theater, Palissot hopes to teach spectators about the true nature of love, and by paralleling Marivaux, Palissot provides an excellent "source" that spectators could easily understand. Paradoxically, this didactic strategy dialogues with Diderot's call to use the *drame* as a pedagogical tool. Quoting from Diderot's *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*, Anne Boës points out that theater "est un instrument efficace du pouvoir parce qu'il a un retentissement auprès du peuple. Son 'effet' doit donc avoir une utilité morale et pédagogique" (56). With *Les Philosophes*, it does not seem that Palissot would disagree with Diderot on this point. By using the work of the most popular comic dramatist alive in 1760, Palissot boosts the pedagogical message of his play by providing a credible source on theatrical love.

⁷⁵ Marivaux, Pierre de. *Le Triomphe de l'amour*. (1732) Paris, GF Flammarion, 1989.

⁷⁶ I explore Léonide's efforts to organize a society around her in more depth in a recent article in *Eighteenth-Century Women* (see "Works Cited" for complete bibliographical listing).

In Marivaux's *Le Triomphe de l'Amour*, Léonide puts forth a romantically based social plan from the onset of the play. Similarly, romantic philosophy enters the plot of Palissot's comedy by the end of the first act. During the final scenes of act one, Marton (the house servant) and Damis form a plan to woo Rosalie back into the latter's arms and oust the pesky *philosophes* from the estate. In short, they hope to pit their philosophy of love against the *philosophe*'s assertion of reason. Marton explains the ruse in more detail: "Venez, et nous verrons si la philosophie,/Quel que soit son crédit, pourra dans ce grand jour/Tenir contre Marton, et Crispin, et l'amour!" (1.6). What follows in the next two acts is not difficult to predict. Damis and Marton formulate a clever way to expose *philosophe* hypocrisy and win Rosalie back into Damis' arms. And following the Palissot's strategy of attacks against Diderot and other *philosophes*, the two characters inside the play depend on a complex relationship between overt denunciation and hidden messages to drive out Valère and his cohort.

Narrative, Texts, and Performance in the Dénouement of *Les Philosophes*

Most of the action in the play takes place during the third and final act. Damis, Marton, and Crispin (a book seller, or *colporteur*) create a plan that they hope will expose the *philosophes* as self-indulgent hypocrites, force Valère and his cohort out of the estate, and woo Cydalise and Rosalie back into Damis' more "sensible" way of thinking. In the final act, Palissot's staging of written documents, as well as his use of narrative and performative elements of criticism, emerges as paramount to the playwright's continuous condemnation of the *philosophes*. In addition, the interplay between audio-visual event and text serves an important role during the final scenes of Palissot's play. By the end, text and performance blur into a polysemic haze which more than hints at a unique

dramaturgy. But first, Palissot continues to condemn specific works by Diderot and Rousseau with even more fervor than in the previous two acts.

In act 3 scene iv, Palissot steals a line directly from *Le Fils naturel*, when Cydalise exclaims: “Je devrais le gronder, son esprit me désarme;/On ne peut y tenir et *je suis sous le charme*” (3.4, emphasis added).⁷⁷ This criticism parallels Palissot’s earlier critiques of *philosophe* didacticism and is similar to the playwright’s previous tip of the hat towards learned members of the audience. Palissot admits that Diderot and Rousseau are very persuasive, and almost enchanting, which makes their dissemination of *philosophe* ideals all the more insidious. But by quoting from Diderot’s play, Palissot implicitly criticizes the *philosophe*’s *drame* once again. Later in this scene, Palissot changes from subtle critiques on Diderot’s theater to overt attack, ridiculing the writer’s conception of a “genre purement domestique.” Finally, to complement his dig at Diderot, Palissot inserts an enunciated reference to Molière (as if the connection was not obvious enough already!), his own inspiration and source for the construction of *Les Philosophes*.

During the play, Palissot continually pits a Molièresque vision of comedy (and his own) against the *drame* and other forms of theater favored by *philosophes*. In this third act, however, Palissot gives his play a personal touch with an innovative mirroring effect. Palissot stages a version of *Les Philosophes*—and its reception—inside the theatrical space:

Valère:
Certain auteur dans une comédie,
Veut, dit-on, nous jouer.

Cydalise:

⁷⁷ The original line reads “Je m’écria, Presque sans le vouloir, il est sous le charme” (Diderot, *Le Fils naturel* 168).

L'entreprise est hardie.

Dortidius, *avec feu*:

Nous jouer! Mais vraiment, c'est un crime d'État;

Nous jouer!

Valère:

Nous saurons parer cet attentat. (3.1)

In this short encounter, Palissot praises himself and his supporters while at the same time continuing his criticism of the *philosophes*. After already having denounced the State as unimportant and beneath their interests, the *philosophes* now will have to rely on government officials to censure the premiere of a “certain author’s” play. Palissot, once again, seeks to draw out the hypocritical paradox between *philosophe* words and actions. But this time, instead of overt citation, Palissot makes a clever meta-theatrical comment—a reflection on what will happen in “real life” after the performance of *Les Philosophes*—hypothesizing on how the *philosophes* will act after they see themselves on stage.⁷⁸

The playwright’s mise-en-scene of themes such as the power of the censure, audience reactions to performance, and critical reception more than hint at a close proximity between the theatrical and “actual” timeframe. Palissot, like in the case of his previous prediction of *philosophe* solidarity, foreshadows his rival camp’s behavior. While discussing what the *philosophes* should do to mitigate the potential popularity of a play in which they are ridiculed, Valère comes up with the idea to stage a comedy of their

⁷⁸ Palissot’s innovation with this scene lies in his staging of theater *reception* (how the *philosophes* will respond to *Les Philosophes*) rather than a mere “performance-in-a play”—a strategy that was explored by seventeenth-century dramatists like Molière and Racine. For more information on the staging of the “performance-in-a play” see Kimberly Cashman’s adeptly named monograph, *Staging Subversions: The Performance-within-a-Play in French Classical Theater*, or Georges Forestier’s *Le Théâtre dans le théâtre sur la scène française du XVIIe siècle*.

own and to ensure its success through critical manipulation. The *philosophe* states that he and his cohort will “ferons un bruit à rendre les gens sourds./ Nous avons des amis, qui de loges en loges,/Vont crier au miracle, et forcer les éloges/N’avons-nous pas d’ailleurs le succès des soupers?” (3.8).

A few months after *Les Philosophes*’ overwhelmingly successful premiere at the Comédie-Française, Voltaire staged his *L’Ecossoise* at the same venue. As a polemical riposte to Palissot’s Counter-Enlightenment comedy, Voltaire’s play caused a similar receptive *bruit*. Part of the play’s popularity, as we shall see, stems from the fusion of former rivals inside the *philosophe* camp and their eventual cooperation at the time of *L’Ecossoise*’s performance. Chapter three of this dissertation discusses how extra-scenic dramaturgy—a concerted choreography during the performance—helped contribute to exactly the sort of raucous public reception (of Voltaire’s play) that Palissot so adeptly predicts in the above passage.

The final three scenes of *Les Philosophes* (3.9-3.11) best illustrate Palissot’s complex representation of both performative and textual aspects in his criticism of the *philosophes*. Damis and Marton devise a two-pronged attack to expose the *philosophes* as inept charlatans and mean-spirited hypocrites. First, they convince Crispin, the local *colporteur*, to pretend that he is a “wild man” from the “state of nature,” and to then emerge from the woods surrounding the estate. With this dramaturgical event, Palissot makes a reference to Rousseau’s *Discours sur l’inégalité des hommes*.⁷⁹ He also compounds this more subtle attack with continued overt denunciation. For example,

⁷⁹ Rousseau’s *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* was the *genevois*’ response to question on inequality posed by the Académie of Dijon in 1753. In his response, Rousseau argued that man had since degenerated from an original state of nature because of the inequalities inherent to the modern political system.

Cydalise, Valère, and another *philosophe*, Théophraste, discuss their favorite readings, including Rousseau's 1755 work:

Cydalise:
Ah! Je relirai donc mon livre favori!

Valère:
Quoi! l'*Inégalité*. C'est bien le mien aussi.

Théophraste:
Ce livre est un trésor; il réduit tous les homes
Au rang des animaux, et c'est ce que nous sommes.
L'homme s'est fait esclave en se donnant des lois,
Et tout n'irait que mieux, s'il vivait dans les bois.

Cydalise:
Pour moi, je goûterais une volupté pure
À nous voir tous rentrer dans l'état de nature. (3.8)

Palissot repeats (for the fifth time!) the theme of Cydalise's approval as his condemnation. Once again, Palissot provides fodder to members of the audience who have read Rousseau's controversial treatise as well as to less inclined spectators who easily perceive Cydalise's idiocy. And to further bolster his critique of Rousseau, Palissot adds a pantomimic scene, where Crispin silently enters the stage on all fours,⁸⁰ eating a piece of lettuce.⁸¹

⁸⁰ To add even more complexity to his attack, the image of Rousseau on "quatre pattes" could be a reference to a letter from Voltaire to the famous *citoyen de Genève*, in which Voltaire makes the following comment about Rousseau's *Discours*: "J'ai reçu, Monsieur, votre nouveau livre contre le genre humain; je vous en remercie; vous plairez aux hommes à qui vous dites leurs vérités, et vous ne les corrigerez pas. Vous peignez avec des couleurs bien vraies les horreurs de la société humaine dont l'ignorance et la faiblesse se promettent tant de douceurs. On n'a jamais employé tant d'esprit à vouloir nous rendre Bêtes. *Il prend envie de marcher à quatre pattes quand on lit votre ouvrage*" (*Correspondance de Voltaire*: August 30, 1755). If we read Palissot's Jean-Jacques pantomime in this vein, we can perceive yet another way by which Palissot hoped to drive a wedge between Voltaire and other *philosophes*.

⁸¹ This was by far the most polemical scene in the play and the one which caused the greatest public uproar. In his Pléiade edition of *Les Philosophes*, Jacques Truchet points

With this example, Palissot steps outside of the binary receptive techniques that he has employed throughout the play: the pantomime scene surpasses both overt citation and Palissot's disparaging remarks against the *philosophes* through his characters' words. Not only does Palissot criticize the *philosophe* essay through textual reference and the enunciated dialogues of his characters, he manifests his disapproval through dramaturgical devices. This scene will assert itself as the most popular of the play and will be discussed by writers such as Fréron and Voltaire for years to come.⁸²

Moreover, the fact that Palissot (with Fréron's help)⁸³ specifically chose the actor Prévile to play the role of Crispin shows the playwright's interest in acting—a relatively modern theatrical concern during this era. Prévile was one of the most well-known actors of the period, and it certainly seems bizarre that he would have carried out a role with no lines and one, single, scene. While scholars have noted that playwrights of the *drame* incorporated concerns about acting into their dramaturgy and that authors like “Diderot refuse de séparer écriture et représentation. Sa sensibilité personnelle, son expérience de spectateur lui montraient que l'acteur est le cœur même de l'incarnation théâtrale, le foyer de ce phénomène,” (Roubine 67) this sensibility is rarely attributed during this period to writers from outside the Diderotian sphere (and certainly not to any of his most ardent adversaries !).

out that the pantomimic scene was removed cut from the performance when the comedy was replayed in 1782 (*Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle* 1388).

⁸² The pantomimic scene becomes metonymic for the play in general and later during the eighteenth century, *Les Philosophes* is often referred to as the play where J.J. Rousseau walks on all-fours.

⁸³ In his *Journal*, the critic Charles Collé notes that it was “Fréron qui a présenté et lu cette pièce [*Les Philosophes*] aux comédiens” (t. II 350).

Most of the criticisms made by Palissot during his play echo Counter-Enlightenment pamphlets from the late 1750s and early 1760s. However, by staging Crispin on all fours and insisting that the popular actor Prévaille play the role, Palissot brings anti-*philosophe* criticism into the modern theatrical space through the popular (even Diderotian!) techniques of pantomime and emphasis on acting. Pantomime as a dramaturgical technique gained more and more visibility throughout the eighteenth century, and we can possibly analyze Palissot's pantomime against the backdrop of larger debates in dramatic theory during this period.

Already in 1757, with his "Lettre à Dorval," Palissot questioned Diderot's claim to novelty in pantomime:

Oserai-je cependant vous dire que je crois avoir découvert quelques traces de ce nouveau genre dans Molière? Voyez *les Fourberies de Scapin*, *le Malade imaginaire*, *les Précieuses ridicules*, *Pourreagnac*, la Pantomime m'y paraît quelquefois indiquée, faiblement, à la vérité ; l'art était dans [48] son enfance, il n'apparaît qu'à vous de le porter à sa perfection ("Lettre à Dorval" in *Supplément d'un important ouvrage*, 47-48).

Once again Molière finds his way into the Palissot vs. Diderot debate. According to Palissot, the famous seventeenth-century comic dramatist used pantomime well before Diderot attached significance to the action in his dramaturgical theories and *drames*.

In his seminal work on the *drame*, *L'Esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*, Pierre Frantz focuses more on eighteenth-century notions of pantomime by emphasizing the importance of silence in Diderot's dramaturgy. Frantz points out that for Diderot, "Le verbe est lié aux signes, voix et graphèmes qui le manifestent. Et les signes de la langue, parole et écriture, ne sont pas privilégiés par rapport aux gestes et autres signes purement visuels" (25). By using pantomime, Palissot hints at this vitality of

silence—a uniquely Diderotian conception of theater that seeks to replace certain dramatic utterances with silent, gestural actions by the characters on stage.

But in *Les Philosophes*, Palissot breaks the silent pantomimic scene with bursts of laughter from the audience, who no doubt would have found utterly ridiculous a scene with Crispin on all fours, munching on a leaf of lettuce. Palissot incorporates a modern, apropos, Diderotian concept into his play, but then quickly “breaks” the effect with more mockery and *bas comédie*. While Palissot’s philosophical viewpoints assert little more than a reactionary bent, his theatrical composition, at times, whispers elements of modernity and an acute knowledge of (and refutation of) contemporary dramatic theories and practices. In sum, Palissot refuses to pay credence to Diderot’s more serious conception of pantomime and reifies the practice’s more jovial connotations in Molière’s comedy, or more recently, in Paris’ various *foires*.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, the importance of polemical texts cannot be understated in Palissot’s work; and throughout the comedy, textual citation serves as one of the playwright’s main vehicles for criticizing *philosophes*. During the final scene, however, the “place” of the text moves from a strictly quotation-based critical function, enters the narration of the play, and emerges as necessary for the dramatic dénouement. After revealing the truth that Crispin is nothing more than a local salesman and not a philosophical example of the state of nature, Damis plunges another sword into Valère by exposing a bit of the latter’s literary criticism. Earlier in the play, Damis had found a letter revealing Valère’s true opinion of Cydalise’s novel. The young hero Damis then

⁸⁴ For more information on how pantomime was incorporated into the various productions at France’s *foires*, consult Isabelle Martin’s *Le Théâtre de la Foire: Des tréteaux aux boulevards*, and more specifically, her chapter on “Les techniques théâtrales” at the *Foire*, pp. 157-196.

makes sure that his hopeful mother-in-law finds the document, and in a moment of personal embarrassment, Cydalise reads the letter aloud:

Cydalise:

Je te renvoie, mon cher Frontin, ce recueil d'impertinences que Cydalise appelle son livre. Continue de flatter cette folle, à qui ton nom savant en impose. Théophraste et Dortidius viennent de me communiquer un projet excellent qui achèvera de lui tourner la tête, et pour le succès duquel tu nous seras nécessaire. Ses ridicules, ses travers, ses... (3.11)

Cydalise is unable to finish reading the letter as her anguish begins to inhibit her ability to speak: the *philosophes* are “démasqués” and forced to leave the estate immediately (3.11). The text (letter) is paramount to both the final revelation of the *philosophes* as charlatans and the dramatic dénouement, which brings Damis and Rosalie happily together in matrimony. The document effectively ends *philosophe* control of the estate and secures a successful future for Damis and Rosalie. And from the spectator's perspective, Cydalise's reading of the text provides the only break in the alexandrine rhythm of the play—a tonal change in the performance—and a precise moment which must have heightened the audience's attention to the character's speech.

During the last few scenes in his play, Palissot attacks his encyclopedic rivals through text and performance—or, through carefully cited *philosophe* works and performative ruses inherent to the theatrical experience. Texts are vital to a successful ending for the “bons,” just like pamphlets prove essential in Palissot attempt to “unmask” real-life *philosophes*. Inside of the text/performance recipe, Palissot combines sociopolitical and aesthetic criticisms of *philosophes*. The dramaturge writes for his readership and his live audience, fully encompassing both aspects of eighteenth-century dramatic writing.

Because of the bombardment of Counter-Enlightenment pamphlets during the 1750s, Palissot's audience was preconditioned to some of the textual criticisms of *philosophe* works made by the dramatist during the performance. But Palissot blends audience conditioning with a direct call to their senses through the narrative of the play. These dialogical criticisms are made through the voices of Damis, Valère and other characters; and then even more, through performative phenomena such as Palissot's pantomimic experience *cum* criticism, or the design of Cydalise's costume to shadow the real-life Madame Geoffrin.

Scholars are correct in marking *Les Philosophes* as an important event in the ongoing pamphlet quarrel from 1750 to 1770.⁸⁵ But one cannot understate the singularity of Palissot's theatrical work, and more specifically, his adept attention to dramatic phenomena and his creation of a polemical event inside of theater. Palissot's multifaceted critical approach underlines his inherent desire to create a receptive event—an aspiration to *faire date*. The playwright takes into account the sociological makeup of his audience, and whether or not these sociological differences actually existed pales in importance to Palissot's (and other eighteenth-century dramatists') belief in their existence. In *Les Philosophes*, Palissot gives each group exactly what he thinks they want (or precisely what they don't want!).

⁸⁵ O. Ferret treats *Les Philosophes* as one of the most important events of the *querelle* between 1750 and 1770 in his book, *La Fureur de Nuire*. Also, Robert Darnton highlights the urgency that *philosophes* must have felt during this precise year: "In 1760, when Morellet went to the Bastille for writing a reply to Palissot's comedy *Les Philosophes*, it looked as though the whole movement might be crushed" (Darnton, "'Two paths through the social history of ideas" p. 278).

Lastly, Palissot's dramaturgical construction hints at a distinct cross-pollination of both written sources and narrato-dramatic effects. Palissot, as a dramatist, brings the pamphlet debate between anti-*philosophes* and *philosophes* into the Republic of Letters as he incorporates a significant amount of aesthetic concerns into his attack. In short, Palissot, possibly more than any previous playwright, places polemics metaphorically and literally onto the main stage of the *belles lettres*.

Although differences exist between Palissot's work and Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise*, a similar interplay between written materials and performative phenomena emerges as paramount in Voltaire's *philosophe* riposte. In *Les Philosophes*, the debate moves ambiguously between pamphlets and performance. In the following example from Voltaire's theatrical corpus, we will continue to trace the philosophical debate, and see how the famous *philosophe* attempts to *faire date* by establishing an even closer proximity among performances, texts, and current events in his sentimental comedy, *L'Ecossaise*.

CHAPTER TWO: VOLTAIRE'S *L'ECOSSAISE*

Desperate Times Call for Desperate Measures: Counter-Enlightenment Fervor and the Summer of 1760

In the previous chapter, we examined the way Charles Palissot combines textual quotations, narrative elements, and performance to create a multifaceted attack against *philosophes*—and particularly—against Denis Diderot and the nascent *drame*. In his comedy, *Les Philosophes*, Palissot addresses both a live audience and a literary readership in a process that blends the generic line between dramatic work and polemical pamphlet. A loud, boisterous event at the Comédie-Française resulted from Palissot's multi-modal effort.

By using a complex strategy of different narrative and textual attacks, Palissot attempts to give each spectator the means to fully appreciate his scathing criticisms of contemporary *philosophes*. With this approach, Palissot assigns some members of the audience precise textual attacks to follow against *philosophe* works and personalities, while at the same time, he provides less philosophically inclined spectators the means to understand anti-*philosophe* attacks through an easy-to-follow story, which denounces the *méchants* and bolsters the *bons*.

This interplay among texts, dramatic narrative, and performance perhaps led to the more energized spectator recorded in the eyewitness accounts of *Les Philosophes*' opening night.⁸⁶ By moving the discussion from pamphlets to the Comédie-Française, Palissot brings Counter-Enlightenment polemics into the theatrical realm, to a

⁸⁶ See the introduction to chapter one for a more detailed account of the atmosphere surrounding the premiere of Palissot's *Les Philosophes*.

quantitatively larger audience, and to the literal and metaphoric center stage of the Republic of Letters.

Counter-Enlightenment fervency may have peaked during the months leading up to Palissot's *Les Philosophes*—a dangerous possibility that *philosophes* could not afford to ignore. In his history of dramatic criticism, Maurice Descotes attests to the precipitous nature of this precise period for Voltaire and other *philosophes*:

Les années 1758-1759 marquent une étape dans la lutte engagée parce que, à cette date, la partie n'est pas encore gagnée par la *secte* [philosophes] et parce que, les forces antagonistes s'équilibrant à peu près, l'avantage peut encore passer d'un camp à l'autre. Une décade plus tard, au contraire, il sera évident que les partisans de la tradition sont débordés de façon à peu près irrémédiable. (*Histoire de la critique dramatique* 153)

After 1770, enough *philosophes* had manipulated themselves into comfortable *fauteuils* at the Académie Française—a process that had already been put into motion as early as the 1760s, when *philosophes* started to gain access to the Académie Française with increasing rapidity.

In order to understand the ideological climate at the time of Palissot's debut, it is important to note that only Voltaire (elected in 1746), Duclos (1747), and D'Alembert (1754) enjoyed the social and financial incentives of a chair at the Académie. This relative insignificance at the prestigious institution in 1760 contrasts with a subsequent “snowballing” effect of *philosophe* elections starting with Marmontel in 1763, Antoine-Léonard Thomas in 1767, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac in 1768, Jean-Baptiste Suard in 1774, Guillaume-Chrétien de Malesherbes in 1775, the marquis de Chastelux in 1775, Jean-François de la Harpe in 1776, Nicolas Chamfort in 1781, and the marquis de

Condorcet in 1782.⁸⁷ If *Les Philosophes* had premiered during the 1770s, or certainly during the 1780s, real-life *philosophes* would have probably laughed off Palissot's theatrical attack and viewed it as nothing more than a simplistic ruse by a bitter literary hack.

But in 1760, however, the battle had yet to be won, and *philosophes* worried about a possible convergence against them of political, religious, and literary forces. Palissot had moved the war from pamphlets, prefaces, and calls to the censure to one of the most famous European stages—and Voltaire's group had to do the same. *Philosophes* such as Grimm and D'Alembert recognized the necessity of a quick response to Palissot's play and urged Voltaire toward revenge "by pointing out that the only 'protecteur déclaré' of *Les Philosophes* was his own arch-enemy, Fréron" (Duckworth, *Introduction* 247).

Voltaire, not wanting to disappoint the two *encyclopédistes* and possibly in search of a venue to manifest his anger toward an old enemy like Fréron, responded indeed. According to the Chevalier Mouhy's report, on July 26 1760, the Comédie-Française staged Voltaire's *L'Ecossoise*—a play that, "n'a jamais fait plus de bruit, ni n'a été plus suivie et essuyé tant de critiques" (cited in Duckworth, 261). *Bruit pour bruit*, the second phase of the theatrical battle between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* had begun.

Revenge or Coincidence? Some Historical Considerations on the Performance of *L'Ecossoise*

In his riposte to Palissot, Voltaire follows his adversary's lead by combining intertextual, narrative, and performative techniques into an exemplary demonstration of

⁸⁷ For more information on the chronology of *philosophes* at the Académie Française, see the "Introduction" to Darrin McMahon's *Enemies of Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity*, p. 7.

contemporary polemics. But the word “revenge” is misleading when scholars at present or Voltaire’s contemporaries discuss the relationship between Voltaire’s comedy and Palissot’s *Les Philosophes*. In his critical edition of *L’Ecossoise*, Colin Duckworth follows the genesis of the play with astute accuracy, pointing out that Voltaire’s comedy was not a direct response to Palissot. Although the precise dates when Voltaire began to construct his play (sometime in 1759) are difficult to discern, Duckworth argues that *L’Ecossoise* was never intended to be performed when Voltaire composed the piece, and that the play found a stage only after Palissot’s original attack (Duckworth, “Introduction” 225). Confirming Duckworth’s analysis of the play’s genesis, Jack Yashinsky argues that even though Voltaire wrote a first draft of the play as early as 1759, he only started reworking the play during spring of 1760—after hearing about rehearsals of Palissot’s comedy at the Comédie-Française (256).

Backing up Yashinsky’s link between the two performances, several critics argue that Voltaire’s play would have never passed the Royal censure if Palissot’s play had not already been allowed to see the stage at the Comédie-Française (Duckworth, “Introduction”; Ferret, “Introduction to *Les Philosophes*”). With these indications in mind, it is still valid to assert that Voltaire’s play was an act of *philosophe* revenge. Even though some elements in Voltaire’s narrative may have found their genesis outside of the polemical debate with anti-*philosophes*, the *performance* of *L’Ecossoise* was a direct response to the *performance* of *Les Philosophes*.

In analyzing *L’Ecossoise*’s dramatic composition, we are faced with an anomaly that jars with the norms of eighteenth-century theater. Contrary to *Tancrède* (Voltaire’s other play at the Comédie-Française in 1760), *L’Ecossoise* was not an effort in pure

dramaturgy—it was not destined for immediate performance—and it found its genesis in extra-theatrical sources like pamphlets and literary criticism, as well as in previous dramatic examples.⁸⁸

Owing to the urgency surrounding the play's performance, the *preconditioning* of audience members plays an even more central role than in the case of Palissot's *Les Philosophes*. With the level of anti-*philosophie* in France at an all time high, Voltaire hastily needed a receptive audience even before his play went up on the boards of the Comédie-Française.⁸⁹ When *L'Ecossaise* opened, parodies of Palissot's *Les Philosophes* were already on stage at the Comédie-Italienne, the Passy Theater, and other Parisian venues.⁹⁰ In addition, authorities had recently sent the abbé Morellet to jail in June 1760 for his *La Vision de Charles Palissot*, a scathing pamphlet against Palissot.

Learning from Morellet's legal troubles, *philosophes* recognized the need to encode their revenge in a subtler manner than obvious denunciation; but at the same time, they had to make their point accessible to the greatest amount of people in order to have any meaningful impact against their enemies. Recognizing the popularity of drama as a vehicle for social and ethical didactics, Voltaire and his cohort turned to theatrical

⁸⁸ "Pure dramaturgy" was the norm throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In her work on performance, Florence Naugrette points out that the vast majority of dramatists, from Shakespeare to Molière, always performed their works before publishing them (38). This is also the case for every other play by Voltaire, except for his 1758 work, *Socrate*.

⁸⁹ In his study on the literary staging of public opinion in eighteenth-century France, Nicolas Veysman summarizes the difficulties endured by *philosophes* during this precise period. According to Veysman, the years 1758 and 1759 saw the "suppression du privilege accordé à l'*Encyclopédie*, condamnation de l'*Emile*, [et] de *De l'esprit* (*Mise en scène de l'opinion publique* 51).

⁹⁰ Versions of the *Les Philosophes* were also at *foires* such as St. Laurent and St. Germain.

performance. Voltaire responded with an attack of his own that places both Counter-Enlightenment arguments and their mechanisms for dissemination on stage.

In the pages that follow, I will describe the content of Voltaire's response to the Counter-Enlightenment in his comedy, *L'Ecossaise*, as well as show how he formulates these attacks through intertextuality, narrative (or storyline) techniques, and performance. But what is more, I hope to highlight certain literary and cultural practices that come into play in Voltaire's dramatic work, and again, show a close proximity between society and theater, dramatist and pamphleteer, or journalist and playwright.

In addition to criticizing general philosophical principles, Voltaire attacks the practice of Counter-Enlightenment pamphleteering and anti-*philosophe* notions of literature. Through a close reading of *L'Ecossaise*, I hope to both broaden and deepen the scope of the theatricalized polemic between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes*. Then, by using these two plays as a lens, we may be able to perceive new relationships among performance, polemics and writing that culminated during the summer of 1760. The theatrical genre, as we shall see, materializes as a powerful tool for persuading the spectator or reader. As we follow a debate that began in pamphlets during the 1750s, moved onto center stage in 1760, and then took on more surreptitious theatrical forms during the next decade—we will keep in mind the vital energy of theater, and specifically, the genre's ability to incorporate various visual, auditory, and narrative elements into one "event."

Preconditioning the Spectator with Pamphlets: Voltaire's *À Messieurs les parisiens*

In our analysis of *Les Philosophes*, we saw how pamphlets from the late 1750s preconditioned certain audience members for the performance of Palissot's play.⁹¹ With knowledge of events such as the *Cacouacs* affair or Moreau's diatribe against Voltaire, learned members of the Republic of Letters were able to recognize specific Counter-Enlightenment arguments against *philosophes* during the performance of *Les Philosophes*.⁹² Voltaire's response, *Le Caffé ou l'écossaise*, was staged at the Comédie-Française on July 26 1760—a few weeks after Palissot's comedy had run its course. Not one to be outdone by his adversaries, Voltaire goes even further in his attempt to precondition his spectators than Palissot by publishing a pamphlet just one night before the opening of *L'Écossaise*. This change in the strategic function of the pamphlet is important: whereas Palissot merely incorporated arguments from polemical *brochures* into his dramatic narrative, Voltaire integrates pamphlets into his pre-performance strategy, utilizing them purposefully before his play hits the boards.

In *À Messieurs les parisiens*, Voltaire rekindles the polemic surrounding the Pompignan affair,⁹³ and harks back to the story of Socrates' unjust persecution by the

⁹¹ For example, Palissot used identical lines from pamphlets that appeared during the *Cacouacs* affair. For more information, see chapter one of this dissertation.

⁹² In short, the “Cacouacs” was a derogatory name for the *philosophes*. The affair attacked members of the *encyclopédie* project, denouncing it as an “entreprise de subversion qui trahit les intérêts de la France et ruine les notions de famille, de patrie, de religion (1758)” (Descotes 140). For a more detailed description of Counter-Enlightenment pamphlets during the late 1750s, see Olivier Ferret's *La Fureur de nuire*, pp. 289-292.

⁹³ This refers to the battle between Voltaire and Le Franc de Pompignan after the latter's polemical, anti-*philosophe* reception speech at the Académie Française on March 10 1760. For a detailed account of the affair, see Ferret's *La Fureur de nuire*, pp. 120-140.

Athenians.⁹⁴ The Socratic topos built upon an already existing corpus of *philosophe* pamphlets and unperformed theater. Most recently, Voltaire had explored this *philosophe cum* victim theme in his un-staged play, *Socrates* (1757-1758). And as Jean-Marie Goulemot points out, Diderot employed the same story, writing an *Apologie de Socrate* during his 1749 imprisonment at Vincennes (79).

In Voltaire's *À Messieurs les parisiens*, the *philosophe* focuses his reader's attention on a singular aspect of (the next evening's) the performance: the satirical mise-en-scene of Elie Fréron, the ardent Counter-Enlightenment journalist, pamphleteer, and enemy of the *philosophes*. In the opening passage of the pamphlet, Voltaire uses a fictionalized translator and a healthy dose of irony to describe his character *Frélon*.⁹⁵ Voltaire provides his reader with important information about the next evening's performance with a light-hearted hodgepodge of French and "English":

My dear translator, mon cher traducteur, you have committed many a blunder in yr. Performancée, vous avez fait plusieurs balourdises dans votre traduction: you have quitte impoverish'd the character of Wasp, and you have blotted his chastisement at the end of the drama...vous avez affaibli le caractère de Frélon, et vous avez supprimé son châtiment à la fin de la pièce. (349)

Even before the comedy's premiere, Voltaire attacks the Counter-Enlightenment camp with his play—both *À Messieurs les parisiens* and a textual version of *L'Ecoissaise* were published before the stage performance—thus providing another example of how theatrical productions during the summer of 1760 diverged from eighteenth-century norms. *L'Ecoissaise* was published in Paris before mid-June—some six weeks before its

⁹⁴ *A Messieurs les parisiens* was published most recently in Voltaire's *Oeuvres complètes*, SVEC Vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 347-351.

⁹⁵ It is interesting to note the origins of the neologism *Frélon*. Voltaire created the word out of a combination of the French term for wasp (*Frelon*), and of course, his adversaries last name (Fréron).

initial performance—a rare publication strategy that further confuses the barriers between pamphlets, literature, and performance. Normally, plays were kept in tight circulation, performed, and then published (if a successful performance run was achieved).⁹⁶

In the next chapter, we will examine how *L'Ecossaise*'s publication before the audio-visual event affected spectators and theater critics. But for now, it is merely important to note Voltaire's deviation from publication norms during this time. Writing to Nicholas Thieriot in July 1769, Voltaire describes his innovative strategy of pre-performance publication. According to Voltaire, his efforts before the premiere of *L'Ecossaise* have since served as an example for other dramatists to follow, possibly in order to bolster the receptions of their plays. The *philosophe* points out how it is “actuellement à la mode de faire imprimer les pièces de théâtre sans les donner aux comédiens; mais de tous ces drames il n'y a que *L'Ecossaise* qu'on ait joué” (Voltaire, *Correspondence*, IX, 984).⁹⁷

In *À messieurs les parisiens*, Voltaire disguises his polemical pamphlet as a legitimate dramatic criticism of *L'Ecossaise* by using a fictive narrator, balanced (academic) rhetoric, and a discussion of character composition—a wholly dramaturgical notion. Voltaire's mildly “academic” discourse, however, is methodically employed (he gives quick translations of every English word) and really nothing more than a way to enlighten the reader to the real meaning of the word Wasp (*frelon*, read: Fréron), and a warning towards other Counter-Enlightenment pamphleteers that the *philosophe*'s

⁹⁶ For more information of eighteenth-century theatrical publication norms, see Hervé Bismuth's history of European theater, specifically chapter four.

⁹⁷ Unfortunately for Voltaire, this isn't true. *L'Ecossaise* was not the only *drame* to be performed after the publication of the text. Diderot's *Le Père de famille* enjoyed the same atypical path to the stage of the Comédie-Française in 1762.

lambasting of Fréron in *L'Ecossaise* could have been worse (for example, if Voltaire hadn't deleted Fréron's "chatiment" at the end of the play, as indicated in the pamphlet).⁹⁸

With this preconditioning text, Voltaire readies his audience for the next evening's theatrical arrival of Wasp (or Fréron), a strategy that focuses his spectator's attention on one man and one genre: Fréron and his *journal*. This process echoes Palissot's combination of many *philosophe* critiques into an evisceration of Diderot and his *drame*. With pamphlets and publication strategies, Voltaire makes his audience aware of some of the digs at Counter-Enlightenment works and personalities that will come forth in *L'Ecossaise*. But, with his discussion of character composition, Voltaire refuses to ignore issues inherent to theater. The *philosophe* remains inside of the dramatic domain (theater criticism) and parallels his overt polemical attacks with subtle reflections on the traditional notion that performance precedes the publication and criticism of a play.

In *Les Philosophes*, Palissot uses quotations from *philosophe* works such as Helvétius' *De l'Esprit* or Rousseau's *Second Discours* in combination with narrative and performative elements (the love story between Damis and Rosalie or the famous actor Prévile walking on all fours). With this multifaceted dramaturgy, Palissot hopes to inspire visceral reactions by audience members from all walks of life. If a spectator hasn't read Rousseau's *Second Discourse* or Diderot's *Le Fils naturel*, he or she still could understand the attack against *philosophe* social and literary practices through overt

⁹⁸ Depending on the version of the text, Voltaire uses Fréron and Wasp interchangeably. However, when employing the English word, he included a footnote giving the translation into French (e.g. version 60CR and 60AM, noted in Duckworth 361).

denunciation (the Latinized anagram Dortidius for Diderot, for example), a classic love story, or through a well-known dramaturgical model inspired by Molière.⁹⁹

With the following analysis of Voltaire's dramatic revenge, we should perceive a parallel process of cross-pollination between texts and performance. Voltaire uses this combinatory method as revenge against Palissot's specific play, Fréron's literary criticism, and the litany of Counter-Enlightenment pamphlets that littered the streets of Paris during the 1750s. But, a close analysis of *L'Ecossoise* also reveals important social and literary changes that surpass the polemic between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* during the summer of 1760.

It may in fact prove fruitful to study Voltaire's comedy against the backdrop of larger socio-literary issues such as the emerging notions of successful theater, the rising professionalization and "taking sides" of writers, the increasing influence of café culture and public discussion, and the periodical press—vital notions that will energize French society several decades later during the throes of revolution.¹⁰⁰ In order to show accurately how Voltaire positions himself inside and outside the world of theater, I will discuss both "extra-scenic" considerations and on-stage tactics used by Voltaire in his 1760 comedy, *L'Ecossoise*.

⁹⁹ It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of spectators could not have *seen* Diderot's *drame* because it was not performed publicly until its Comédie-Française debut on September 26th, 1771. However, as Pierre Frantz notes, *Le Fils naturel* was performed in private at Saint-Germain en Laye for the duc d'Ayen in 1757 and published in February of that same year ("Jouer le drame au XVIIIe siècle", p. 207).

¹⁰⁰ This relationship between popular cultural practices and theater possibly invites us to move forward the date of Susan Maslan's assertion that "...French revolutionary theater was the first modern experience of the interaction of mass culture and mass politics" (*Revolutionary Acts* vii).

The Curtain Rises on Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise*

As soon as the actors appear on stage, Voltaire gives his spectators a glimpse of the vituperative critic, Frélon (or Wasp, depending on which edition and which performance!),¹⁰¹ and Fabrice, the local coffee shop/guesthouse owner.¹⁰² The Scot Monroe, who is on the run after losing his family and land to the English crown, later joins the conversation in his search for an empty room in the London guesthouse. Voltaire completes the image of a vibrant, English café-hotel by introducing Lindane, the suffering and impoverished heroine of unknown origins, and the comical Londonian businessman, Friport (or Freeport).

During the first few acts, it becomes clear that Lindane is in love with an English lord named Murrai (or Murray) and that Murrai has strong feelings for Lindane, but is hesitant to act upon them because of Lindane's enigmatic past. Lady Alton, the comedy's female antagonist, also loves Murrai and uses a repertoire of nasty schemes to denounce Lindane as an *aventurière* and woo Murrai away from her. For example, Alton intercepts and changes a love letter from Murrai to Lindane and tries to convince the latter to accept a large sum of money to relinquish her romantic claim on the embattled Murrai. As the story unfolds, the spectator finds out that Lindane is, in fact, Monroe's (the Scot) long lost daughter and Murrai's family was responsible for impoverishing Lindane and

¹⁰¹ Duckworth's critical edition reveals that the censure banned both the English word *Wasp* before the premiere of Voltaire's comedy. This obligation, however, seems to have been forgotten in later Parisian performances, as well as performances during subsequent years in Lyon, Marseille, and Bordeaux. For more information see Duckworth's "Introduction" to *L'Ecossaise*, pp. 359-363.

¹⁰² All quotations from *L'Ecossaise* are from the *Complete Works of Voltaire*. Vol. 50. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1986, unless otherwise indicated.

murdering her mother (Monrose's wife).¹⁰³ This is all made clear when Frélon reveals Monrose's true identity—denouncing both Scottish father and daughter in his polemical newspaper.

Voltaire also makes it known that the only reason Monrose has come to London is to avenge his family's honor and kill the living members of the Murrai clan, and thus, uses the classical topos of a female protagonist who oscillates between her lover and her father (e.g. *Le Cid*). Lindane is caught between a rock and a hard place and must choose either to respect her father's honor or put her own love first and run away with Murrai. But even before Monrose calls for a duel with Murrai (act V), the young Englishman—who was too young at the time of the rebellion and therefore had nothing to do with the initial crime against Monrose's family—insists on providing restitution for his father's crimes and re-establish Monrose's name in both England and Scotland. At the end of the story, Monrose's bitter urge for revenge cedes to both his daughter's love for Murrai and to his realization that the actions of one man's family do not necessarily shed light on that same man's character.

Inside this seemingly banal comedy with very few complex characters and a predictable "happy ending," Voltaire employs a multi-layered attack against the Counter-Enlightenment establishment. The *philosophe* weaves citations of written materials with performative and narrative aspects into what will emerge as—because of this combinatory effort—a powerful and polemical theatrical product.

¹⁰³ The historical context of the play is loosely based on Charles-Edward's failed attempt to run the English out of Scotland (Jacobite Rebellion) during the 1740s. Lindane and Monrose are criminals in England because their family supported the rebellion (as did the French government).

Voltaire, Fréron, and Fiction: Defining the Writer's Role

In the first act of his play, Voltaire focuses his criticism on one work: *L'Année littéraire*.¹⁰⁴ Directed by Fréron from 1754 until his death in 1776, the paper was an unwavering, voluminous arm of Counter-Enlightenment criticism. During his stint as editor, Fréron published 168 volumes of around 360 pages each, rarely missing a single month's entry (Balcou, "Elie Fréron" 23). It is essential to note that Palissot was protected by ministers with ties to the Crown such as the Duc de Choiseul and Madame de la Marck. These powerful relationships gave the playwright a certain amount of amnesty from overt attacks by Voltaire and other *philosophes*. Fréron, however, was less protected, and more importantly, he had already angered Voltaire several times—and most recently—with the pamphleteer's harsh criticism of Marmontel's *Aristomène* and Voltaire's own *La Femme qui a raison* in November of 1759.¹⁰⁵

Voltaire's early criticisms of Fréron eventually gave way to more intense attacks after Fréron's abusive remarks on the *Encyclopédie* and *Candide*.¹⁰⁶ For example, in 1759, Voltaire published *Le Pauvre diable*, a nasty pamphlet criticizing Fréron's relationship with other Counter-Enlightenment figures such as Lefranc de Pompignan and the various Jesuits who wrote articles for the *Journal de Trévoux*. These *brochures*, however, pale in importance to Voltaire's satirical treatment of Fréron in his 1760 comedy. In *L'Ecossaïse*, Voltaire stages Fréron and his *gazette* as early as the first scene of the play, hinting at the pamphleteer's motive behind his manic "literary" production.

¹⁰⁴ For more information on Fréron or the *Année littéraire*, see *Elie Fréron, polemist et critique d'art*, eds. Jean Balcou, Sophie Barthélemy, André Cariou (2001); or Jean Balcou's well-known monograph: *Fréron contre les philosophes* (1975).

¹⁰⁵ For more information on Fréron's treatment of Voltaire's *La Femme qui a raison*, see chapter 5 of Goulbourne's *Voltaire comic dramatist*, especially pp. 178-183.

¹⁰⁶ See *Année littéraire* 1758, viii, p. 312 and *AL* 1759, viii, pp. 3-25, respectively.

Here, Frélon complains about the “nouvelles affligeantes! des grâces répandues sur plus de vingt personnes! aucune sur moi!” (1.1).

Frélon laments the fact that fellow writers refuse to mention him in their articles, and here, Voltaire emphasizes Frélon’s self-serving nature and egotistical drive toward literary glory. On one level, we can read this attack as a direct response to Palissot’s character Valère, who acts only out of self-interest and even goes so far as to deceive members of his own cohort.¹⁰⁷ But this attack also highlights Voltaire’s attempt to separate the “real” Frélon from any existing literary allegiances or circles by asserting that his views are aberrations from the norm and that nobody cares about what he thinks (e.g. there are lots of stories in circulation, but “aucune” about Frélon).

Rather than combining members of the Counter-Enlightenment into one persona (Palissot’s “*philosophe*”), Voltaire adopts a much different strategy, choosing instead to isolate Frélon’s own individual faults and draw them out as pernicious deviations from the norm. This technique differs from Palissot’s attempt to consolidate *philosophe* works and personalities into a single representation. Because they were all lumped into the same ideological category in Palissot’s play, *philosophes* found strength in numbers and overcame slight differences in their opinions to form a more united front against the Counter-Enlightenment. An important example of this phenomenon is the temporary but nevertheless strong *rapprochement* between Diderot and Voltaire, as evidenced by Voltaire’s citation of Diderot as an important source in the dramaturgical construction of

¹⁰⁷ For instance, Valère’s quarrel with Dortidius over “Cratès” *De L’Esprit*, in act II of Palissot’s *Les Philosophes*.

L'Ecossaise.¹⁰⁸ Contrasting with Palissot's reduction of individualism, Voltaire's tactic places a spotlight on one man and one *gazette*—a strategy that will prove successful in forever tainting Fréron's status as a reputable literary critic.¹⁰⁹

After pointing out Fréron's lack of importance among fellow journalists, Voltaire then defines the pamphleteer's place in society by explaining precisely what he is not. In *L'Ecossaise*, Voltaire points out numerous times that Fréron's *Année littéraire* is not literature, but rather, mean-spirited gossip:

Frélon :

Je ne suis point de la maison, monsieur ; je passe ma vie au café, j'y compose des brochures, des feuilles : je sers les honnêtes gens. Si vous avez quelque ami à qui vous vouliez donner des éloges, ou quelque ennemi dont on doit dire du mal, quelque auteur à protéger ou à décrier, il n'en coûte qu'une pistole par paragraphe. Si vous voulez faire quelque connaissance agréable ou utile, je suis encore votre homme.

Monrose :

Et vous ne faites point d'autre métier dans la ville ?

Frélon :

Monsieur, c'est un très bon métier.

Monrose :

Et on ne vous a pas encore montré en public, le cou décoré d'un collier de fer de quatre pouces de hauteur ?

Frélon :

Voilà un homme qui n'aime pas la littérature. (1.1)

Here, Voltaire shows three important elements of Frélon's job. First, his writing is necessarily linked to economic benefit—the pamphleteer prints texts because he is paid “une pistole par paragraphe”—thus the implication that Frélon's goal is to write with

¹⁰⁸ See Voltaire's “Préface” to *L'Ecossaise* in Duckworth's critical edition for more information on the link between Voltaire and Diderot.

¹⁰⁹ Even Palissot, once his closest friend, will eventually agree with Voltaire's harsh treatment of Fréron (see Palissot's introduction to Voltaire's *Oeuvres*, 1792).

quantitative vigor, rather than with any concern for quality. Secondly, Fréron is a polemicist who relishes the opportunity to ruin anyone's "enemy" for the right price. And lastly, Fréron is flabbergasted when Monroe fails to associate the pamphleteer's job with literature. Fréron wholly believes that he is not a pamphleteer, but actually in the business of producing literature—an opinion which undoubtedly shadows Fréron's argument that he belonged in the Republic of Letters.¹¹⁰

Voltaire's character Fréron first appears as a tit-for-tat, binary response to Palissot's Valère in *Les Philosophes*. In Palissot's work, Valère attempts to win Rosalie's hand in marriage for his own economic and social benefit, and not because Valère feels any romantic sentiment for her. In *L'Ecossoise*, Fréron manifests a similar penchant for egotistical, selfish gain: and to this extent, he emerges as little more than a reversal of Palissot's character. But Voltaire moves beyond a mirror image and shows a considerable degree of polemical efficiency when Fréron makes a qualitative statement on literature, arguing that Monroe "doesn't like literature" because he disagrees with Fréron's economically infused notion of *belles lettres*.

In Palissot's comedy, Cydalise's approval of a literary work equates disapproval by Palissot. Because he paints Cydalise as such a weak-minded character, Palissot probably hoped that audience members would quickly understand a repetitive system of Cydalise's approval *cum* Palissot's mockery. By staging Fréron's opinion of literature, and attaching it to themes of financial benefit and denunciation, Voltaire hopes to achieve a similar effect. In this case, however, the anti-*philosophe*'s approval connotes a

¹¹⁰ For a very detailed analysis of Fréron's relationship with eighteenth-century notions of *littérature*, *belles lettres* and *les oeuvres écrites*, see Annie Becq's article, "Le mot 'littérature' dans l'oeuvre de Fréron." *Elie Fréron, polémiste et critique d'art*, pp. 33-43.

condemnation by *philosophes*, and hopefully, by the audience as well. In addition, we can see the efficiency of Voltaire's riposte in how he combines both of Palissot's critical tactics (denunciation through Valère and Cydalise) into one *méchant*.

Another way by which Voltaire defines Fréron's literary role (or lack thereof) is through exposing the pamphleteer's sources and publication strategies. In act II, Fréron argues that he can "help" Lady Alton by ruining Lindane's reputation with his newspaper. Through a conversation between the two antagonists, Voltaire shows the diluted dose of veracity in Fréron's "take" on current events:

Fréron :

Quand on découvre peu de chose, on ajoute quelque chose, et quelque chose avec quelque chose fait beaucoup. J'ai fait une hypothèse.

Lady Alton :

Comment, pédant ! une hypothèse !

Fréron :

Oui, j'ai supposé qu'elle est malintentionnée contre le gouvernement.

Lady Alton :

Ce n'est point supposer, rien n'est posé plus vrai : elle est très malintentionnée, puisqu'elle veut m'enlever mon amant.

Fréron :

Vous voyez bien que dans un temps de trouble, une écossaise qui se cache est une ennemie de l'Etat.

Lady Alton :

Je ne le vois pas ; mais je voudrais que la chose fût. (2.1)

When Fréron lacks concrete proof, he simply makes something up in order to serve a goal (il "ajoute quelque chose"). Here, Voltaire argues that Fréron's newspaper is not a reliable source of facts, but merely the printed version of a pamphleteer's personal aspirations and vendettas. But also, he shows inadvertently that Fréron's rag comprises a fictive element—an "ornament" of untruth that stretches (or completely ignores) the

exactness of political, literary, or social events during the middle of the eighteenth century. Fréron makes things up in order to attract a reader, but more importantly, to serve his “clients,” who have paid him to construct narratives with precise goals.

By denouncing Fréron’s newspaper as fallacious, Voltaire may also (unintentionally) bolster its ability to relay “a story.” Even though the facts don’t check out, the fictive elements of Fréron’s narrative could emerge as interesting to the right reader (his client). Voltaire’s definition of Fréron’s journalism allows a space for creative but mean-spirited material. In a later chapter, I will come back to this important fictionalization of current events in the *Année littéraire* and how notions of “straight journalism” or “unbiased reporting” are much more modern than we may believe.¹¹¹

In another “textual” attack, Voltaire separates Fréron from other contemporary writers by asserting that his newspaper deviates from accepted norms in journalism. Toward the end of the second act, the loud-mouthed businessman, Friport, differentiates between Fréron’s rag and other current events newspapers:

Friport :
...Eh ! du chocolat ; les papiers publics ; on a plus de peine à s’amuser qu’à s’enrichir.

Fabrice :
Voulez-vous les feuilles de Fréron ?

Friport :
Non, que m’importe ce fatras ? Je me soucie bien qu’une araignée dans le coin d’un mur marche sur sa toile pour sucer le sang des mouches. Donnez les gazettes ordinaires. Qu’y a-t-il de nouveau dans l’Etat ?

Fabrice :
Rien pour le présent.

¹¹¹ See *intra*, chapter 3—and more precisely, the section on Fréron’s *Relation d’une grande bataille*.

Friport :
Tant mieux ; moins de nouvelles, moins de sottises. (2.5)

Friport refuses to mince words when manifesting his hatred for Fréron's newspaper. He even goes so far as to call it a hodgepodge (*fatras*) that metaphorically sucks the blood from society. We could read this critique as another way by which Voltaire emphasizes the aberrant nature of Fréron's opinions and argue that the *philosophe* favors newspapers in general (*gazettes ordinaires*), but not Fréron's. But if we follow the scene (2.5) a little bit longer, Friport throws down the papers in disgust, rendering it clear for the reader or spectator that the character's hatred of Fréron extends to journalistic media as a whole.

Does this scene show Voltaire's more general criticism of the growing journalistic medium in Paris? Does Voltaire, through a possible English avatar, warn French society about a worrying trend that mixes current affairs, art, and polemics into a journalistic *fatras*—a process that might ultimately lead to the demise of *belles lettres*?

Friport's disparaging remarks about journalism foreshadow one of Voltaire's pamphlets from later in 1760. In his introduction to a *Recueil des faceties parisiennes pour les dix premiers mois de l'an 1760*, Voltaire writes that, "Les Journaux et les Mercuries tâchent en vain de faire vivre un mois ou quinze jours les sottises nouvelles, mais entraînés eux-mêmes dans l'abîme, ils s'y précipitent avec elles, comme les nageurs mal-adroits [sic] vont au fond de l'eau en voulant donner la main aux passagers qui se noyent" (p. A2).¹¹²

In this callous description of the *Mercur de France* and other newspapers, Voltaire points out the repetitive nature of contemporary journalism, as well as the

¹¹² *Recueil des faceties parisiennes pour les six premiers mois de l'an 1760*. Handwritten note says "[publ. Par A. Morellet avec préface de Voltaire]," Unknown publication location, (BnF, Richelieu 8-RJ-2111, p. A2).

genre's propensity towards trying to "make something" out of nothing. In *L'Ecossaise*, Voltaire creates a unique space for Fréron's writing in contemporary society. In the discussion between Monroe and Frélon, Voltaire argues that Fréron has a skewed idea of literature. In short, Fréron is not in the business of producing literature. However, the pamphleteer is not a dependable journalist who relays pertinent, accurate information—a fact that marks Fréron's writing with fiction and blurs the nature of the pamphleteer's works.

Fréron, through Voltaire's ambivalent fashioning, emerges as a writer of journalistic fiction—a bizarre and ambiguous genre of which Voltaire is obviously not a fan. This double-sided image of Fréron vagueifies Voltaire's attempt to provide a clear, negative image of the Counter-Enlightenment pamphleteer. But luckily for Voltaire, *L'Ecossaise* is a work of theater—a genre that includes performing bodies, gestures and sounds—and which gives the *philosophe* other tools for rendering Fréron more blatantly ridiculous.

Two Contrasting Strategies for Reaching the Spectator

In his article, "Pour une esthétique de la réception théâtrale," Patrice Pavis describes the double strategy employed by playwrights in order to please their audiences. He writes that every theatrical work is "la réponse à une question qu'elle se pose implicitement, réponse à une interrogation sur sa place dans la tradition littéraire et la réalité de son époque" (33). Although their strategies are different, Voltaire and Palissot both show a desire to adhere to and diverge from contemporary norms and dramatic traditions with their theatrical examples. Both playwrights inscribe themselves into larger

themes that surpass the sheer context of philosophical debates, but at the same time, they focus on synchronic phenomena from the years leading up to 1760.

In *Les Philosophes*, Palissot tells a story about the good characters' triumph over the bad. He polarizes Damis (the good) and Valère (the bad) to emphasize that honesty and good nature are the best paths to a successful romantic and financial end. In addition, Palissot uses Molière as his inspiration, borrowing lines directly out of *Les Femmes savantes*. The anti-*philosophe*'s use of Molière evokes a literary framework with a proud comedic tradition. Pavis views this continuation and manipulation of tradition as an important aspect of successful theater reception:

Le rapport du texte singulier à la série des textes antécédents qui constituent le genre dépend d'un processus continu d'instauration et de modification d'horizon. Le texte nouveau évoque pour le lecteur (ou l'auditeur) l'horizon des attentes et des règles du jeu avec lequel des textes antérieurs l'ont familiarisé ; cet horizon est ensuite, au fil de la lecture, varié, corrigé, modifié ou simplement reproduit. (32)

Through his use and manipulation of both Molière and contemporary dramatic ideas, Palissot changes the short-term nature of comedy and effects the "horizon of expectations" of *Voltaire*'s spectators, who comprised the next audience at the Comédie-Française.

By combining these literary strategies with the enunciated, on-stage citations of *philosophe* works, Palissot caused visceral reactions from spectators. These narrative, dramaturgical, and bibliographic strategies enabled Palissot to facilitate a pedagogical process between his audience and the characters on stage. Spectators understood where the play was going and who was going to prevail at the end. In *Les Philosophes*, there are no surprises in the overall plot: Palissot's use of a known dramaturgical scheme eased the didactic flow of his message from the stage to the parterre. Palissot did not write a

cornerstone text in dramatic comedy—his mark on the genre did not survive the anti-*philosophe/philosophe* polemic. Nevertheless, because it was *his* play that preceded Voltaire's, and because Voltaire's comedy responded to certain themes in Palissot's play, the *comédie des Philosophes* thus synchronically affected the “horizon of expectations” for any member in the audience at the premiere of *L'Ecossaise*.

Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise* was an attempt by *philosophes* to gain the upper hand in the polemical debates with Counter-Enlightenment members and maybe even a last-ditch effort to slow their bleeding after the interdiction of the *Encyclopédie* in 1759. But also, it was the next play after Palissot's comedy to hit the boards. Voltaire needed to rally theatrical spectators into supporting his own camp, and to accomplish this task, the *philosophe* had to create a show as intense and moving as Palissot had done just several weeks before.

Like his anti-*philosophe* counterpart, Voltaire criticizes the other camp's texts. What is more, Voltaire responds to Palissot's heightened sensitivity toward Parisian spectators in 1760 through his own multilayered strategy of making the audience “comfortable” with or “knowledgeable” of the events on stage. However, there are strong differences between these two tactics. Instead of rendering the spectator more “comfortable” with the play's narrative through the use of Molière, Voltaire writes current events and contemporary cultural practices into his dramaturgy. In this case, Parisian audiences easily identified with the characters on stage because, as we shall see, they *resembled* Lindane, Polly, or Fabrice.

Voltaire's dramatic text is a complex amalgam of English theater, French sentimental comedy, and astute reflections on contemporary society. With *L'Ecossaise*,

Voltaire moves beyond the mere theatrical staging of a polemical pamphlet and incorporates nuanced arguments against Counter-Enlightenment literature: we can easily read this play as a manifestation of the superior literary talent of Voltaire (when compared to Palissot). As we will see in the following chapter, contemporary critics recognized *L'Ecossaise* as more than the unfortunate result of ephemeral polemics. In the few pages that follow, let's look at how Voltaire “won” the theatrical battle of 1760 by pleasing his audience—through narrative and performative devices.

Voltaire first proves that *philosophes* were knowledgeable about contemporary socio-political issues in France and that his cohort agreed with the general public. Next, Voltaire ensures that his play breaks the pattern of pamphlet polemics and asserts that the comedy will enter the domain of *literature*. The superiority of Voltaire's comedy (when compared to *Les Philosophes*) becomes clear through Voltaire's use of nuanced textual metaphors and performative techniques. Through these tactics, Voltaire seeks to silence the Counter-Enlightenment in the socio-critical sphere by moving the debate back into the world of Letters—and to a degree—out of live, visible theater and into less-circulated texts.

Cafés, War and France in 1760: Voltaire's “Contemporary” Dramaturgy

The summer of 1760 approximately marks the middle of France's Seven Year War with England and other European foes.¹¹³ After consecrating thousands of troops to

¹¹³ The Seven Years' War officially saw the participation of most European powers such as Prussia, Austria, Spain, England, France, and Portugal. However, most of the fighting stemmed from colonial disputes between France and England in the Caribbean and North America. For a brief introduction to the complexities of this war, including its relationship with the Austrian War for Succession and the various battles on Italian soil, see William H. Fowler's *Empires at War: The Seven Years' War and the Struggle for North America*.

rather lackluster battles in Europe, the Caribbean and North America, the duc de Choiseul's foreign ministry was beginning to feel the emotional and financial strains of ongoing war. As French subjects lost confidence in their government's ability to beat British forces abroad, Choiseul needed a way to both boost their morale and detract their attention away from contemporary foreign policy.

Some scholars argue that Choiseul, in a bout of theatrical intervention not seen since Cardinal Richelieu's days,¹¹⁴ forced controversial plays such as *Les Philosophes* and *L'Ecossaise* past the censure precisely to distract Parisians from his ongoing political and military mishaps. Although there is little historical evidence to back this claim, scholars have argued that in 1763, the minister paid Charles-Simon Favart to write *Un Anglais à Bordeaux* during the exact time that France was admitting defeat and signing the Treaty of Paris.¹¹⁵ Choiseul's meddling, even if only possible, speaks to close proximity between politics and art during Louis XV's reign. But perhaps more interestingly, Choiseul's use of theater as a popular distraction illuminates the sheer force of theater as a social event during pre-Revolutionary times.

Dubbed by Fréron, Lefranc de Pompignan, and other Counter-Enlightenment writers as Anglophilic, anti-war and cosmopolitan, *philosophes* suffered through a decade (1750-1760) of vicious slander by the government and its ardent supporters. On the stage, we saw how Palissot evoked this criticism of *philosophe* disinterest in national affairs as

¹¹⁴ Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) was King Louis XIII's Chief Minister, an avid patron of the arts, and founder of the *Académie Française*. During the *querelle* surrounding Corneille's *Le Cid*, Richelieu is said to have incited debate between two rival sides to deter the public's attention away from some of his mishaps as foreign minister. For more information, see Anthony Levi's *Cardinal Richelieu and the Making of France*.

¹¹⁵ For more information on the Duc de Choiseul as a mediator between theater and international politics, see Truchet's *Le Théâtre au 18e*, p. 1420, or Olivier Ferret's introduction to his critical edition of *Les Philosophes*.

well as their proclivity towards international tastes and philosophies. In *L'Ecossaise*, Voltaire makes a concerted effort to respond to these attacks by demonstrating his knowledge of French current affairs. What is more, the *philosophe* also shows that he understands the precise ways that Parisians learned what was going on around them by staging café conversation and underlining the emergence of journalism.

Early in the play, Voltaire makes the link between the economic output of the Antilles and a successful outcome to the Seven Years' War:

Le Troisième interlocuteur:
Il y a beaucoup à craindre cette année pour la Jamaïque; ces philosophes la feront prendre.

Le Premier interlocuteur:
Le gouvernement ne peut pas subsister tel qu'il est.

Le Troisième interlocuteur:
Si le prix de l'eau des Barbades ne baisse pas, la patrie est perdue. (1.3)

In this short dialogue, Voltaire shows that he understands the connection between rum prices in the Caribbean (*eau des Barbades*) and governmental policy. Because high rum prices lead to economic prosperity (through taxes), France and England bolstered the size of their fleets in an attempt to protect and increase control over their respective islands in the region.¹¹⁶

Voltaire not only demonstrates his awareness of contemporary economic and political issues, he also ridicules the argument that the *philosophes* are somehow to blame for England's (read: France's) shortcomings. It is important to remember that the two interlocutors are meant to be English patrons at a London café. Nevertheless, Voltaire

¹¹⁶ In *Caribbean Rum: A Social and Economic History*, Frederick H. Smith provides an interesting account of the sheer importance that rum had in the genesis, and eventual outcome, of the Seven Years' War.

brings this specific conversation into the French context by inserting the word *philosophe*. It would be illogical for English subjects to blame their political woes on a band of *philosophes*—the polemic between two rival intellectual groups did not mark the English sociopolitical landscape during this precise time. When read in light of contemporary *French* social currents, however, the staged criticism makes more sense.¹¹⁷ In this example, Voltaire interrupts the comedy's *vraisemblance* in order to strategically stage contemporary, national debates.

Or, if we examine the scene in an “English” context and allow the English to use the word *philosophe*, we see how Voltaire confronts Palissot's (and other Counter-Enlightenment writers') claim that *philosophes* spend their days hypothesizing on metaphysical possibilities. Here, the *philosophe* makes direct correlations among political consequences, successful government, and contemporary social practices (drinking rum). But also, Voltaire jokingly criticizes the English proclivity towards drinking and ridicules the fact that an Englishman may think the “patrie perdue” because of elevated alcohol prices.

With just one single exchange between two men at a café, Voltaire shows his knowledge of contemporary politics, the importance of cafés as places for information exchange, and a noticeable rise in French nationalism due to war. This latter strategy is the beginning of Voltaire's rapprochement to patriotism, and it could have been a ploy to attract the parterre into his theatrical and philosophical scheme. Whether strategic or

¹¹⁷ In *Voltaire comic dramatist*, Goulbourne argues that Voltaire's choice of an English setting was, without doubt, a displaced (due to the censure) means of critiquing French society (205). Voltaire's London setting, then, inscribes the *philosophe* into a popular eighteenth-century thematic of “displacement” that included many different works by Diderot (“Lettre sur les aveugles,” *Eloge de Richardson*), and, of course, Montesquieu (*Lettres persanes*).

genuine, Voltaire's concentration on contemporary English politics and his light criticisms of English society are certainly indicative of what Raymond Trousson and Jerom Vercruysse have identified as the *philosophe's* "changement de position radicale avec l'Angleterre après la guerre de Sept ans" ("Angleterre," *Dictionnaire general*, 41).¹¹⁸

In *Les Philosophes*, Palissot transfers a pedagogical Counter-Enlightenment message against *philosophe* principles with greater ease because of his "comfortable" dramatic form: Moliéresque comedy. Preconditioned to Molière's plays and the use of the famous comic dramatist's schemes by eighteenth-century successors, Parisian audiences were able to focus less on the plot (they knew what would happen in the end), and more on the satirical portrayal of the *philosophes*. Although Voltaire chooses a radically different comedic form, he parallels Palissot's attempt at rendering the audience more comfortable—but this time, through commonplace settings, ultra-contemporary news pulled from journalistic sources, and muted (but nevertheless apparent) calls to patriotism.

The setting of *L'Ecossaise* provides a first commonplace for an eighteenth-century spectator. The discussion on rum prices and political consequences takes place in a lively London café. Although café culture in France began much later than across the Channel, by 1760, Parisian spectators would have recognized the social banter around a

¹¹⁸ This modest patriotism cannot be understated. As an avid supporter of English politics and philosophies, Voltaire appears nevertheless rather pro-French in *L'Ecossaise*. This could be due to two chief reasons: the Seven Years' War and Voltaire's knowledge that Anglophilia would be an easy target for anti-*philosophe* critics. For a more detailed description of Voltaire's relationship with England, see Ahmad Gunny's *Voltaire and English Literature: A study of English literary influences on Voltaire* (1979).

cup of chocolate or coffee by Voltaire's characters as reflective of their own everyday practices.¹¹⁹

Scholars in contemporary times have pointed out *L'Ecossaise*'s almost naturalist reflection of French society at the time. In *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle: Jeux, écritures, regards*, David Trott describes Voltaire's theatrical staging of popular and contemporary cultural markers: "Assistons-nous, dans *Le Café, ou L'Ecossaise*, aux rencontres d'un limonadier, d'un gazetier, d'un proscrit écossais voyageant incognito, de sa fille en détresse, d'un négociant revenu de Jamaïque, d'un aristocrate anglais,...Le café ouvre une nouvelle fenêtre sur la société de l'époque" (72).

Some spectators probably even walked across the street after the performance of *L'Ecossaise*, to the famous *Café Procope*, in order to chat about the comedy they had just viewed or the latest news from abroad.¹²⁰ Voltaire's desire to reflect contemporary social practices is even reflected in his choice of title for the play, originally naming it *Le Caffé ou l'écossaise*. Voltaire strengthens the bond between his play and his audience through establishing correlations between the comedy's setting and the everyday life situations of his spectators. But what is more, the *philosophe* also attempts to attract spectators by establishing a psychological link between them and the characters on stage.

¹¹⁹ For more information on the rise of "café culture" in England, consult Helen Barry's *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late-Stuart England*, and specifically, chapter one, entitled, "Pressing Anxieties: Coffee houses, print culture and the public sphere."

¹²⁰ Jeffrey Ravel draws an interesting picture of the everyday lives of theatergoers in the first section of *A Contested Parterre*.

“We Can Do It Too:” Voltaire’s Theatrical Avatars

Some spectators in the heterogeneous audience at the Comédie-Française might not have understood specific criticisms against Fréron or his *Année littéraire*.¹²¹ However, it is difficult to determine the exact demographic makeup or literacy rates of eighteenth-century parterres, which makes the analysis of theater publics as a tangible entity difficult, if not, impossible. Simply put, we just don’t know now what theater audiences knew then. Instead of trying to project empirical knowledge on the eighteenth-century theatergoer, it may prove more fruitful to examine the evocation of “spectators” as a rhetorical concept—a way for eighteenth-century writers to talk about and differentiate among their publics. I discuss this rhetorical concept with more detail in the third chapter of this dissertation.

At this point, it is important to note that playwrights believed in the existence of an educational distinction among spectators, as reflected in previously quoted works by Marmontel, D’Alembert, Fréron, and Voltaire. This latter writer, in an attempt to connect with every audience member and not merely those spectators who were privy to every contemporary literary reference, makes a concerted effort to affect the parterre. To intensify his attack against Fréron and clarify any nuanced citations for a less philosophically inclined audience member, Voltaire shows his spectator his own version of a good vs. evil plot and attributes the successful dénouement to “less-privileged” characters in the theatrical work.

¹²¹ Habermas describes the audience at the Comédie-Française as comprised of “domestic servants, soldiers, apprentices, young clerks, and a lumpenproletariat who were always ready for a ‘spectacle’” (*Public Sphere* 38). Clarifying even further, Ravel points out that the audience probably included “tax farmers, students, propertied women, shopkeepers, magistrates, clerks, prostitutes, intellectuals, and many others...” (14).

In *Les Philosophes*, Palissot mitigates the difficulty of understanding textual citation with more accessible narrative strategies such as a similar good vs. evil plot, a timeless love story, and repetitive denunciation.¹²² In *L'Ecossoise*, Voltaire ripostes with a similar repetitive mockery (the character Frélon). But in addition, the *philosophe* infuses his characters from lower social castes with pedagogical agency, intellectual clarity, and the ability to catalyze important events in the play. These techniques could have resonated with parterre audience members and quickened the process of projection and identification between the spectator and the characters on stage. For example, the café owner Fabrice emerges as an intellectual equal to the other characters in the play in the fields of ethics and literary criticism:

Fabrice :
De goût ou de dégoût ; vous me faites tort, vous dis-je.

Frélon :
Au contraire, c'est moi qui achalande votre café ; c'est moi qui l'ai mis à la mode ; c'est ma réputation qui vous attire du monde.

Fabrice :
Plaisante réputation ! celle d'un espion, d'un malhonnête homme, (pardonnez, si je répète ce qu'on dit) et d'un mauvais auteur !

Frélon : Monsieur Fabrice, monsieur Fabrice, arrêtez, s'il vous plaît ; on peut attaquer mes mœurs ; mais pour ma réputation d'auteur, je ne le souffrirai jamais.

Fabrice : Laissez-là vos écrits ; savez-vous bien, puisqu'il faut tout vous dire, que vous êtes soupçonné d'avoir voulu perdre mademoiselle Lindane ?

¹²² The fact that both Voltaire and Palissot used comedy to attack their rivals indicates the flexibility of the genre. In sum, it would be very difficult for one to imagine two playwrights carry out a polemical spat in tragedy, owing to its more rigid set of dramatic rules.

In this confrontation with Frélon, Fabrice argues that economic success and social popularity pale in importance to virtue and ethics. In short, Fabrice disagrees with Frélon that “any publicity is good publicity.” The link that Fabrice makes between nasty writers and popularity falls closely in line with the contemporary opinions of Diderot and Voltaire. Confirming this anti-mercenary opinion among *philosophes*, Franck Salaün points out that Diderot held the notion that the “homme de lettres, s’il ne redoute pas la pauvreté, à laquelle il s’est préparé, doit par contre tout faire pour résister à la bassesse, à l’avilissement, à l’écriture mercenaire” (277).

The successful dénouement of the play depends on Fabrice’s support of Lindane and his refusal to succumb to Lady Alton and Frélon’s desire to expulse the *écossaise* from the boardinghouse. In short, for the play to have a “happy ending,” Fabrice has to reject both Frélon’s money and his mercenary ideas on ethics and literature. When Fabrice says, “Laissez-là vos écrits; savez-vous bien, puisqu’il faut tout vous dire, que vous êtes soupçonné d’avoir voulu perdre mademoiselle Lindane?” he gives his opinion that overt denunciation, even under the guise of literature, is detrimental to society and should be avoided at all costs. Whether or not the revealing comments are made with “goût” or “dégoût” is less important than the social or personal damage that those comments actually cause.

Fabrice shows a literary tenet that surpasses the specific context of Frélon’s rag. According to Voltaire’s character, society can allow writers to satirize rivals under the guise of aesthetic standards (Voltaire’s staging of Fréron), but when they explicitly persecute and denounce living members of society through their writing, polemicists cause social harm and the degradation of mores—a process that removes this type of

writer from the realm of “belles lettres.”¹²³ Through a possible avatar, Voltaire gives his theatrical work a more *literary* tone by criticizing a sort of tabloid journalism, and in so doing, the *philosophe* tries to distance himself from the mise-en-scene of polemical pamphlets and contemporary politics.

The servant Polly is another character who demonstrates a heightened degree of agency and an acute ability to resolve the problems of those around her. Moreover, she emerges as a concrete example of what Russell Goulbourne describes as Voltaire’s desire to “integrate” servants and less wealthy characters “into his dramatic action” (174).

Polly’s modest background determines her behavior throughout the play and her social status allows her not to fear Frélon’s threats against her reputation: Polly is a servant and doesn’t effectively have a reputation to lose.

During the first act, Polly curtly explains why she cannot bear being in the pamphleteer’s presence: “Pour trois raisons; c’est que vous êtes bel esprit, ennuyeux et méchant” (1.4). On one level, we can read Polly’s words as an attack against Frélon’s character. But on another level, we can see a reflection on literature and writers that parallels Fabrice’s earlier criticism on those who write nasty pieces. Lindane’s servant correctly identifies Frélon as a “bel esprit”—a name with specific connotations during the eighteenth century. In her article, “Être ou ne pas être écrivain: la figure du ‘bel esprit’ entre XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles,” Eloise Lièvre highlights the pecuniary and practical nature of the ‘bel esprit’:

¹²³ *Philosophes*, as discussed in chapter one, quickly learned the danger of not hiding polemical discourse behind aesthetic charms after the case of the abbé Morellet. After publishing a direct criticism of Palissot’s *Les Philosophes* (*La Vision de Charles Palissot*) the abbé wound up spending ten months in jail.

Il est important de remarquer que cette activité professionnelle du bel esprit est aussi marquée par une polygraphie (le bel esprit écrit à la fois en vers et en prose) et une spécialisation générique qui suppose une conception fonctionnelle de la littérature (stances, élégies, idylles ou lettres sont utiles à leurs commanditaires qui paient parce qu'ils en ont usage). (254)

Fréron's *Année littéraire* is filled with harsh criticisms in prose, epigrams, and nasty lyrical digs at rival authors—Voltaire and his gang would probably agree that Fréron is the “bel esprit,” *par excellence*, of the eighteenth century. Polly's assertion that the character Frélon is a *bel esprit* mirrors Fabrice's remark that the pamphleteer is nothing more than a nasty gun for hire. Polly attacks both Frélon and his *métier*, but we can easily displace the critique from this specific case and apply it to more general principles. With this criticism, Polly denounces all works that are the result of a financial agreement.

The servant Polly (as a possible reflection of Voltaire) favors a more independent and wholly *literary* vision of “lettres”—a cultural production that is (seemingly) unattached to direct financial patronage. As Elena Russo points out in *Styles of Enlightenment*, Voltaire “cautioned the man of letters against dependence on the market,” and like Diderot, Voltaire agreed that it is better to publish poorly and in secret than with financial gain and nefarious attachment (6). Without a strict financial bond, this type of literature is born out of a more general idea of *génie*, rather than a specific economic context, such as the Duchesse de X wants a story about Y.¹²⁴ By insisting on a literary production that stems from abstraction and independence, Voltaire hopes to touch the

¹²⁴ Voltaire's criticism of Pangloss in *Candide* emerges as another *philosophe* warning to intellectual mercenaries. One of the most virulent criticisms of the tutor is the fact that he is paid for his services and thus his philosophy is tainted by economic factors that lead to selfish interest.

greatest number of people (not just Duchesse de X and her entourage, to follow our example).

Voltaire and Diderot: “Theatrical” Considerations in *L’Ecosaise*

In the previous chapter on Charles Palissot, we saw how “theatrical” considerations from Molière and Marivaux permeated Palissot’s dramaturgical construction of the *Les Philosophes*. Although his play criticized genres as disparate as philosophical treatises and libertine novels, Palissot nevertheless harked back to the dramatic arts in order to make more interdisciplinary criticisms against his *philosophe* rivals. In this section, I hope to parallel my discussion of Palissot’s theatrical “toolbox” with a description of Voltaire’s use of the dramatic genre. With *L’Ecosaise*, the *philosophe* uses theatrical predecessors and dramaturgical strategies to convince the spectator that he or she should support Voltaire’s side in the sharp literary polemic against the Counter-Enlightenment.

In his July 1760 review of Voltaire’s *L’Ecosaise*, the Orléanist playwright and critic Charles Collé writes that Voltaire’s comedy has subdued and “sentimental” overtones, and that the play’s style resembles “davantage à celui de Diderot” (*Journal* 370). An important, strategic bond emerges between Voltaire and Diderot when we combine Collé’s reflection on style with Voltaire’s praise of Diderot in the preface to *L’Ecosaise*, the opinions of both *philosophes* against mercenary writers, and finally, Voltaire’s desire to respond to Palissot’s harsh condemnation of Diderot in the *Les Philosophes*. Both Diderot and Voltaire recognized the power of theater, and it may prove fruitful to measure the intensity of their philosophical affinity through an analysis

of Voltaire's adherence to and departure from Diderot's emerging notions of drama during the late 1750s.

The previous example of Voltaire's character Polly provides a possible way to attach a very fine epistemological cord between Voltaire and Diderot at this precise time in literary history. When Voltaire stages an "everyday" character that bolsters the value of virtue and stands up to a vicious socialite, he, at least in part, shows Diderotian principles. As Jean-Jacques Roubine reminds us,

Le drame n'a pas pour seul objectif, rappelons-le, de montrer le monde réel. Mais, à travers une telle représentation, d'attendrir le spectateur et de le convertir à la vertu. Dès lors, les théoriciens de ce genre nouveau butaient exactement sur la même difficulté que les disciples d'Aristote. L'in vraisemblable était ruineux pour l'adhésion affective du spectateur, condition *sine qua non* de la *catharsis*. Il ne saurait davantage entraîner, par l'effusion, au culte et à la pratique de la Vertu. (53)

Polly is not a "tricky" maid from Molière's dramatic corpus,¹²⁵ nor is she a shy servant to a powerful female character like Corinne is to Léonide in Marivaux's *Le Triomphe de l'amour*. With his character Polly, Voltaire seems to follow Diderot's notion that "everyday" characters boost the sentimental experience of audience members in the theater, and this new link between powerful emotional scenes and less noble characters may have struck a chord with previously ignored members of the audience.

The scene is one of the most intense moments in the play and marks the "beginning of the end" for Frélon. By standing up to Frélon, Polly contrasts an ethic of virtue and unrelenting service to her caring mistress with Frélon's ephemeral and pecuniary idea of friendship. This relatively "cathartic experience," although traditionally discussed only in the realm of noble tragedy, takes on new generic and socio-economic

¹²⁵ For example, she is not a calculating trickster-valet like Scapin, nor a borderline con artist like the servant Carle in Molière's *Les fourberies de Scapin*.

forms in Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise*. Polly creates a "purgative" situation, where spectators are able to cleanse themselves morally and emotionally after a strong lesson in what is right and wrong when good conquers evil through calls to virtue and the tender anger of Lindane's servant.

Polly also plays a significant role in the dénouement of the play. The story ends in a successful manner because she reveals Lindane's true identity to Murrai, the English love interest. At first, Lindane scolds her servant for going behind her master's back and releasing very pertinent information. But with the knowledge of Lindane's background, Murrai quickly finds his moral course by re-establishing Monrose's name in Albion. Without this financial and ethical decision by Murrai, Lindane would never have taken his hand in marriage—thus ruining the romantic and happy conclusion at the end of the comedy. This action of restitution, involving both changes of heart and financial transactions, parallels the ending of Diderot's *Le Fils naturel*, and specifically, when Lysimond (the father) suddenly arrives with a financial sum for his children (Dorval and Rosalie) so that they can both live happily ever after.

Although differences between the two plays are just as clear as their similarities, the endings of both theatrical works depict happily (re)constructed families in a joyous *tableau*.¹²⁶ Voltaire's evocation of Diderot in his preface, in addition to the existence of a few structural and ideological affinities between *L'Ecossaise* and Diderot's *Le Fils naturel*, seem to push Voltaire's play into the emerging *drame* category. However, *L'Ecossaise*'s English origins attenuate the overt link to Diderot, and one could easily look back as far as 1731, to George Lillo's *The London Merchant or the Story of George*

¹²⁶ Even Fréron surprisingly admitted that the ending of *L'Ecossaise* "a fait tableau" (*AL*, V 283).

Barnwell, to find a proto-example of Voltaire's comedy. But, and complicating this story even more, did Diderot's readings of and possible borrowings from English writers such as Lillo and George Coleman bring the *drame* to France? Did Voltaire then, "go through" Diderot's reading of British playwrights to construct *L'Ecossaise*? And what do we make of the Venetian Carlo Goldoni's *La Bottega del caffè* from 1750—a play that also could have served as a source of inspiration for Voltaire's comedy?

If we try to fix historicity on theatrical production during summer of 1760, we are left with too many possibilities and not enough evidence to assert one generic theory over another. Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise* seems to emerge laughably from the bibliographic haze as an Anglo-Italo-Diderotian-*drame*-comedy *à la Voltaire*—an impossible mix of styles, genres, countries, and authors. Although a strict generic study proves rather fruitless and inaccurate, it is nonetheless important to note structural and ideological affinities between the two *philosophes*, the fact that both Diderot and Voltaire were under attack by religious and literary conservatives, and that both *philosophes* recognized that strong Counter-Enlightenment powers required them to combine their forces and bury their slight differences.

In his *comédie des Philosophes*, Palissot groups Enlightenment personalities under one, singular title: the *philosophe*. It seems that in this specific case, Diderot and Voltaire recognized that Palissot's tactic could eventually become his demise, and in his theatrical response, Voltaire includes "just enough" elements from the *drame* to portray a subtle but strong alliance between the two great *philosophes*.

Moving a few hundred years into the future, even critics at present seem relatively divided on whether or not to dub Voltaire's comedy a pure effort in *drame*. In his study

on Voltaire's theatrical works, Russell Goulbourne argues that *L'Ecossaise* is, and is not, a *drame*. In *Voltaire comic dramatist*, he admits that, "Voltaire responds to the theory and practice of the *drame* by writing comedies which flout Diderot's conception of unity of tone and his opposition to contrasting characters" (187). But at the same time, Goulbourne points out how Voltaire's comedy is far less "*pathétique*" than most *dramas*.

According to Goulbourne, *L'Ecossaise* is, like Voltaire's *Socrate*¹²⁷ and *Saül*,¹²⁸ an ambivalent play that both supports and criticizes Diderot's dramatic theories: "Ironically, though, there is a tension at the heart of this response to Diderot, a tension which is most evident in *Socrate*, *L'Ecossaise* and *Saül*. For while these comedies implicitly attack Diderot the dramatist, they also implicitly defend him as a *philosophe* by satirizing contemporary anti-*philosophes*: they are double-edged swords" (187). Goulbourne's erudite study of Voltaire's complete comedic corpus weighs *L'Ecossaise* against the *philosophe*'s other comedies such as *La Femme qui a raison* and *L'Enfant prodigue*. This intra-Voltairian criticism centers the discussion of *L'Ecossaise* on theater, rather than on mere polemics—a warranted change from traditional critical discourse—and an argument that underlines sources of Voltaire's 1760 comedy from the *philosophe*'s own writings. Goulbourne's study thus renders *L'Ecossaise*'s generic origins even more difficult for critics to unilaterally attribute to one tradition.

However, Goulbourne is not ignorant of the contemporary literary climate, and highlights the delicate relationship between Voltaire's implicit aesthetic attacks against his own party and overt support of *philosophes* during the late 1750s. Voltaire could not

¹²⁷ *Socrate*, which according to Goulbourne was dubbed a "dialogue philosophique" at the time, was published in 1759 and not performed until 1793 (188).

¹²⁸ Voltaire published the comedy *Saül* in 1763. A burlesque play set in ancient Israel, *Saül* was never performed and banned by the Church in 1765 (Goulbourne 228).

afford to openly criticize Diderot's ideas on theater because of Counter-Enlightenment attempts to fissure and fracture the *philosophe* circle. Nevertheless, Voltaire is able to "kill two birds with one stone" by publicly supporting Diderot and his *drame* with his preface and published letters; while at the same time, lightly criticizing his colleague through slight rebukes inside the dramatic narrative.

It is also important to stress how Voltaire's contemporaries viewed the play, and Collé's confusion between Voltaire's and Diderot's styles should not be taken lightly. What is more, around seven years after the polemic surrounding *Les Philosophes* and *L'Ecossaise*, Beaumarchais included Voltaire's work alongside Diderot's *Le Fils naturel* as previous examples of the *genre sérieux* (Beaumarchais' version of the *drame*) in his "Essai sur le genre dramatique sérieux," written as an introduction and treatise to Beaumarchais *Eugénie* in 1767.¹²⁹

In his play, Voltaire shows a variety of strategies that seek to attach the spectator to the *philosophe* cause. These include the comic denunciation of Fréron, the play's good vs. evil plot, and the use of different socioeconomical strata in complex character composition. The heightened attention paid by Voltaire to the spectator certainly dialogues with Diderot's theories on theater. Voltaire strategically chooses more "common" characters to serve as active agents in both his attack on the Counter-Enlightenment and in the dénouement of Lindane's touching adventure. But not all of Voltaire's dramatic considerations fall into line with Diderot's nascent idea of *philosophe* theater.

¹²⁹ See Beaumarchais, *Oeuvres* (Paris 1809), i, II.

Towards the end of the play (4.5), Polly serves as Voltaire's voice once again when she comments on the story's dénouement, speaking directly to the audience: "Voilà d'étranges aventures! Je vois que ce monde—ce n'est qu'un combat perpétuel des méchants contre les bons, et qu'on en veut toujours aux pauvres filles." By giving her opinion on the "aventures" taking place on stage, Polly eclipses herself from the plot, speaks meta-scenically about the play, and aligns herself with the audience (or reader). This didactic moment creates a bond between Polly and the spectator, or, between Voltaire and his audience—a process which facilitates the transfer of the *philosophe's* message.

However, Polly's direct discourse with the spectator breaks down the "wall" that separates the actors on stage and the audience in the theater house. In Diderot's conception of the *drame*, this distinction between the "fictive space" on stage and the "real space" of the audience is paramount.¹³⁰ In his study of the changing notion of representation during the eighteenth century, Paul Friedland discusses Diderot's important 1758 concept, which was named by later critics as the "fourth wall":

The fourth wall was a concept predicated on the conviction that no action on the stage would ever have the appearance of plausible reality if the actors betrayed any hint that they were aware of being watched. Instead of directing their performances toward the audience, actors should pretend that the open space between the stage and the audience was a fourth wall. Actors should behave, in short, just like real people enclosed in a defined space, without observers: they should direct their lines to one another and respond appropriately. (26)

The actor playing Polly is overtly ignoring the "fourth wall" by turning and speaking directly at the audience. Voltaire uncovers Diderot's "paradoxical" conception of the

¹³⁰ This separation is very clear in Diderot's advice to actors in *De la poésie dramatique* (1758). The *philosophe's* instructions: "Imaginez sur le bord du théâtre un grand mur qui vous sépare du parterre; jouez comme si la toile ne se levait pas" (*Oeuvres*, 1310).

actor's role: on the one hand, the actor must move the spectator into completing actions of virtue; but on the other hand, the actor must *show* the spectator how to resolve problems rather than *speak* directly at her. Voltaire follows Diderot's idea in his attempt to create a mirror between his characters and his spectators. However, their method for achieving this bond diverges, with two starkly different ideas about acting.

Voltaire reinforces this connection by addressing patriotism in his dramaturgy. In his comedy, Palissot viciously attacks the *philosophes* for their lackluster love of country. They steal Damis' fiancée while he is off at war and overtly show that they couldn't care less about matters of State. In *L'Écossaise*, Voltaire responds by creating a surreptitious, but patriotic bond between persecuted Scottish characters and the French public: the Scots were no strangers to rough treatment from Albion because of Jacobite rebellions earlier in the century; and in 1760, the French were subjected to a large dose of English violence as well, due to the Seven Years' War. Voltaire inscribes this (albeit displaced) patriotism into Monrose's emotive dialogue about his *patrie*:

Monrose (*à part*)

Une jeune écossaise qu'on arrête ! et le jour même que j'arrive ! Toute ma fureur renaît. Ô patrie ! ô famille ! Hélas ! que deviendra ma fille infortunée ? elle est peut-être ainsi la victime de mes malheurs ; elle languit dans la pauvreté ou dans la prison. Ah pourquoi est-elle née ? (2.2)

Once again, Voltaire uses a character *à part*—a dramaturgical tactic that breaks the audience's absorption¹³¹ in the narrative and forces spectators to focus solely on Monrose's short soliloquy.

¹³¹ For more information on Diderot's conception of *absorption* (as specifically constructed in his *Salons*), consult Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot*.

Voltaire, through his character's *interjection*, links *patrie* with *famille* and wraps the entire discourse in pity and desperation—and by using interjection, Voltaire employs a popular tactic that emerges in multiple genres during the eighteenth century. In *La Vie théâtrale au dix-huitième siècle*, Martine de Rougemont highlights the importance of interjection in both theater and novels. She argues that in drama, interjections are one of the chief means by which *philosophes* sought to pass lessons from the stage to the audience (31). This is an overt call to the senses of his audience members—a maneuver that transcends socially stratified dramaturgical methods to apply to all members in both the parterre and the balconies.

Voltaire's ambivalence towards Diderot's model of drama shows the heterogeneity of comic writing during the eighteenth century. Rather than forcing *L'Ecosaise* into the *drame*'s rather strict Diderotian definitions, it may be best to merely underline the malleable nature of comedy during this time. In his history of European theater, Bismuth points out the difficulties in pinning down a strict poetics of dramatic comedy:

La comédie devient ainsi un genre protéiforme, susceptible d'épouser tous les registres émotifs, de mettre en scène—ce qu'elle faisait depuis Molière—des personnages appartenant aussi bien à l'univers de la noblesse qu'à celui de la bourgeoisie, d'être composée en vers comme en prose: elle est le genre *libre*, à l'opposé de la tragédie, confinée dans un registre et dans des thématiques délimitées. (206).

Voltaire, with his play, pushes the dramatic envelope, showing his talent in this “genre libre,” and stages characters from even more diverse socio-economic groups (ruined father, “nouveau riche” businessman, powerful servant, poor-but-proud daughter).

Moreover, Voltaire covers his new representations of French society with a sentimental tone that more than hints at Diderot's theater from just three years earlier.

The fact that people distributed Diderot's play as a text, and that the *Fils naturel* wasn't performed until the 1770s, creates an air of uncertainty and potential vis-à-vis the *drame*, rather than overt popularity and strict rules. At this precise moment in time, the *drame* was an enigmatic genre that might be characterized as unstable at best before undergoing serious revision and normalization in the coming years by authors such as Michel-Jean Sedaine and Louis-Sebastien Mercier.

Both Diderot's and Voltaire's conceptions of serious comedy emphasized the author's pedagogical power to show the spectator that issues of family life and kindred friendship trump romantic experiences in European courts or cathartic moments from long-lost Antiquity. Both Diderot and Voltaire demonstrate a common didactic goal, albeit through different strategies and diverging notions of exactly how (and with what dramaturgical tools) the author ought to "move" the spectator. Perhaps, then, it is best to leave the generic debate open and merely emphasize the unsteady and changing features of the *drame*—and comedy in general—during this moment in the history of European theater.

Measuring Value in Polemical Theater: Voltaire's "Staying Power"

Through the patriotic dialogue of his characters, the use of "comfortable" and contemporaneous settings, and stimulating a process of projection and identification between parterre social classes and powerful characters, Voltaire achieves a similar objective (to Palissot) of readying his audience for a message. Voltaire *and* Palissot seek the approval of influential spectators and parterre audiences by performing their comedies at the Comédie-Française, continental Europe's most visible stage. Both playwrights employ a constellation of attacks, including the quotation of textual sources,

the attempt to engross the spectator into a good vs. evil plot, and the use of dramaturgical techniques such as pantomime or direct speech with the audience.

Putting both Palissot and Voltaire on an equal pedestal, however, does not take into account the disparity in “staying power” between the two plays. Palissot’s *Les Philosophes* was a receptive flash in the pan, and although it was reprised several times until the late 1780s, it never achieved a sliver of the popularity it had during the tumultuous summer of 1760.¹³² Although Palissot’s play opened to an audience of 1439 spectators (more than Voltaire’s 1150), by the fourteenth performance, that number had dwindled to only 462.¹³³ In contrast, Voltaire’s play started off slower than Palissot’s comedy, but it then turned into a veritable “blockbuster” during the rest of the eighteenth century, and continued to be played with regularity until well into the nineteenth-century.¹³⁴

In recent times, *L’Ecossaïse*’s importance has paled in comparison to classic comedies by Molière, Marivaux, and Beaumarchais; nevertheless, Voltaire’s play found its way to the Parisian stage recently with Vincent Colin’s adaptation in 2007. And for an acute example of how little the discussion on *L’Ecossaïse* has evolved among critics, it is interesting to note that a reviewer from *Radiolibertaire* deemed the play a *drame bourgeois* and argued that the “[H]istoire de la pièce est infiniment plus intéressante que son intrigue” (Hambourg 4).

¹³² It is also interesting to note that during the 1782 performance, Palissot was forced to omit the “best” scene of the play—the pantomime of Rousseau because censors thought that it was a far-too-nasty dig against the recently deceased *genevois*.

¹³³ For a detailed chart of both plays’ respective audience totals and earnings, see Duckworth’s *Introduction*, p. 266.

¹³⁴ 916 spectators attended the fourteenth performance of *L’Ecossaïse*. Duckworth notes that “...between 1760 and 1788, *L’Ecossaïse* de Voltaire was repeated every year at the Comedie Francaise except 1777, 1786, and 1787, for a total of 112 performances” (277).

If both plays emerged from the same philosophical debate and incorporated so many of the same polemical and narrative tactics, why did Voltaire's play "win" the receptive battle? First, we could find a superficial answer in the superior talent of a proven writer over the pen of a rather mediocre hack. There is certainly a degree of truth in this response, and several contemporary scholars stop their analyses with this simple fact.¹³⁵ But also, Voltaire's comedy stands on its own as both live theater and as a written piece of literature. We cannot lose sight of the important nature of the printed text in the Palissot/Voltaire polemic: both plays underwent a series of revisions and publications and were probably more often read than viewed live. Voltaire published *L'Ecossaise* before it was performed—a subversion of eighteenth century norms that may dislocate the "goal" of the play from theatrical performance to textual analysis.

This historical fact sheds light on the importance of publication and reading during the eighteenth-century. What is more, a silent, individual reading of *L'Ecossaise* may have produced a different set of metaphors and themes when compared to the live, boisterous performance. In his work on the nature of performance, Christopher Braider emphasizes this qualitative difference between reading and viewing a performance, noting that, "Reading, by contrast [to performance], engages active intelligence, sifting appearances in order to frame the careful discriminations by which alone a work's true character is known. Where the play as event dupes the beholder, the play as text invites an integrally rational response..." (36).

¹³⁵ In fact, very few scholars agree that Palissot's comedy even deserves to be mentioned in conversations about the theatrical genre. For example, Descotes argues that "*Les Philosophes* sont un libelle mis en forme dramatique; et l'œuvre ressortit davantage à la satire qu'au théâtre" (155). Colin Duckworth analyzes the critical disdain for both comedies in his 1972 article, "Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise* and Palissot's *Les Philosophes*: a strategic battle in a major war," p. 333.

Both Palissot and Voltaire wanted audiences to understand the “true nature” of their polemical efforts, and thus quickly published copies of their plays. In fact, the “textual” nature of the debate may show a desire to persuade members of a literary elite, rather than the parterre, Marmontel’s “genuine judge.” In the next section, I will examine this dichotomy between written text and spoken word in order to highlight a few of the ways that Voltaire re-centers the polemic inside the world of Letters through complex literary metaphors and allusions to written texts.

Reading *L’Ecosaise*, or, Moving the Debate Back Into the *belles lettres*

In *Les Philosophes*, Palissot criticizes the encyclopedist cohort by making references to other literary and philosophical events during the theatrical performance. These include the staging of texts by Rousseau, Helvétius, and other *philosophes*. In addition, Palissot theatricalizes anti-*philosophe* arguments for which we could easily find sources in polemical Counter-Enlightenment pamphlets during the late 1750s. However, Palissot also uses arguments internal to theater and pits a Molièresque dramatic scheme against Diderot’s theories of a nascent *drame sérieux*. In *L’Ecosaise*, Voltaire refuses the binarism of Molière-or-Diderot, using instead a comedic form that is both similar and different to emerging *philosophe* theater. But also, Voltaire seeks to bypass both pamphlets and performance by inserting complex literary metaphors into his dramatic text—a fact that renders the question of audience even more pressing.

Voltaire combines text, narration, and performance in a superior manner and solidifies the comedy’s entrance into the Republic of Letters. Voltaire’s play better responds to contemporary taste (in its subject matter) and reflects larger issues such as the emerging bourgeois taste for the *drame*, the increased participation of non-aristocratic

social classes in cultural production, and finally, the closer relationship between eighteenth-century French citizens and the current events around them.¹³⁶ But Voltaire's play is not a newspaper article about French society during the pre-Revolutionary period, nor is it a light-hearted boulevard production with the simple hope of mocking Fréron. Voltaire, contrary to Counter-Enlightenment adversaries and proponents of more "performative" theater, sought to re-integrate the polemic into more textual forms, rather than the more raucous arena of theatrical performance.

Contemporary critics picked up on novelistic tones in Voltaire's comedy and harshly critiqued *L'Ecossaise* because it demonstrated "anti-theatrical" tendencies. Not exactly a beacon of impartiality but highlighting this vision, Fréron castigates the piece by calling it a "Roman assez mal imaginé, un tissu d'invraisemblances," and a "fatras d'absurdités" (*AL*, IV, 106). During the eighteenth century, the term "roman" was often a critical dig that connoted a work of any genre with an outlandish plot and a convoluted narrative structure. However, Fréron uses a variety of textual terms and metaphors such as "fatras" (hodgepodge) "tissu", and finally, "Roman" in his harsh critique of Voltaire's play. Fréron's repetitive use of textual terms seeks to remove theatricality from Voltaire's play, and from Fréron's negative tone, we can argue that too many textual associations meant bad comedic theater.

Charles Collé, the Orleanist critic who first made the link between Voltaire and Diderot, called Voltaire's play "un mauvais Roman qui veut être une comédie" (*Journal*

¹³⁶ As the second half of the century progressed, the French had more access to current event newspapers. Jack Censer points out that "...the number of papers increased over time, from five in the 1740s to a dozen in the late 1750s and nineteen by the end of the ancien régime—and these totals only include papers that lasted at least three years and circulated legally" (161).

370). Collé makes an overt generic distinction between theatrical comedy and the “Roman,” and criticizes *L’Ecosaise* for being a bad example of the latter. Neither of these two critics were *philosophes*: to interpret their opinions about Voltaire’s play as unbiased and void of polemical motive would be incorrect. Nevertheless, they both underline the *romanesque* aspects of *L’Ecosaise* and criticize Voltaire’s desire to please a reader rather than a spectator.

The fact that Voltaire never really intended his play for the stage, and only sought a performance after Palissot received permission to stage his own play, resulted in an abnormal eighteenth-century theatrical example and a possible predecessor to nineteenth-century armchair theater.¹³⁷ In his history of European drama, Hervé Bismuth argues that, “Depuis qu’il existe des textes de théâtre, à l’exception des premières tentatives des auteurs humanistes, la destination première du texte dramatique est la scène: l’auteur dramatique écrit en principe pour être joué” (249). Bismuth goes on to argue that authors such Alfred de Musset, Alfred de Vigny, and Victor Hugo changed this *a priori* consideration for performance with plays that were never destined for the boards, such as *Cromwell* (1827), *Chatterton* (1835), and *Ruy Blas* (1838).

Voltaire’s dramaturgy in *L’Ecosaise*, at least at its origin, did not take into account a live audience at the Comédie-Française. Only after Palissot’s play caused a buzz in literary circles around Paris, did Voltaire then attempt to get his play put up on the boards. Although we can assume that Voltaire made dramaturgical and narrative changes to his play during the early summer of 1760, little evidence remains to clearly

¹³⁷ “Armchair” theater (or “Closet Drama”) refers to plays that were never intended for performance.

show us the precise nature of these edits.¹³⁸ Putting a dramatic text in circulation before a performance was an anomaly during this period, and Bismuth's assertion that the stage was the "destination" of most dramatic texts holds true for the vast majority of eighteenth-century plays in France.

But in the case of *L'Ecossaise*, two interpretive "horizons" emerge: one for spectators who were preconditioned by pamphlets and polemical texts before a performance, and another slightly different horizon that comprised readers of the comedy who had yet to see the show. This shift in "horizons" has epistemological repercussions: a reader of Voltaire's work certainly picked up on nuanced metaphors faster than a spectator at a live performance.¹³⁹ Throughout his play, Voltaire peppers the text with ambiguous textual metaphors, and an in-depth study of some of these literary devices may help us determine whether or not Voltaire can differentiate between a reader and a spectator with his dramaturgy.

In *L'Ecossaise*, Voltaire presents two contrasting female protagonists in Lindane and Lady Alton. Lindane is the voice of reason, chastity and virtue, while Lady Alton attempts to manipulate characters through nasty threats and unethical ruses. But what is more, Voltaire chooses to show the dissimilarity between the two characters by pitting disparate images of the writing process against one another. Toward the end of the first act (1.5), Voltaire gives his reader a writing metaphor with the way Lindane earns her modest living through embroidery:

¹³⁸ Little evidence, save the alternative lines highlighted by Colin Duckworth in his introduction to *L'Ecossaise*. According to Duckworth, most of these dramaturgical edits sought to remove the spotlight from Fréron and apply Voltaire's critique to members of the Counter-Enlightenment at large (see Duckworth's intro, part II).

¹³⁹ For a more detailed account of the *qualitative* effect of Voltaire's divergence from publication norms, see chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Lindane :

Il ne faut perdre ni le courage ni l'espérance : je supporte ma pauvreté, mais la tienne me déchire le cœur. Ma chère Polly, qu'au moins le travail de mes mains serve à rendre ta destinée moins affreuse : n'ayons d'obligation à personne ; va vendre ce que j'ai brodé ces jours-ci. (*Elle lui donne un petit ouvrage de broderie.*) Je ne réussis pas mal à ces petits ouvrages. Que mes mains te nourrissent et t'habillent : tu m'as aidée : il est beau de ne devoir notre subsistance qu'à notre vertu.

Polly :

Laissez-moi baiser, laisser-moi arroser de mes larmes ces belles mains qui ont fait ce travail précieux. Oui, madame, j'aimerais mieux mourir auprès de vous dans l'indigence, que de servir des reines. Que ne puis-je vous consoler ! (1.5)

Here, Voltaire draws upon a well-known literary *topos* of embroidery *cum* writing, even emphasizing the importance of the work in his stage directions.¹⁴⁰ In this passage, Lindane physically hands over the embroidery to Polly. But on a figurative level, she also relays a story to her servant about duty and ardent attachment to “doing what is right.” Lindane’s narrative, woven physically and metaphorically in a *textured* piece of work, passes from person to person. Lindane (through her dialogue and embroidered work) tells a story of virtue, responsibility, and refusal to lower self-expectations.

Voltaire presents the message through the performance as well as through nuanced literary metaphors such as the embroidery/text. This double-edged combination of performance and text hints at the specificity of dramatic writing. Because the playwright always incorporates speaking individuals in a communicative act, he or she cannot “move away” from performance to bury purely fictional textual elements in the dramatic narrative. Although the embroidery emerges as a largely textual metaphor, it only becomes part of a completed message when Lindane physically hands the work over

¹⁴⁰ This metaphor is a common *topos* in epistolary novels from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (*Lettres péruviennes*, for example) but actually dates back Classical Rhetoric, and then of course, to Marie de France’s 11th century *Lais*.

to Polly. Borrowing from Jauss' work on interpretation, Patrice Parvis sheds light on the inherent duality of the fictive space in theater:

La fiction (le texte et les systèmes narratifs, idéologiques, etc. qu'il véhicule) est à tout moment à la merci de ruptures de jeu : l'événement, la réalité matérielle du spectateur, la présence du comédien. Seul le théâtre nous offre cette relation ambiguë à la scène : un langage, une idéologie et une fiction sont iconisés, donnés à voir, plus qu'à comprendre. Cette relation se fait ainsi toujours à *l'intérieur et à l'extérieur* de la fiction, dans la lecture horizontale (soumise au texte, à la narration, à l'idéologie) *et* dans une lecture verticale (faite dans l'événement, dans le sentiment d'une « présence » de l'acteur, dans l'acte herméneutique de l'interprétation).
(39)

The actor's "presence," even if only imagined by a reader, provides a material, performative interruption to the strict literary metaphor of embroidery. Because Voltaire writes for theater—with dialogue and action—he cannot fully depart from the imaginative presence of a stage, actors, and an audience. The metaphor associated with Lindane's text/embroidery connotes virtue and a didactic link between Lindane and her servant, and maybe between Voltaire and his spectator, as well.

This overwhelmingly positive association jars with another use of textual metaphor in *L'Ecossoise*: Lady Alton's use of letter writing. Throughout the play (most notably in act II), Lady Alton manipulates various characters by writing nasty letters, lying about who wrote them, or interrupting letters from the author to the intended recipient. Lady Alton, like Frélon, *uses* writing as a means to control other people and achieve malicious, selfish goals.

In a revelatory scene (2.2), she pretends that Murrai's love letters to Lindane were originally destined for her rival (Alton) and convinces the *écossoise* that Murrai has undergone a change of heart and now favors Lady Alton. The play's female antagonist mirrors Frélon, and especially, his ability to create fiction out of a nasty context.

Although Lady Alton has a hand in the production and manipulation of texts (letters), her attempt to tell a story (make Murrai love her and not Lindane) proves unsuccessful. Like Frélon, she skews written materials into polemics and denunciation rather than honor and *vertu*—and also like the nasty pamphleteer—she is absent from the final scenes of the play, and relegated to ephemeral anecdotes rather than the crux of the comedy’s plot.

In fact, both Lady Alton and her literary corpus (the letters) remain outside of the chief narrative of the play. Although she succeeds in creating temporary confusion through textual manipulation, she never suspends the audience’s belief (they know she has altered the letters). This fact renders her, like Frélon, two-dimensional and unable to convey the strong emotions that pass from stage to parterre with more dynamic and complex characters such as Lindane, Polly, and even, Friport.

Voltaire also focuses on the power of texts to convey both positive and negative aspects of an emerging critical sphere of journalistic media. In a dramaturgically modern scene (2.6), Voltaire stages the concurrent actions of Polly and Lindane on one side of the stage with Friport trying to read the newspaper on the other side.¹⁴¹ Friport negotiates his attention between the current events in the newspapers and Lindane’s conversation with Polly (the play’s climax to its central narrative). Friport’s inability to concentrate on either the newspapers or Lindane may hint at a difficult (and sometimes pernicious) fact that the public constantly has to move between literature (the plot) and journalism, and that maybe the advent of journalistic media detracts from “the story,” inserting unnecessary polemics into society and the literary milieu.

¹⁴¹ David Trott points out that *L’Ecossoise* was very modern not only in this scene, but also in its split-stage dramaturgy. Throughout the play, Voltaire partitions the action between the café setting and the guesthouse bedrooms (*Théâtre du XVIIIe*, 72-73).

Act I, scene three, however, presents Voltaire's harshest condemnation of French journalistic practices and possibly even public opinion in general. Here, Voltaire stages a group of discordant voices—all of whom try to weigh in on the contemporary sociopolitical atmosphere of mid eighteenth-century France. Nicolas Veysman points out the interdisciplinary nature of this “cacophonous” scene:

C'est au café que Voltaire choisit de placer sa mise en scène d'une impossible symphonie des voix particulières qui se croisent, se mêlent, sans jamais constituer une voix publique harmonieuse. 'Ils parlent tous quatre en même temps', précise Voltaire en didascalie. À la confusion des voix mêlées, Voltaire ajoute celle des thèmes abordés, l'un parlant de théâtre, l'autre d'économie, sans que la parole parvienne jamais à devenir dialogique, recluse par conséquent dans une surdité mutuelle que souligne le parallélisme des conversations étrangères les unes aux autres. (207)

Through his stage directions (*didascalie*) and dialogues, Voltaire shows the impossibility of enunciating a clear, correct opinion when a “symphony” of voices speak at the same time. Voltaire subtly criticizes certain members of the ‘public’ for their desire to give their opinions on political, economic, and aesthetic issues. There are too many “hacks” with newspapers, and according to Voltaire, they should cede some pages to more illuminated experts like himself.

His condemnation of emerging popular criticism, however, is not nearly as severe as his diatribes against Fréron and the *Année littéraire*. Nevertheless, Voltaire clearly worries that the opening of critical avenues to a more popular public leads to an overall degradation of specific media.¹⁴² Voltaire heavily criticizes Fréron and his newspaper for attempting to judge everything—from painting to theater to politics. In the above scene,

¹⁴² Voltaire's concern for a more public arena parallels an overall critique of “the masses” that dots *philosophe* texts up until the Revolution. For example, Roland Mortier argues that Condorcet's goal in *Sur la nécessité de l'instruction publique* (1791), was “to bring out new elites” rather than open up the education avenues to all (74).

Voltaire slips between his more overt criticisms of pamphleteers to a more subtle dig of popular practices and the Parisian public in general. And what results is an attempt by Voltaire to reduce “public” comprehension of his dramatic text through difficult metaphors and complex intertextuality.

Voltaire uses enunciation and dramaturgical tricks to show the spectator that new cultural practices such as gazette literary criticism, anti-*philosophe* slandering, and journalism may have a negative effect on literature. However, Voltaire’s condemnation of public opinion is called into question by the denouement of his own comedy. By the final scene, the audience realizes that if it wasn’t for Frélon and his nasty newspaper, Monrose would have never figured out that Lindane is his daughter and Murrai would have never realized that Monrose’s family is the one to which he owes restitution. Frélon’s gazette is certainly not literature, nor is it beneficial to society. However, it emerges as dramaturgically necessary to catalyze the happy ending of Voltaire’s play.

Social practices may move outside of Voltaire’s control, manifesting in the narrative covertly and proving their value as essential, and even originary, to artistic production. Because Voltaire writes a dramatic text—and thus incorporates live audiences, bodies, and conversations into his work—he must therefore identify with the society that he chooses to stage. Therefore, the *philosophe* loses his ability to inscribe sheer “literary” metaphors into his text: he must also take into account the bodies, voices and effects of live actors. But what is more, Voltaire also loses his power to provide a unitary condemnation of certain cultural practices during this time, such as the role of journalism in French society.

Enough is Enough: Calls for a Cease-Fire in the Republic of Letters

Although Palissot was the first to bring the pamphlet war between Counter-Enlightenment writers and encyclopedists to the French main stage, Voltaire goes further than his anti-*philosophe* adversary in incorporating literary devices and staging techniques into his play. The receptive longevity, as indicated by ticket sales at the Comédie-Française, proves that Voltaire “won” the theatrical battle against Palissot. And in the critical domain, the abbé Coyer, in his *Discours sur le satyre contre les philosophes* (1760), highlights important differences between the two plays:

Si le Public s'intéressait aux Philosophes, à leurs productions, et à tout ce qui humilient l'envie, je croirais qu'un zèle condamnable corrompt son goût : mais je le soupçonne d'avoir trouvé dans *L'Ecossoise*, ce qui n'est pas dans la Pièce de *Philosophes*, de l'action, de la chaleur et de l'intérêt. Sans doute M. Hume, poète-philosophe, bien différent d'un compilateur d'Epigrammes, connaît la nature humaine et la peint. Sa Comédie, qu'on savait par cœur, avant qu'elle fût sur la Scène, a paru toute neuve. Elle amusera encore le Public, lorsque la Pièce des Philosophes sera ensevelie dans l'oubli. Puisse-t-on également oublier qu'il fût un moment de délire où, dans la patrie des *Montesquieu* et des *Voltaire*, les *aboyemens des Chiens de Saint-Medard*, et les coassemens des Corbeaux de la Gaule, ont passé pour des Oracles. (87)

Voltaire's comedy was simply of better quality than Palissot's *Les Philosophes*. *L'Ecossoise*, according to Coyer, manifests a “staying power” (“elle amusera encore le Public”), while Palissot's comedy is nothing more than a sudden burst of unfortunate drama. Coyer says that even though the public knew Voltaire's text “par coeur” before the performance, this fact did not hurt the success of *L'Ecossoise*.¹⁴³

Nevertheless, Parisian audiences and literary personalities of the time quickly grew annoyed at what they saw was a degradation in the quality of theater at the

¹⁴³ Coyer is not the only critic to critic on the bizarre nature of Voltaire's publication strategy. I discuss the receptive and aesthetic features of this practice in chapter three of this dissertation.

Comédie-Française. We can see the origins of this process in a letter to Voltaire from Malsherbes (*Correspondance* D9154), in which the latter, serving at this time as the Crown's official censor, begs Voltaire to stop the whole episode with Fréron and Palissot.¹⁴⁴ In fact, the very same abbé Coyer who had previously lauded Voltaire's comedy, an ardent *philosophe* himself, mitigates some of his praise for *L'Ecossaise* by warning Parisians about a pernicious zeitgeist stemming from *both* theatrical works:

Deux Comédies personnelles sur le même Théâtre en trois mois ! Citoyens, en quelque rang que vous soyez, prenez garde à vous. L'Ore des Lettrés, qui gouverne à la Chine dans la plus grande union, et qui rampe en France dans la discorde, se lassera peut-être de se déchirer lui-même. Sur qui se jettera-t-il ? (90-91)

Coyer cautions fellow Parisians about the dangers of too many “comédies personnelles” on the stage in too short of a time frame. With this passage, Coyer seems to permit a small dose of satire (Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise*), however, the *abbé* does not want this sort of theater to dominate the playbill of the prestigious Comédie-Française. One could imagine his sigh of relief when Voltaire's more “standard” *Tancrède* went up on the boards a few weeks later, in the early fall of 1760.

In a similar vein, the following testimony from an anonymous writer urges society to refuse the type of theater exhibited in *L'Ecossaise*. He or she is disappointed with Parisian spectators for their explicit support of Voltaire's comedy, and hopes “que le Public reviendra de son erreur, rougira de son injustice, et que par respect même pour la réputation du premier de nos poètes, il dévouera ce Drame monstrueux et diffamatoire, comme n'ayant pu sortir de la plume d'un Ecrivain tel que M. de Voltaire.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Cited in Duckworth's edition of the play, p. 271.

¹⁴⁵ Anonymous. *Lettre sur la Comédie de L'Ecossaise*. 1760, p. 12. BnF Richelieu: 8-RF14503.

A “monstrous *drame*,” and a “horrible hodgepodge”? Members of the literary establishment soon came to the conclusion that these two comedies were not fit as representatives of the Comédie-Française’s repertoire; and what is more, it seems that Paris had grown tired of the relentless war between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes*. A debate that was born in pamphlets during the 1750s had attained a place on one of the biggest stages in Europe in the summer of 1760. The electric atmosphere surrounding theater during this time modified dramaturgical construction as well as the spectator’s reception of performances. For a (brief) moment in time, extra-theatrical phenomena, including polemical literary debate and socio-political events, altered the theatrical atmosphere in Paris—from dramatic writing, to performing, to (as we shall see next) criticizing. But this energy could not last, and most members in the Republic of Letters called for a return to normalcy at the Comédie-Française.

Although the explicit theatrical polemic between the two rival camps ebbed during the subsequent years, Counter-Enlightenment forces had not been warded off for good. The debate continued, but imbedded more implicitly inside other dramatic works. Due to changing aesthetic tastes, the tightening of censorship laws and morphing political and literary allegiances, the Republic of Letters put into place generic constraints on both sides of the battle. Therefore, the overt debate between the *philosophes* and the Counter-Enlightenment took on a plethora of creative forms over the next few years—and most notably in literary criticism, parody, and philosophical dialogue.¹⁴⁶ After analyzing the criticisms of *Les Philosophes* and *L’Ecosseuse* in the following chapter, we will then see

¹⁴⁶ The debate continued vigorously in Grimm’s *Correspondence littéraire*, Fréron’s *Année littéraire*, the various parodies of the two 1760 blockbusters (*Le philosophe en bois*, *Le Petit philosophe*, *L’Ecosseuse*, *L’Ecosseuse en vers*), and finally, in Diderot’s *Le Neveu de Rameau*.

how dramatists of the 1760s and later incorporated strategies and themes from the *philosophe* polemic into their own “theatrical events.”

Criticisms of both plays show a heightened level of sensitivity by writers to the public’s reaction to performance. Both plays (and both sides of the battle) were in competition and the winner seems to be the playwright who was best able to persuade the audience into believing his cause. In critical texts of these two plays, the mobilization of two distinct sides—as well as audience reception—becomes the chief focus of critics.

In the following chapter, I will analyze the *suite* of the Palissot/Voltaire affair, starting in the critical sphere, in order to uncover how the spectator asserted himself as an active, *visible* agent in the writings of Elie-Catherine Fréron, Melchior Grimm, Charles Collé, and other theater critics from the eighteenth century. Then, as the affair garnered more and more criticism—as the Republic of Letters began to grow tired of the polemic (and emerging “popular” tastes) or when Royal censures banned the *philosophe*/anti-*philosophe* argument from center stage—we will see in chapter four of this dissertation how the problem surreptitiously found its way into theatrical genres as disparate as historical tragedy and *comédie plaisante*.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CRITICAL CONTINUATION OF THE PALISSOT/VOLTAIRE AFFAIR

Critical Uncertainty in Eighteenth-Century France

In *L'Ecossaise*, Voltaire stages the vituperative literary critic Elie-Catherine Fréron as the character *Frélon*—a deceitful journalist who emerges as the play's antagonist. Although Voltaire's comedy touches themes as diverse as English legal practices and sentimental family relationships, contemporary critics usually described *L'Ecossaise* as a *pièce de circonstance* about Fréron and his band of Counter-Enlightenment journalists. Never one to back down from literary quarrels, Fréron did not waste any time responding to Voltaire in the pages of his anti-*philosophe* periodical, *L'Année littéraire*. Fréron's first criticism of the play dates from June 3 1760, some six weeks before *L'Ecossaise* was performed at the Comédie Française, and thus in response to the published versions of Voltaire's play that circulated in Paris during the last few weeks of May. Fréron does not stop his critiques there, writing two more reviews of the play on July 27 and August 4 1760, respectively.¹⁴⁷

In each of his three reviews, Fréron shows a distinct style and goal. In this chapter, I will analyze the theatrical debate between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* by reading Fréron's response to Voltaire and by examining critical reviews of both polemical comedies from a more general optic. As we shall see, criticisms of these two comedies took on starkly different forms from the abbreviated descriptions of plays that dot the *Arts* sections of the New York Times or the erudite reviews in academic journals from the dramatic arts. But more importantly, the critical *suite* of the Palissot/Voltaire

¹⁴⁷ Fréron's reviews appeared in the following order: *Année littéraire* (AL) IV (June 3 1760), pp. 73-114; AL, V (July 27), pp. 209-213; AL, V (August 4), pp. 279-288.

affair takes on radically different forms even when compared to *contemporary*, eighteenth-century theater reviews. The singularities that we will see in each of Fréron's reviews, then, speak to the uniqueness of this specific event, and to a creative critical energy that marked this polemic. Over the next few pages, I will examine a number of "parodie critiques," criticisms, "poésie-critiques," "remarques," and letters that each assert legitimate "theater criticism" as their *raison d'être*. What emerges is a heterogeneous corpus of critical materials that underline a fragile normative process in literary criticism—especially when related to the dramatic arts—during the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁸

In *La Vie théâtrale au dix-huitième siècle*, Martine de Rougemont analyzes both plays and theater reviews, highlighting the critic's ambiguous profession and contested social status. According to de Rougemont, the critic at this time radically differed from his or her equivalent in periods anterior or posterior to the eighteenth century:

Au XVIII^e siècle la fonction de critique apparaît comme une fonction originale et autonome, qu'on aimerait pouvoir comparer à ce qu'elle est devenue dans les siècles suivants. Elle ne repose sur aucune légitime institutionnelle : les académiciens ne se font pas journalistes, ni les professeurs ; on vient souvent à la presse du séminaire, d'une charge de secrétaire privé ou de précepteur, d'une tâche intellectuelle subalterne, et l'on y vient comme à une aventure libératrice. (100)

¹⁴⁸ This critical uncertainty is no doubt the reason why, at present, scholars have yet to write the definitive monograph or collective work about theater criticism during the eighteenth century. While works such as *Le miel et le fiel: La critique théâtrale en France au XIX^e siècle* by Marianne Bury and Hélène Laplace and *Un Siècle de critique dramatique: de Sarcey à Poirot-Delpech* by Chantal Meyer-Plantureux analyze the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries respectively, critics have yet to tackle critical discourse in the dramatic arts during the *siècle des Lumières*, aside from a chapter in Martine de Rougemont's *La vie théâtrale*, a chapter in Julie Candler Hayes's *Identity and Ideology: Diderot, Sade, and the Serious Genre* (pp. 81-105), and several sections of Maurice Descotes' *L'Histoire de la critique dramatique*.

“Literary” writers during the eighteenth century inherited aesthetic norms from the previous century, and thus adopted or diverged from poetic models such as Nicholas Boileau and Jean Racine, for example. Even if writers disagreed on the definition of “good writing,” such as in the case of the debate between Ancients and Moderns, they at least claimed legitimacy by either connecting their works with classical models from Antiquity or by emphasizing the unique “Frenchness” and novelty of seventeenth-century Letters.¹⁴⁹

Critics, however, did not enjoy (or suffer) the same institutional molding. In the world of “no holds barred” critical journalism, institutions failed to provide norms to which authors could adhere in their articles’ subjects or styles. Nowhere is the demonstration of this “critical uncertainty” more clear than in responses to Palissot’s and Voltaire’s polemical comedies from 1760. In the pages that follow, I will study some of these creative examples of theater criticism from the Voltaire/Palissot affair and from the middle of the eighteenth century in general, with the hopes of drawing out examples of audience-stage interaction, text-performance relationships, and emerging cultural practices such as polemical journalism, café culture, and “public” judgment.

The “Textual” Critique, or, Fréron Keeps His Cool

Fréron’s first review of *L’Ecossoise* dates from June 3 1760, some six weeks before the play’s performance at the Comédie-Française. It is important to remember that Voltaire’s comedy appeared in print before the premiere, and that at this time, the play’s

¹⁴⁹ For more information on the debate between Ancients and Moderns see, among others, Marc Fumaroli’s “Les Abeilles et les Araignées,” introduction to *La Querelle des Ancients et des Modernes* (2000); and Joan DeJean’s *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* (1997).

authorship was unknown or wrongly attributed by some to Denis Diderot.¹⁵⁰ What is most startling to the reader is that the tone in Fréron's preliminary review is relatively calm, even given the fact that the critic is satirized as early as the first scene of the play. Fréron mitigates obvious disdain for the comedy with relative praise for certain aspects of Voltaire's work, such as the character compositions of Lindane and Freeport, and the play's overall ability to "faire tableau" in the final scene (*AL*, IV, 105). The Counter-Enlightenment critic appears surprisingly bipartisan, writing that *L'Ecossoise* is nothing more than a "tissu d'invéraisemblances" and a "fatras d'absurdités" (106), but nonetheless admitting that "Lindane est un modèle de vertu, de noblesse, de patience et de douceur" (76).

In this first review, Fréron provides a lengthy (30 page) summary of the plot and cites excerpts that he feels are either excellent demonstrations of "vertu," on the one hand; or on the other hand, unfortunate examples of bad writing. The critic's tone is remarkably dry and erudite. Even though it is obvious that Fréron doesn't like *L'Ecossoise*, his disinterested style gives the reader the impression that this opinion is due to the play's shortcomings in verisimilitude or tone, and not because Fréron himself is implicated in the affair. When he finally addresses Voltaire's staging of the *Frélon* character, Fréron brushes off the harsh satire by asserting that the author lacks originality.

Mais, si c'est moi réellement que l'auteur de la Comédie a eu en vue, j'en conclus que ce n'est pas M. de Voltaire qui a fait ce Drame. Ce grand Poète, qui a beaucoup de génie, surtout celui de l'invention, ne se serait pas abaissé jusqu'à être le plagiaire de M. Piron, qui, longtemps avant l'*Ecossoise*, m'a très ingénieusement appelé *Frélon* ; il est vrai qu'il avait dérobé lui-même ce bon mot, cette idée charmante, cet effort d'esprit... (*AL*, IV, 110)

¹⁵⁰ Charles Collé argues that Diderot is the author until well into August of 1760 (see his *Journal*, II, pp. 370-373).

The unknown dramatist's harsh treatment of Fréron, according to the critic himself, is nothing new and just another example of nasty pamphleteering from members of a "*secte philosophique*." By denying that Voltaire is the author of the play and mentioning Alexis Piron's name, Fréron accomplishes two goals. First, the critic situates the play below Voltaire's level and into the more depraved realm of theater parodists, *chansonniers*, and jokesters.¹⁵¹ Secondly, by still mentioning the *philosophe*'s name, Fréron nonetheless makes an implicit criticism of Voltaire. If the "Patriarch of Ferney" is in fact *L'Ecossaise*'s author—if the reader reads between the lines and understands Fréron's implicit dig—then Voltaire's reputation as an author with "genius" is tarnished, and with his comedy, the *philosophe* thus produces an unsuitable work for somebody with his stature.

Fréron's calm, reasoned tone probably stems from the fact that he never imagined that *L'Ecossaise* would see the stage, let alone at the Comédie-Française, one of Europe's most prestigious theatrical venues. Before providing his "exposition détaillée" of the play's plot, Fréron first asserts that *L'Ecossaise* is nothing but a pamphlet that has made "...une espèce de fortune dans la Capitale," but could never be "jouée sur aucun théâtre" (*AL*, IV, 73). To conclude his review, Fréron sticks to "standard" critical discourse in an attempt to dislodge the play from any sort of theatrical tradition. If, according to the

¹⁵¹ Alexis Piron (1689-1773) was a noted parodist, dramatic author, and candidate for election to *Académie française* (the vote was vetoed by Louis XV). Even if his more "serious" works such as the tragedies *Calisthènes* (1730) and *Fernand Cortez* (1744) earned him a legitimate literary reputation during his time, he was more well known throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for his clever epigrams, songs and jokester comedies, like *Ode à Priape* (1710) and *Les belles jambes* (1730). For more information on Piron's life and works, consult Derek Cannon's *Identity and Transformation in the Plays of Alexis Piron*. Oxford: Legenda, 2007.

critic, *L'Écossaise* is a supposed comedy “dans la tradition anglaise,” then, its plot should echo contemporary plays from across the Channel:

Il y a plus, le *Caffé* ou *L'Écossaise* n'existe point en Angleterre ; il est vrai qu'il y a plusieurs Comédies Anglaises sous le titre du *Caffé*, telles que *The Coffee House Politician or The Justice caught in his own trap*, le *Politique du Caffé ou la Justice prise dans ses propres filets*, par M. Fielding, Auteur de *Joseph Andrews*, de *Tom Jones*, etc. ; *The Coffee-House a farce*, le *Caffé*, farce par M. Miller ; *The Humours of a Coffee-House*, les *Amusemens du Caffé*, Comédie par M. Ward ; *The Usurpers, or The Coffee House Politicians*, les *Usurpateurs ou les Politiques du Caffée*, par un anonyme. Toutes ces Comédies, véritablement Anglaises, n'ont aucun rapport, aucune affinité, aucun trait de ressemblance avec le *Caffé* ou *l'Écossaise*. Mais une preuve bien convaincante qu'elle n'a jamais été faite originairement en Anglais, c'est qu'on y voit une ignorance des usages d'Angleterre, dont un auteur de ce pays ne serait pas capable. (*AL*, IV, 109-110)

By demonstrating his knowledge of contemporary theater from England, Fréron argues against the play's claim to British origins.

What is more, the critic attaches the play to the lowly Gallic pamphleteering tradition instead of France's important theatrical history, which would include comic dramatists such as Molière, and possibly Marivaux. According to Fréron, *L'Écossaise* stems from neither British nor French theater: it is nothing but the result of sectarian nastiness from social climbing, pamphleteering *philosophes*. Fréron's June review of Voltaire's printed text shows a remarkable level of reserve, calm, and erudition. The critic provides a detailed plot summary, comments on the play's awkward language, and questions the historical and literary underpinnings of the dramatic text.

Fréron and the *propos normatif* of Eighteenth-Century Theater Criticism

In his first criticism of *L'Écossaise* Fréron shows what we might deem a “normal” tone in his review, or, what de Rougemont has called the “*propos normatif*” that marked

some eighteenth-century critical discourse.¹⁵² In *La Vie théâtrale*, de Rougemont describes the methods used by “normal” critics during this period: “Ils racontent l’histoire, en font l’extrait comme d’une œuvre lue, et que leur lecteur ne pourra plus que reconnaître. Ils signalent les beaux vers, et préviennent contre ceux qui sont clinquants, qui se feraient admirer sur le moment” (101). In short, “normal” critics provided lengthy summaries of dramatic works with a reserved, neutral tone. They quoted heavily from the text itself, and sometimes inserted complete scenes of the play into their theater reviews.¹⁵³

De Rougemont also argues that some critics detached the text from any idea of performance to concentrate on the “vraisemblance de l’action, convenance des personnages, [et la] qualité de la versification” (101). Even though Fréron’s critique pertains to prose comedy and not to tragedy in verse, he nevertheless ignores “theatrical” elements of the play such as potential staging techniques, acting considerations, and spectator reactions, thus asserting this “normative” style of theater criticism that marked some eighteenth-century theater criticism.

This is partly due to the fact that he never envisioned the play’s performance and dismissed *L’Ecossaïse* as another pernicious *philosophe* pamphlet. But Fréron never even questions how a Parisian might react to Voltaire’s play, nor does he consider the play as a

¹⁵² Fréron’s first review is normative in its treatment of the play’s plot and tone, but nevertheless diverges from traditional reviews with its strong condemnation of *philosophe* pamphleteering.

¹⁵³ In his first review, Fréron provides a clear example of this practice, quoting *L’Ecossaïse*’s Act I, scene 2 in its entirety.

possibility for regional theater or one of France's "théâtres de société."¹⁵⁴ But what is most interesting is that this form of critical discourse—a formal review marked by a denial of performance—also comes forth in other eighteenth-century theater reviews, and even in criticisms of performed theatrical works at the Comédie Française and other Parisian stages.

Charles Collé, a dramatist and theater critic, demonstrates at times this "textual" (as opposed to performance-based) sort of theater criticism in his *Journal historique ou mémoires critiques (Journal)*. In this work, published monthly between 1748 and 1772, Collé reviews nearly every play that was put up on the boards at the Comédie-Française, the Comédie-Italienne, as well as *théâtres de société* such as the stages at Bagnole, Bagatelle, and Fontainebleau. Collé's style and choice of content exemplify de Rougemont's definition of the "propos normatif" in eighteenth-century dramatic criticism. I will examine two of his reviews from 1758, or, two years before the Palissot/Voltaire controversy.

In his critique of the tragedy *Hypermnestre* by Antoine-Marin Lemièrre, Collé writes that the play was actually a "fable de quarante-neuf maris égorgés par leur femmes," rather than a theatrical production.¹⁵⁵ He goes on to argue that Lemièrre's tragedy "est assez ridicule" and that "le récit...est nécessairement froid, et ne peut pas intéresser" (*Journal*, II, 257). However, the play enjoyed twelve performances, nearly comprising a full, successful run at the Comédie-Française (a great success was usually

¹⁵⁴ Fréron's disregard for potential performances of *L'Ecossaise* is all the more shocking, given the fact that Voltaire was building a regional theater of his own at Ferney during this precise period.

¹⁵⁵ *Hypermnestre, tragédie, par M. Le Mierre, représentée, pour la Ire fois, par les Comédiens françois ordinaires du Roi, le 31 août 1758*. Paris: Duchesne, 1771. BnF 8-YTH-8812.

14 performances). In his (albeit short) review of *Hypernmèstre*, Collé ignores spectator reactions or acting techniques, choosing instead to focus on textual elements of the tragedy. Instead of trying to examine why audiences genuinely enjoyed Lemièrè's tragedy, Collé disregards the play's reception and cites a few lines from the play, using a literary vocabulary ("récit", "fable") comparable to Fréron's early critiques of *L'Ecossaise*.

Collé repeats this style with his next criticism in the *Journal*, a review of Jean-Baptiste Messine de Collet's comedy, *l'Île déserte*.¹⁵⁶ Once again downplaying theatrical elements of the play, Collé writes that Messine's work "n'est pas une comédie" and that it is more a "petit roman" with "nul art théâtral" (*Journal*, II, 258). Collé unfortunately fails to define "art théâtral," or, at the very least, how one could admirably show it in a dramatic work. Nevertheless, the critic then goes on to lament the ridiculousness of the plot and the fact that he had predicted the dénouement as early as the second scene of the first act (258).

Collé did not invent this critical posture: "textual" theater criticism naturally follows seventeenth century models such as the Neo-Aristotelian paradigms used by the *doctes* who criticized Corneille's plays for their divergence from classical rules.

According to seventeenth-century critics such as Georges de Scudéry and François Hédelin (the abbé) D'Aubignac, the text is the primary object of criticism.¹⁵⁷

Summarizing this critical method in his *Introduction aux grandes théories du théâtre*,

¹⁵⁶ *L'Île déserte, comédie en un acte et en vers, par M. C...., représentée, pour la première fois, par les Comédiens françois ordinaires du Roi, le 23 août 1758*. Paris: Duschesne, 1758. BnF 8-YTH-9177.

¹⁵⁷ For a more detailed discussion of seventeenth-century theater *doctes*, see my discussion of the polemic surrounding Corneille's *Le Cid* in the Introduction to this dissertation.

Jean-Jacques Roubine emphasizes the selective nature of seventeenth-century writings on theater. Roubine argues that, “Le seul public ‘légitime’ aux yeux des ‘doctes’, ces ‘connaisseurs’ qui savent les règles ou ces ‘honnêtes gens’ qui ont des lumières de tout, constituait davantage un lectorat que le vrai public des théâtres” (41). With a first glance, it seems that Collé exhibits the same audience-denial scheme as his predecessors one century earlier.

We can easily discern this seventeenth-century ideal of a learned, reading public in Collé’s reviews of *Ile déserte* and *Hypermnèstre*. Although both plays enjoyed relatively successful runs at the Comédie-Française (largely successful in *Hypermnèstre*’s case), Collé ignores audience judgment, ticket sales, and acting techniques. He appears attached to seventeenth-century norms in criticism and judges the tragedy against his personal notions of what “good theater” should consist of, thus raising himself to the level of a *docte* and characteristically ignoring other methods of theatrical judgment.¹⁵⁸

Owing to the fact that *L’Ecoissaise* had not been performed at the time of Fréron’s first review, it is somewhat more difficult to read Fréron’s case as a continuation of seventeenth-century discursive norms. The publication of a play before its performance, as we have seen in the previous chapter, was a rarity during the eighteenth century, and probably even a less frequent practice one hundred years earlier. But what is essential is Fréron’s assertion that *L’Ecoissaise* will never see a stage because of aesthetic problems in the play, such as its novelistic tendencies and its failure to adhere to normal generic

¹⁵⁸ Although biography does not *always* influence ideology, it is worth noting Collé’s strong, conservative ties to the Crown. Collé was, specifically during the 1750s and 1760s, a visible member of Louis XV’s court at Versailles, and perhaps more importantly, he was also *reader* to Philippe II of Orléans until well into the 1770s. For more information on Collé, see Jacques Truchet’s *notice* in “Théâtre de société,” *Théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*. T. II, 1459-1465.

goals (is it a comedy or a *drame*?). Fréron argues that *L'Ecossaise* will remain nothing more than a “pamphlet” because of narrative problems or character composition—he leaves out any discussion of the play’s potential to please spectators, cause a polemical “bruit,” or respond to the audience’s desire to see a *philosophe* riposte to Palissot’s previously staged *Les Philosophes*. According to Fréron (in this first review), *L'Ecossaise* will never see the boards of the Comédie-Française mostly because it is bad literature, and not due to any extra-theatrical reasons such as polemics, censorship, and politics.

It is not surprising that Fréron, an ardent Counter-Enlightenment critic and *élogiste* of classical authors such as Racine and Boileau would take up a “normative” discourse that dated from an earlier century. However, Fréron was also a man of his time and not impervious to changing norms in critical discourse. In her volume, De Rougemont highlights a diachronic change in theater criticism that occurred during the eighteenth century. She writes that, “Peu à peu, les critiques accordent dans leurs articles plus de place à la comparaison entre l’effet littéraire et l’effet scénique, et commencent à reconnaître une valeur propre à ce dernier...” (101). Here, I will closely analyze a few theater reviews from middle of the eighteenth century, as well as Fréron’s second critique of *L'Ecossaise*, to illustrate some instances where the performance—including the actors, the audience, and the stage—trumps reflections on the versification, character composition, and plot of the text.

Performance-Based Criticisms, or, Fréron Loses His Cool

Jean-François Marmontel’s controversial re-writing of the tragedy *Venceslas*, and the play’s subsequent staging at the Comédie-Française in 1759 gave rise to at least a

short-lived change in dramatic criticism by “traditional” reviewers such as Charles Collé.¹⁵⁹ Marmontel’s case diverges from theatrical norms—this was not a case of “pure” dramaturgy in which a playwright thought of an idea, composed a text, and saw his work performed. *Venceslas* was a re-writing of Jean de Rotrou’s acclaimed 1648 tragic-comedy of the same name.

The play tells the story of Ladislas and Alexandre, two noble brothers who are unfortunately after the same woman: the princess Cassandra. During the tragic dénouement of the play, Ladislas unintentionally kills Alexandre under cover of darkness, thinking that his brother is actually his rival, the evil duke of Courland. The horrible truth is revealed to both Ladislas and the audience when Courland (alas he is alive!) and the King Venceslas confront the young murderer the following morning.

When Marmontel staged his own version of the French classic, needless to say a polemic ensued in which Counter-Enlightenment critics lamented the aesthetic changes made by a *philosophe*—most of which consisted in changing the text’s versification.¹⁶⁰ But most importantly, *Venceslas*’ well-known plot and long tradition of performance at the Comédie-Française prevented theater reviewers from having to summarize at length the tragedy’s intrigue and character compositions. Moreover, the audacity of a *philosophe* version of a French classic inaugurated a critical posture that eventually incorporated references to the larger battle between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes*.

¹⁵⁹ *Venceslas, tragédie de Rotrou, représentée pour la première fois sur le théâtre de l’Hôtel de Bourgogne, par la Troupe royale en 1647, et remise au théâtre avec des changements faits par Marmontel, le... 30 avril 1759*. Paris: Barba, 1819. BnF 8-YTH-18821.

¹⁶⁰ Fréron also commented on the *Venceslas* affair in the *Année littéraire* (vol. 4, 1759).

In his March 1759 review, Collé highlights back-room shenanigans and audience reactions to the performance, rather than narrative elements of the tragedy. For example, Collé begins his review with an “aventure anecdotique” that occurred at the play’s premiere:

Il est arrivé, à cette représentation, une aventure peu vraisemblable, mais très vraie...[272] Le Kain a commencé par refuser de jouer son rôle de Ladislas, tel que M. de Marmontel l’avait refait. Le Duc de Duras, Gentilhomme de la Chambre, a insisté ; il s’en est défendu, et même il s’est passé, entre ce Gentilhomme et le Comédien, une scène de contestation dans les foyers, toujours indécente pour celui qui a l’ordre à donner, vis-à-vis de celui qui a à le recevoir. (*Journal*, II, 271-272)

Collé’s review diverges from his previous criticisms of tragedies by Lemierre and Messine at the Comédie-Française. In his criticism of *Venceslas*, Collé focuses on practical aspects of the performance rather than on the merits of the dramatic text. By writing about the political relationships among the playwright, the censure and the *comédiens*, Collé illuminates the polemical “behind-the-scenes” world of theater during this period. The critic moves his reader’s attention from the stage to the alcoves of the theater house, and from the fictive events on the stage (the play’s narrative) to actual events that occurred during the performance.

Instead of spotlighting the action on stage, Collé’s account ignores the characters’ dilemmas and dialogues and focuses instead on the actor Lekain’s insubordinate behavior:

Le Comédien prétendait que sa mémoire ne pouvait se plier à apprendre les nouveaux vers de ce rôle ; que les anciens lui revenaient malgré lui, qu’on l’exposerait infailliblement à manquer à tout bout de champ à la représentation, et que ce serait...exposer la réputation d’un Comédien, qui s’en était faite une assez grande dans le public (*Journal*, II, 272).

Collé argues that the actor Lekain deliberately replaced Marmontel's edits to Rotrou's dramatic text with the original seventeenth-century verses. Instead of performing "Marmontel's *Venceslas*," Lekain reverted to Rotrou's original. What is more, this dramatic insubordination caused a noticeable reaction by the audience.

For the critic Collé, the precise content of these changes (what did Lekain change?) pales in importance to the fact that Lekain alters the performance, causes spectators to react to him (and not the text), and subverts both the playwright's and the censure's wishes (Marmontel's version of *Venceslas* had the Royal authority needed for performance). More implicitly, Collé's review underlines a marked conservatism by actors at the Comédie-Française, the keen awareness by spectators of the smallest aesthetic changes to a dramatic text, emerging political overtones related to theatrical performance during this time, and disparities among the desires of spectators, actors, and dramatic authors.¹⁶¹

This more "anecdotal" or "performance based" discourse removes the locus of criticism from the play's narrative, characters, or composition. Instead, the critic focuses on the actual performance of the play, highlighting elements such as the actor's delivery of certain lines, spectator reactions, and extra-scenic factors occurring at the theater house, such as politics, allegiances, or censorship. In short, this style of dramatic criticism bolsters non-fictive elements of the theatrical event (actors, audiences) instead of fictive elements such as the play's characters or "story." We will probably never know the exact reasons behind Lekain's last-minute switch from Marmontel's text the Rotrou's original

¹⁶¹ I explore the conservatism of actors at the Comédie-Française in chapter four of this dissertation, and specifically, in my analysis of their refusal to perform Marie-Joseph Chenier's *Charles IX ou l'Ecole des Rois* during the Revolution.

lines (did he simply forget? Was he paid? Was it an aesthetic protest?). Nevertheless, and in this specific case, the performative turn in theater discourse plausibly emerged from the heightened polemical energy that characterized the ongoing war between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes*—or at the very least—from Marmontel’s renewed evocation of the longtime battle between *Ancients* and *Moderns*.

Collé did not like Marmontel,¹⁶² and he had few nice words to say about the *philosophes* in general.¹⁶³ To relay his opinion, the Orléanist critic downplays aesthetic qualities of the play and highlights extra-scenic anecdotes that might have explained the work’s moderate success. For at least a short time in the history of theater and its criticism, anecdotal stories and nasty battles possibly interrupted the continuation of a level-headed discourse that focused primarily on a play’s aesthetic elements.

Marmontel’s re-writing of *Venceslas* marked an important step in the battle between anti-*philosophes* and *philosophes*, causing both sides to weigh in on the charged performance at the Comédie-Française in late February of 1759.¹⁶⁴ However, *Venceslas* was not an overt attack against Marmontel’s political rivals, nor was it a significant financial or critical success. The theatrical battle between both camps certainly picked up

¹⁶² Collé does not mince his words when describing his relationship with Marmontel: “Je ne suis point ami de Marmontel, ni ne veux l’être” (*Journal*, II, 287)

¹⁶³ Collé’s disdain of the *philosophes* originated with Diderot’s publication of *Le Fils naturel* in March 1757. Collé’s reaction: “On observera encore, qu’il semble que ces Messieurs ayent fait partie de se louer réciproquement, à la moindre occasion, et dans toutes les circonstances; et ces éloges, qui paroissent communs entr’eux, ridicules parmi les autres gens de lettres, et outrés à tout le monde, démentent le grand nom de philosophe qu’ils se prodiguent continuellement, et montrent une petitesse qui ne devrait point se trouver dans les ames de gens qui se disent tout crument les sages du siècle” (*Journal*, II, 167). For more information on Collé and the *philosophes*, see my recent article, “*Les Philosophes* selon Charles Collé,” forthcoming (spring 2010).

¹⁶⁴ Both Fréron and Grimm review Marmontel’s *Venceslas* in their respective journals, albeit with different opinions.

speed as a result of Marmontel's play, but it culminated the following year with Palissot's *Les Philosophes* and Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise*. Ideologically engaged critics on both sides of the fence responded to the heightened partisan energy inside the Republic of Letters. For example, Fréron changes his tone radically in his second review of Voltaire's work, and possibly provides the *exemple par excellence* of eighteenth-century "performance-based" theater criticism.

On July 27 1760 (the night after the premiere of Voltaire's comedy), Fréron "received" a review of Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise*, which he promptly published in the *Année littéraire*. An attentive reader sees parallels between this review, entitled *La relation d'une grande bataille* and Voltaire's similar author-denial scheme in his preface to *L'Ecossaise*. By denying authorship, Fréron prepares his reader for a denunciatory text and all of the "no holds barred" critiques that mark this popular discursive style.¹⁶⁵ Fréron begins the review with a lengthy description of the physical space where the action that he is about to report takes place.

First, he describes the atmosphere at the venue, writing that "Hier Samedi 26 de ce mois, sur les cinq heures et demie du soir, il se donna au Parterre de la Comédie Françoisse une des plus mémorables batailles dont l'Histoire Littéraire fasse mention" (*AL*, V, 209). What follows is a fictionalized and overtly partisan representation of the action that occurred in the parterre at the premiere of Voltaire's comedy, and what emerges is a virtually unseen style of theater criticism, a true predecessor to Hugo's

¹⁶⁵ Just like in the case of Voltaire's lack of anonymity surrounding *L'Ecossaise*, most readers probably realized that Fréron was, in fact, the author of the "Relation d'une grande bataille". This anonymous attribution is more likely a type of author denial described by Gérard Genette in *Seuils*: "Ce type d'anonymat n'avait généralement rien d'un incognito farouchement protégé: bien souvent le public connaissait, de bouche à oreille, l'identité de l'auteur..." (46-47).

Bataille d'Hernani,¹⁶⁶ and an interesting blend of actual performance, fiction, and journalistic reporting.

An in-depth study of Fréron's *Relation d'une grande bataille* reveals how this synchronic example may highlight diachronic issues in theater and theater criticism during the pre-Revolutionary period—and the difference between Fréron's *Relation* and his previous “aesthetic” review of *L'Ecossaise* emerges as early as the critic's first paragraph:

Les gens de goût voulaient que cette pièce fût sifflée ; les Philosophes s'étaient engagés à la faire applaudir. L'Avant-Garde de ces derniers, composée de tous les rimailleurs et *prosailleurs* ridiculisés dans *l'Année Littéraire*, était conduite par une espèce de *Savetier* appelé *Blaise* qui faisait *le Diable à quatre*. Le redoutable *Dortidius* était au centre de l'armée ; on l'avait élu Général d'une voix unanime. Son visage était brulant, ses regards furieux, sa tête échevelée, tous ses sens agités, comme ils le sont, lorsque dominé par son divin enthousiasme, il rend ses oracles sur le trépide philosophique. Ce centre renfermait l'élite des troupes, c'est-à-dire, tous ceux qui travaillent à ce grand Dictionnaire *dont la suspension fait gémir l'Europe*, les Typographes qui l'ont imprimé, les Libraires qui le vendent, et leurs garçons de boutique. (*AL*, V, 209-210)

At the beginning of his review, Fréron splits the audience into two rival sides, asserting that people with “good taste” booed the play, whereas the *philosophes* made a mission out of rallying spectators to applaud. Next, the critic introduces a military vocabulary (*avant-garde, armée, Général, troupes*, etc.) to describe the way *philosophes* organized

¹⁶⁶ This is a reference to the intense battle between Hugo's supporters and detractors during the 1832 premiere of the Romantic drama, *Hernani*. For more information on the “bataille d'Hernani,” consult Evelyn Blewer's *La Campagne d'Hernani* (2002) or Florence Naugrette's *Le Théâtre romantique* (2001).

themselves and members of the parterre into units with specific behaviors and choreographies.¹⁶⁷

Fréron also separates the audience into socio-literary categories or “classes,” attesting that the “élite des troupes” (those who worked on the *Encyclopédie*) controlled and manipulated less important, but nevertheless *philosophique* spectators. Paralleling Palissot and Voltaire’s strategy of splintering attacks among different groups, Fréron creates “classes” of spectators by singling them out on the grounds of both ideology (*philosophe* or anti-*philosophe*) and their ability to lead or follow (Diderot’s gang or parterre spectators). In addition, Fréron, following Palissot’s example of public denunciation, names specific *philosophes* who were at the premiere, such as Diderot (*Dortidius*, [obviously following Palissot’s example in *Les Philosophes*]), Sedaine (*Blaise*¹⁶⁸), and Grimm (*Le prophète de Boëhmischbroda*¹⁶⁹).¹⁷⁰

In earlier chapters, we examined how audience members at Palissot’s *Les Philosophes* and Voltaire’s *L’Ecosaise* were preconditioned before performances by polemical pamphlets from both camps. Fréron confirms this socio-literary practice in another paragraph of the “Relation”:

¹⁶⁷ Although difficult to confirm (or deny), Fréron’s military vocabulary might have paralleled the descriptions of battles that dotted contemporary newspapers in articles on the Seven Years’ War.

¹⁶⁸ Fréron’s attribution is no doubt in reference to Sedaine’s 1759 play, *Blaise le Savetier*.

¹⁶⁹ This is no doubt a reference to Melchior Grimm, whose pamphlet, *Le petit prophète de Boehmischbroda*, satirized contemporary French music during the “Querelle des Bouffons” in 1754. For more information on this important cultural battle that pitted the composer Rameau’s traditional French supporters against the *Buffons italiens*, consult Downing A. Thomas’ *Music and the Origins of Language: Theories from the French Enlightenment*, pp. 4-9.

¹⁷⁰ Colin Duckworth provides a more detailed account of Fréron’s nomenclature in his “Introduction to *L’Ecosaise*,” pp. 267-268.

La veille et le matin de cette grande journée, on avait eu soin d'exercer tous ces nobles combattants, et de leur bien marquer les endroits où ils devaient faire feu, et applaudir à toute outrance. Le sage *Tacite*¹⁷¹, le prudent *Théophraste*¹⁷², et tous les graves Sénateurs [212] de la République des Philosophes ne se trouvèrent point à cette affaire ; ils ne jugèrent pas à propos d'exposer leurs augustes personnes. Ils attendaient l'événement aux Tuileries, où ils se promenaient inquiets, égarés, impatients. Ils avaient donné ordre qu'on leur envoyât un courrier à chaque Acte. Les gens de goût s'avancèrent tranquillement, mais en très petit nombre, sans Commandants, sans dispositions, et même sans troupes auxiliaires ; ils se reposaient sur la justice de leur cause : confiance trop aveugle! (*AL*, V, 211-212)

Fréron's opinion of the performance is partisan and little more than a nasty fictionalization of *possible* events that occurred at the Comédie Française in late July, 1760: we will never know for sure what happened at *L'Ecossaise*'s premiere. As a polemical rhetorician or as a witness to actual behavior, Fréron nevertheless writes about an organized choreography that responded to specific moments of the performance ("les endroits où ils devaient faire feu").

Fréron emphasizes the concerted effort by *philosophes* to alter audience behavior *before* the performance ("la veille" and "le matin"). According to the critic, the *secte* had already determined how spectators would respond to specific moments in the play before the Comédie-Française raised its curtain. What is more, Fréron diverts the attention of his reader from the play to the Tuileries—the location where Parisians went to buy illegal pamphlets and exchange literary and political gossip.¹⁷³ In Fréron's view, exterior

¹⁷¹ This is probably a reference to D'Alembert. The famous mathematician and encyclopedist published a translation of *morceaux choisis* by Tacitus in 1743.

¹⁷² Duckworth argues that this is possibly a reference to either Duclos or d'Argental ("Introduction" 267).

¹⁷³ In his *Mémoires*, the abbé Morellet provides an interesting correlation between reading practices and exact geographical locations in Paris during this precise period. After the publication of a few pamphlets about Palissot in June 1760, Morellet noticed that "aux Tuileries et au Palais Royal, on voyait des groupes de lecteurs riant aux éclats"

locations to the Comédie-Française (the Tuileries, Palais-Royal) emerge as equally important to understanding the “event” as what is happening on stage.

The critic takes this theory even further, arguing that *philosophes* created a communication system from the Tuileries to the Comédie-Française that relayed orders from “Senators” in the gardens to “troops” at the theater, or, a sort of network for spectator choreography at the show. Keeping Fréron’s partisanship in mind, with this last description, the critic is either highlighting a relatively brand new experience in theatergoing, or, if he is lying, a novel way to critique an adversary’s dramatic work by denouncing the entire theatrical experience as nothing more than a “set up.”

In the next paragraph, Fréron continues his overt denunciation of *philosophes* such as Marmontel, Diderot and Grimm, while at the same time describing the mobilization of spectators during the performance:

La toile se lève ; le signal est donné ; l’armé philosophique s’ébranle ; elle fait retentir la Salle d’acclamations ; le choc des mains agite l’air, et la terre tremble sous les battements de pieds. On sut quelque temps sans dépêcher le courrier, parce qu’on ne savait si le premier Acte était fini ; lorsqu’on en fut certain, le Général honora de cet emploi un de ses plus braves Aides de Camp, *Mercure*¹⁷⁴ exilé de l’Olympe et privé de ses fonctions Périodiques ; il partit plus prompt qu’un éclair, arriva aux Tuileries, annonça ce brillant début aux Sénateurs assemblés, leur [213] dit qu’on avait applaudi à tout rompre, même avant que les Acteur ouvrirent la bouche ; que le seul nom de *Wasp* (mot anglais qui signifie *Guêpe*) avait excité des transports d’admiration ; que rien n’était échappé, et qu’on avait saisi tout l’esprit, tout le sel, toute la finesse des épigrammes d’*Araignée*, de *Vipère*, de *Coquin*, de *Faquin*, de *Fripon*, etc., etc. etc... (*AL*, V, 212-213)

(91). It is also worth noting that the Comédie-Française was located very near (until 1770) and then just next to (1770-1782) the Tuileries.

¹⁷⁴ Most definitely a reference to Marmontel, who had recently spent two weeks in the Bastille and lost his position as editor of the *Mercure de France* for publishing a nasty satire about the Duc d’Aumont.

When the curtain rises, the *philosophe* “army” immediately jumps into action by stomping its feet in unison. In this excerpt, Fréron argues that spectators undermined the role of actors by cheering at specific lines of the play before their oral enunciation by the characters on stage. Fréron’s fictional account may not be a complete manipulation of the truth, given the fact that Voltaire published his dramatic text over two months before the performance—an action that would have enabled spectators to know (and memorize) the actors’ lines before they were delivered. Although Fréron focuses this critique on the play’s performance, we can discern the importance of the dramatic text in providing the spectators the ability to cheer lines they knew were coming, even before the actors could open their mouths!

In the final paragraph of the *Relation*, Fréron moves past the performance of the play and describes a concerted effort by *philosophes* to control the work’s critical destiny:

Le Sénat fut très satisfait de tout ce qu’il venait d’entendre. Le Général lui présenta la liste des Guerriers qui s’étaient le plus distingués. Sur la lecture qui en fut faite à haute voix, on ordonna au petit Prestolet¹⁷⁵ de l’inférer en entier dans sa première Gazette Littéraire, avec de grands éloges pour chaque héros ; [215] ensuite les Sénateurs tendirent la main à l’un, fourrèrent agréablement à l’autre, promirent à celui-ci un exemplaire de leurs *Œuvres Mêlées*, à celui-là de le louer dans le premier ouvrage qu’ils feraient, à quelques-uns des places de courtier dans l’Encyclopédie, à tous des billets pour aller encore à *L’Ecoissaise* gratis, en leur recommandant de ne point s’endormir sur leurs lauriers, et de continuer à bien faire leur devoir ; ils leur représentèrent qu’il était à craindre que la vigilance des ennemis ne profitât de leur inaction pour leur dérober le fruit de leur victoire. Après ce discours éloquent et flatteur, le Sénat les congédia, et invita à souper le Général et les principaux Officiers. Avant le Banquet, on tira un beau feu d’artifice ; il y eut grande chère, un excellent concert de Musique Italienne, un Intermède exécuté par des Bouffons, des illuminations à la façade de [216] tous les hôtels des Philosophes. Un Bal

¹⁷⁵ According to Duckworth’s critical edition of *L’Ecoissaise*, this could be a reference to Joseph de Laporte (267).

philosophique qui dura jusqu'à huit heures du matin, termina la fête. Les Sénateurs, en se retirant, ordonnèrent qu'on eût à s'assembler aux Tuileries sur les six heures du soir pour chanter un TE VOLTARIUM. (*AL*, V, 214-216)

Fréron asserts that the *philosophes*, with an air of self-congratulation, patted themselves on the back after controlling *L'Ecossaise*'s performance. After paying Parisians to come see their partisan play "gratis," according to the critic, *philosophes* then began to write a review of *L'Ecossaise*, lauding each member of the party and doling out gifts for a job well done against the enemy.

In his first review of *L'Ecossaise*, Fréron emphasizes the play's plot as well as the author's compositions of Lindane, Lady Alton, and Freeport. Switching gears in his *Relation*, Fréron then underlines the importance of the "Wasp" reference in determining the overall success of the play. Whereas the satirical reference was nothing more than anecdotal in his first review, in *La Relation* it emerges as a key element of the play's reception.

Fréron's change in emphasis highlights the important "performative" function of Voltaire's *Wasp* character. Reviewing the printed version of the play, Fréron treats the *Wasp* as nothing more than a polemical snippet—a minor character from a *philosophe* pamphlet. However, when *L'Ecossaise* finds a live audience at the Comédie-Française, this once minor aspect of the comedy, through extra-scenic planning and choreography by spectators, emerges as central to the boisterous reception of the theatrical performance.

Fréron's change in rhetoric between the two reviews highlights the qualitative difference between pamphlets and theatrical performances as cultural weapons in the Republic of Letters. Because of the larger and more visible receptive field inherent to

theater, Fréron is forced to change his outlook on the entire affair, as indicated by the style and form of this theater criticism. Fréron's *La Relation* is the critic's reaction to *L'Ecoissaise*'s performance.¹⁷⁶ However, behind the scenes and through more covert epistolary channels, Fréron's response to Voltaire's play takes on more political overtones. Fréron's loud and somewhat hilarious tone in *La Relation* quickly cedes to complaints to the censure and high-level governmental officials.

When *L'Ecoissaise* was nothing more than a pamphlet, Fréron could afford to shrug off the references to his personality and place in society. For example, in a letter to Charles-Simon Favart from the late spring of 1760, Fréron dismisses the play and adopts a matter-of-fact logic: "Je n'ai pas porté de plaintes contre *l'écoissaise*, parce que je n'y suis point nommé et que je ne m'y suis point reconnu, et que tous ceux qui m'ont suivi depuis mon enfance n'ont point vu le moindre trait qui pût me convenir. Ainsi j'ai pris le parti de mépriser cette satire maussade et brutale" (qtd. in Balcou, *Fréron contre les philosophes* 207).

Fréron trivializes the play in his letter to the dramatist Favart. Because *L'Ecoissaise*'s author never uses the explicit word "Fréron" in his text, Fréron sees no reason to pursue the affair with the Royal censure. As a controversial critic himself, Fréron knew the censure's specific rules about denunciation and overt criticism—and

¹⁷⁶ Fréron might also be responding to edits that Voltaire made to the text in order to emphasize *Fréron*'s nefarious character and make more general criticisms of Counter-Enlightenment personalities. In his critical edition of the play, Duckworth argues that the *philosophe* changed the text because, "Voltaire's attention was no doubt brought by d'Argental and Mme d'Epinay to points raised in the reviews, but the incorporation of references to the *philosophes* in act I scene 3 of the stage version can be seen as his attempt to make it fulfill an additional function as a reply to Palissot's play" (253).

Fréron was certainly no stranger to the occasional run-in with authorities.¹⁷⁷ Fréron's early silence indicates that in textual form, Voltaire's insults fall under the guise of accepted norms in the *feuille* genre—all seems fair in the nasty world of pamphleteering. But similar to the critic's abrupt rhetorical transformation from measured calmness in his first review to sarcasm in his second review, Fréron's silence in front of authorities changes after the play's performance.

In a letter to the censure Malherbes on 21 August 1760, Fréron seems to have swallowed all of the harsh criticism that he could possibly bear:

Je sais bien, Monsieur, que j'étais libre de ne point prendre pour moi les injures qui sont dans *l'écossaise* parce qu'il n'y a ni nom propre ni faits allégués. Cette idée m'était même venue ; mais comme Voltaire, et les philosophes, et leurs croupiers, et les petits auteurs que j'ai critiqués, avaient eu soin de répandre que c'était moi qu'on avait eu en vue, mon silence à cet égard aurait passé pour dissimulation, pour fausseté, pour crainte... Ainsi j'aurais mauvaise grâce de dissimuler ces injures atroces, et j'ai mieux aimé m'abandonner à ma franchise bretonne ; j'ai compté que cela me ferait plus d'honneur, et que la honte rejaillirait sur mes ennemis. (qtd in Balcou, *Fréron contre les philosophes*, 207-208)

The performance of *L'Ecossaise*, coupled with the revelation that not just a low-level *philosophe*, but Voltaire, the “Patriarch of Ferney” himself penned the comedy, proves too powerful a trauma for Fréron to combat alone. In his letter to the censure, the critic highlights his modest Breton origins and the fact that he is facing an attack from a unified army. He still understands that Voltaire's omission of Fréron's “nom propre” mitigates the harshness of the critique, nevertheless, he argues that the *philosophes* have made it so clear that the *Wasp* is nobody else but Fréron that he must now blow the whistle. Fréron's desperate plea attests to the power of performance as a form of criticism. *L'Ecossaise's*

¹⁷⁷ For example, the suppression of Fréron's *Lettres de la Comtesse de ...* in 1749 or the temporary suspension of his *Lettres sur quelques écrits de ce temps* in 1752.

dramatic text is harsh enough, but extra-textual performative events during the premiere surpass the written words on the script and emerge as just as important (if not even more important) than the digs in the original manuscript.

When *philosophes* deliver lines before the actors, stomp their feet at certain moments, and highlight the incendiary moments of the performance, they are also subverting the ensemble of textual elements. They choose exactly what to emphasize (the Fréron digs) and center the entire performance on those precise elements. Fréron's critical accounts of the performance, as well as his personal behavior as indicated in correspondence, attest to an ephemeral, difficult-to-locate form of literary criticism: the live spectator critique.

But what if the whole episode didn't really even happen? What if Diderot never led an army of *philosophes* or Madame Fréron remained quiet and self-effacing during the performance—instead of strong-willed and impervious to the “secte philosophique,” as indicated in several criticisms?¹⁷⁸ Whether or not spectators acted in the precise manner described by Fréron is difficult, if not fruitless, to pursue. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of “spectator criticism” is its use as a rhetorical weapon. Therefore, maybe Fréron described fictitious spectator behavior as a critical tool, or, as justification to go to the censure.

When we weigh Fréron's *Relation d'une grande bataille* against his correspondence with Favart, Palissot and other anti-*philosophes*, we can discern two conflicting criticisms. On the one hand, Fréron is the critical text's author and his review of *L'Ecosaise* attempts to show that the play is not “inherently good” and that it is only

¹⁷⁸ Drawing on various sources from the period, Eugène Lantier paints an interesting picture of Madame Fréron in his 1897 seminar on “*L'Ecosaise* de Voltaire,” p. 709.

through concerted efforts by *philosophes* that *L'Ecossaise* gained any sort of public success.

But on the other hand, Fréron's desperate pleas to the censure underline the play's "eventful" nature and its ability to subvert norms in spectator behavior, dramaturgical construction, and publication practices. Fréron's view of the event speaks to a more powerful spectator—one that can determine the overall success of a play without regard to the opinions of traditional theater critics. And more implicitly, Fréron's actions show that the play's overall quality as determined by critics paled in comparison to how the public felt about the play—perhaps best illustrated by the fact that such a mediocre "fatras" could cause a powerful critic to run to the censure and friends for help.

Fréron's multiple assessments of *L'Ecossaise* produce a complex, but extremely interesting picture of how theatrical performance altered the opinions—and more precisely—the vocabulary of literary critics. In addition, his example may even serve as a miniature version of larger problems in critical literary discourse from the middle of the eighteenth century. In his voluminous *History of Modern Criticism*, René Welleck argues that this precise epoch stands out in the larger history of criticism and that "the strongest and most obvious change in the middle of the 18th century was the shift of critical concern to the reaction of the audience" (26). Welleck mitigates this sweeping claim by adding that discursive movements during the Enlightenment were neither "unified" nor all encompassing (25). Nevertheless, Fréron's turn from describing formal, textual elements of the play toward spectator reactions to (and manipulations of) theatrical experience parallels this complex movement toward a more "social" literary criticism.

Fréron was perhaps more implicated than any other living person in the polemics surrounding the play, and one has to wonder if the tone of his writing is more the exception than the rule. We must, then, weigh Fréron's opinion of the events against other reviews of *L'Ecossaise* from the summer of 1760, in order to see if the Counter-Enlightenment critic deviates from or adheres to contemporary norms. On the other side of the ideological spectrum, *philosophes* like Grimm and Diderot also gave their opinions of Voltaire's comedy. In the following section, I will examine a few articles from the *Correspondance littéraire* in order to assess whether or not writers from the *philosophe* camp also diverged from critical norms in their analyses of *Les Philosophes* or *L'Ecossaise*.

Theater Criticism in the *Correspondance littéraire*, or, How to Further “The Cause”

The *Correspondance littéraire* was perhaps the most famous literary bi-monthly in circulation during the eighteenth century.¹⁷⁹ Started by Friedrich Melchior Grimm in 1753 and passed on to Joseph Meister in 1773, the *Correspondance* attempted to cover an encyclopedic amount of intellectual ground, with discussions of such disparate topics as biology, poetry, and civics.¹⁸⁰ Like Fréron's *Année littéraire*, the *Correspondance* was a means to further a sectarian mission, albeit from the other side of the ideological fence. A few months after moving from Saxony to Paris in 1749, Grimm was already shoulder-to-shoulder with established *philosophes*, hosting weekly “dîners de garçons” with

¹⁷⁹ For a detailed account of the *Correspondance littéraire*'s genesis and importance during its time, consult Jeanne R. Monty's *La Critique littéraire de Melchior Grimm*, and more specifically, chapter 2, pp. 23-39.

¹⁸⁰ For more information on the *Correspondance littéraire*, consult either *La Correspondance littéraire de Grimm et Meister 1754-1813. Actes de colloques de Sarrebruck*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1776; or, the critical editions of the *Correspondance* that are currently published by The Voltaire Foundation (1759 edition to be published in 2010, under Henri Duranton's direction).

Rousseau, Diderot, Helvétius and Marmontel.¹⁸¹ With this in mind, any “factual” information reported by Grimm in the *Correspondance* merits the same critical doubt as in Fréron’s periodical.

Despite its obvious one-sidedness, the *Correspondance littéraire* reveals the chronological proximity between the two theatrical works from 1760 that have so far provided the bulk of this study. According to Grimm, Voltaire published *L’Ecosaise* while Palissot’s *Les Philosophes* was still in its rehearsal stage at the Comédie-Française.¹⁸² As we shall see, Grimm uses a variety of tones and strategies to describe the performances and receptions of *Les Philosophes* and *L’Ecosaise*. What first emerges in the *Correspondance* is a stark ideological separation between the two works, but then, a progressive assemblage of both plays into one, rowdy polemic.

Grimm’s first review of *L’Ecosaise* dates from June 15 1760—just two weeks after he had called Palissot’s *Philosophes* a “miserable copy” of Molière that would nevertheless “faire époque” in the history of French letters (*CL*, IV, 239-240). As we saw in an earlier chapter, one of Palissot’s chief goals was to create a rift between *philosophes* such as Diderot and Voltaire by chastising the former with his play and sycophantically praising the latter through correspondance. In Grimm’s early review of *L’Ecosaise*, it appears that Palissot’s plan of splitting *philosophes*, at least in part, was moderately successful. For example, Grimm argues that Voltaire should have kept his satirical comments in their original pamphlet form, instead of presenting them on one of Europe’s most famous stages:

¹⁸¹ Marmontel attests to these *soirées* in his *Mémoires*, Tourneax edition, I, pp. 253-254 (qtd. by Monty 19).

¹⁸² This would have been sometime during the first week of May, 1760.

Un tel persiflage n'est supportable que dans ces feuilles satiriques dont tout le mérite consiste dans la gaieté et dans la saillie...mais la comédie veut d'autres propos ; elle exige surtout une vérité sans laquelle il n'est pas possible de plaire aux gens de goût. M. de Voltaire a très bien choisi le lieu de la scène ; un café offre une multitude de tableaux vrais. C'est dommage que la plupart des scènes ne soient qu'ébauchées, et que la bouffonnerie y soit souvent mêlée aux discours sérieux. (*CL*, IV, 247)

According to Grimm, Voltaire's treatment of Fréron jars with contemporary norms of comedic decency: the *philosophe*'s biting remarks should have stayed in the various "feuilles satiriques" that circulated around Paris during the late 1750s.

Contrary to Fréron's first review, Grimm's early account focuses solely on the *Fréron* character. Instead of following Fréron's lead with remarks on English theater, Grimm argues that Voltaire's staging of Counter-Enlightenment journalism eliminates any sort of legitimacy from the play and that nobody could possibly be as ridiculous as the Fréron character, not even Fréron himself (247). In fact, Fréron and Grimm have two very different ideas about what exactly forms the crux of Voltaire's comedy, and diverge in their respective attempts to find the locus of Voltaire's dramatic work: Grimm highlights the Fréron character, whereas Fréron underlines the play's nonconformity with English comedies.

Grimm points out that the dialogues between Fréron and Lady Alton "gâtent tout" and ruin the coherence of the play (247). He then follows up his June 1 denunciation of Palissot as a plagiarist with a similar remark against Voltaire, arguing that Lady Alton's character is really nothing more than a pastiche, "d'après Mme. De Croupillac¹⁸³ et autres personnages moitié burlesques, moitié fantastiques, toujours faux et de mauvais goût" (247).

¹⁸³ This is a reference to the lead female antagonist in Voltaire's own *L'Enfant prodigue*, a Moliéresque comedy first staged at the Comédie-Française in 1736.

If we examine Grimm's review of Voltaire's play in a critical vacuum and ignore the fact that *Les Philosophes* hit the boards of the Comédie-Française just a few weeks before, Grimm's words seem like non-partisan reflections on the lowly state of comedy in Paris.¹⁸⁴ However, two discrete aspects in Grimm's account of *L'Ecossaise* mitigate this overt criticism of Voltaire. Firstly, and contrary to any other review of the play at this early stage, Grimm immediately reveals Voltaire as the comedy's author. In Fréron's earliest critique of *L'Ecossaise*, as well as in Collé's review of the comedy, both critics believed that Diderot, not Voltaire, had penned the play.

When Grimm tells his reader, "Vous lirez avec plaisir le *Café, ou l'écossaise*, comédie en cinq actes et en prose, traduite de l'anglais de M. Hume, qui ne l'a jamais faite, par M. de Voltaire, qui en est le véritable auteur," he strategically brings Voltaire—who at 64 is the most revered and powerful *philosophe*—into the polemic. Realizing the fact that Palissot spared Voltaire from attack in *Les Philosophes* in order to court the aging author, Grimm probably feared a pact between the two.¹⁸⁵ Grimm implicitly asserts that Voltaire is "ours" and not "yours" in a desperate attempt to unite a force against Palissot's attacks. Recognizing the dangers of losing the "Patriarch of Ferney's" support and seeing the advantages of linking him with the *philosophe* cause, Grimm brings Voltaire into the equation and firmly asserts him as the defender of the *philosophes*.

¹⁸⁴ In perhaps the only critical work that brings to light Grimm's reaction to *L'Ecossaise*, Jeanne Monty unfortunately fails to mention the possibility of Palissot's influence on Grimm's critique. Instead, she views Grimm's assessment of the comedy inside a continuum of his reflections on Voltaire's theater, thus ignoring the specificity of the *philosophe*/anti-*philosophe* affair. For her analysis of Grimm's *L'Ecossaise* critique, see *La critique littéraire de Melchior Grimm*, pp. 95-96.

¹⁸⁵ Palissot added fuel to fire by publishing his intimate correspondence with Voltaire during the summer of 1760 (see Works Cited for complete bibliographical information).

In his first review, Grimm hesitates between drawing Voltaire into the Palissot polemic and asserting critical disinterest by sometimes disparaging Voltaire's satirical portrayal of the Counter-Enlightenment. The critic's ambivalence is perhaps best illustrated in the final section of the June 15 review. Grimm realizes that *L'Ecossaise* is about to follow one of the most controversial plays in the history of French drama. In order to have even the slightest chance of attenuating some of Palissot's "bruit" and "tumulte," Grimm and other *philosophes* begin what might be called a modern-day advertising campaign with the hopes of rallying spectators around Voltaire's rebuttal.

Grimm ends his review with the following paragraph: "Quoi qu'il en soit, cette pièce [*L'Ecossaise*] a eu un très grand succès ici. C'est que le sujet est fait pour toucher tout le monde, et qu'il y a peu de gens qui sentent les défauts et la faiblesse de l'exécution. On dit que les Comédiens français se proposent de la jouer sur leur théâtre" (247). Here, Grimm counters that Voltaire's published (but yet unperformed) work has a significant public and pleases every kind of reader. But what kind of success did *L'Ecossaise* enjoy, and by what audience? And what is the significance of the term "execution" in Grimm's review?

In order to rival Palissot's success, Grimm previews the performance of *L'Ecossaise*. He creates a fictionalized audience ("tout le monde," "gens," "on") and argues that they have received the play with open arms. Even if the critic writes that some of this success is due to the fact that "peu de gens...sentent les défauts"—this ignorance does not prevent the play from enjoying a "très grand" success. Grimm's text emerges as both a theater review *and* a preconditioning text when the critic prepares his reader for the upcoming performance of *L'Ecossaise*. At this time (June 15), Voltaire's play was not

yet in rehearsal stage at the Comédie-Française and Grimm's assertion that the play is to be performed is no doubt a bit of "insider information," inserted into the review with the hopes of rallying the readership around the late-July performance.

The Spectators are Not "*conséquents*": Grimm's Analysis of Theater Reception

In his first critique of *L'Ecossaise*, Melchior Grimm tactically attaches Voltaire to the *philosophe* side of the polemic against Palissot and other Counter-Enlightenment writers. But at the same time, Grimm criticizes several aspects of the comedy and emerges as a relatively disinterested and "fair" critic when compared to the overt partisanship of Voltaire, Palissot, or Fréron. Before moving to Grimm's next criticism of *L'Ecossaise*, it is perhaps best to note the complete change in the polemic's perception by critics, seen in another of the *philosophe*'s reviews of Palissot's comedy, this one dating from July 1.¹⁸⁶

Grimm had this to say about the "critical *suite*" that emerged from Palissot's *Les Philosophes*: "La comédie des *Philosophes* a produit une quantité de brochures de toute espèce, que, pour l'honneur de la littérature française, il faut passer sous silence. On a retranché, à l'impression de cette pièce et à la seconde représentation, plusieurs endroits qui avaient trop choqué à la première. Le public n'est pas conséquent" (*CL*, IV, 253). Grimm attests to a large (quantité) and heterogeneous (de tout espèce) critical production that followed *Les Philosophes*. References to the play seem to touch every aspect of literature and the Republic of Letters, and according to Grimm, this all-engulfing practice has to stop at once.

¹⁸⁶ This is around the date when *Les Philosophes* was retired at the Comédie-Française.

But also, and following his remarks on the ignorance of Paris' reading public, Grimm makes a disparaging comment about theatrical spectators. Instead of understanding dramaturgical changes that might mitigate the intensity of satirical digs, Parisian spectators are not "conséquents,"—they are not logical—and they do not seem to interpret the play as Grimm would like. In fact, spectators seem to be fuelled by *libelles* and pamphlets—sources in which they could find the nasty comments that censures may have edited out of the theatrical performances. In short, spectators are reacting to the content of the pamphlets, or to the first version of the script in circulation, and not to the words that the actors deliver during the second, third, or fourteenth performance. Audience members refuse to acknowledge Palissot's softened rhetoric as they stick to what they know: nasty arguments in the many pamphlets already in circulation at the time of the first performance. In this piece of theater criticism, the disparity between the goal of theatrical texts (the words written on the page) and their actual reception (how the audience behaved, or was reported as having behaved) emerges as a key component in the Palissot/Voltaire polemic.

Despite changes to the dramatic text, audience members reacted either to the original dialogues on opening night, or to the plethora of nasty pamphlets in circulation at this precise time. The following two models show the difference between Grimm's plea for audience attention and the process that seems to be actually occurring (audience members who are not "conséquents," much to Grimm's dismay):

**GRIMM'S CONCEPTION OF (GOOD) THEATER RECEPTION:
PERFORMANCE 1:**

PALISSOT TEXT 1  ACTORS  SPECTATORS

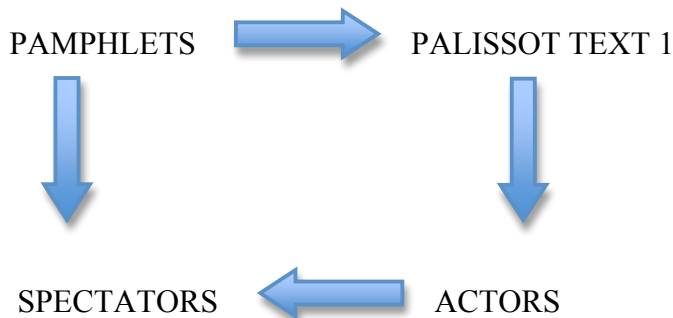
SUBSEQUENT PERFORMANCES:

PALISSOT TEXT 2  ACTORS  SPECTATORS*

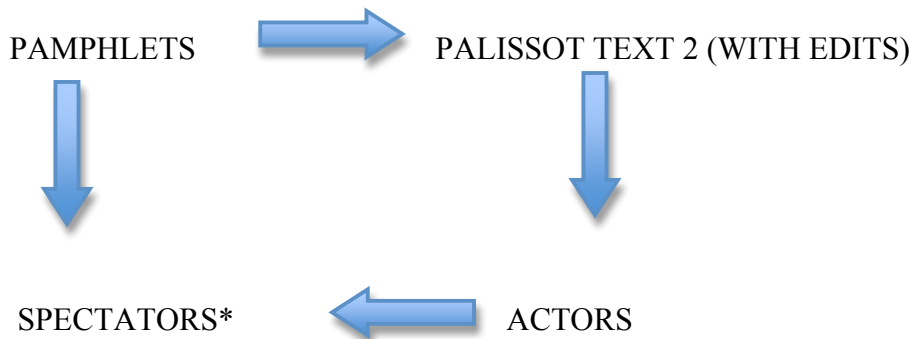
*New Reception by Spectator because of edits to the dramatic text (this reception should be new because of the difference of the new text).

ACTUAL RECEPTION PROCESS BECAUSE OF PAMPHLETS:

PERFORMANCE 1:



SUBSEQUENT PERFORMANCES:



*SAME RECEPTION AS IN PERFORMANCE ONE (Spectators ignore changes to text)

When Grimm argues that spectators fail to assert a new interpretation of the play despite edits to the dramatic text, he implicitly bolsters the power of pamphlets to determine the success of the play, as well as the behavior in the parterre. Pamphlets, not manipulations to the text, or even alterations in the performance (acting changes), determine the interpretation of the theatrical spectator.

Grimm's review of *Les Philosophes* goes beyond a simple "compte rendu" or commentary on versification and speaks to larger issues in cultural production and literary reception. He shows a disparity between the receptions desired by members of the Republic of Letters and the actual way that some eighteenth-century theater audiences understood dramatic performance.

After Grimm's July 1 review of *Les Philosophes*, we can discern a change in the critic's tone vis-à-vis Voltaire's *L'Ecossoise*. Just fifteen days before, Grimm presented arguments with measured nonpartisanship—he both criticized and cheered Voltaire's play for theatrical reasons such as character composition, the ability to "faire tableau," and the verisimilitude of the setting.

However, after realizing that Parisian pamphleteers have regurgitated Palissot's play in a multitude of genres and forms ("de toute espèce"), Grimm changes his reviews of *L'Ecossoise* to encompass issues from beyond the stage, such as literary tenets of satire, political motives for creativity, and strict rules for judgment for any written work. Again, we can see a change in generic field, when Grimm realizes that "*Les Philosophes*" is no longer just a play by Charles Palissot, but actually, a combinatory force of creative material that touches different genres and literary forms.

Before, Palissot had attacked Grimm's cohort through theater—this move from pamphlet to performance was already an irrefutable blow to the *philosophes*. But now, Palissot and his band had become even more pernicious by creating a new genre of attack (the pamphlet parody) in criticism and seeking to take down the *philosophes* and "decent" literature as a whole, during the same summer.

In Grimm's July 15 review of *L'Ecossaise* (still twelve days before its first performance!), the critic returns to the idea of authorship, and more specifically, Voltaire's creation of a fictitious Scottish author. Grimm reminds his reader that Voltaire attributes the play to "M. Hume," the "frère du philosophe David Hume," even though Voltaire, in fact, penned the comedy (260). But more importantly, Grimm then leaves the specific context of *L'Ecossaise* to criticize a more general cultural practice of fictitious authorship. Grimm argues that writers trick readers for the following reasons:

C'est qu'on permet à celui qui se cache de dire plus librement ce qu'il pense. C'est que le gouvernement peut ignorer quand il lui plaît un auteur qui ne se nomme pas. C'est que le public est plus difficile sur un ouvrage avoué que sur un ouvrage dont l'auteur fait semblant de se cacher. Il y a une sorte de poésie dans ce mensonge, et la poésie nous plaît toujours jusque dans les plus petites choses. (260)

Grimm gives his reader a typology of how writers use fake author attributions in contemporary eighteenth-century literature. Some writers use a fictional avatar to speak freely, some to avoid the censure, and some to avoid public criticism. Two interesting elements emerge from Grimm's analysis of this literary practice. First, the critic argues that writers take into account the criticism of their reading public before publishing (or performing) their creative works—a fact that irrefutably applies to Voltaire's consideration of his audience before *L'Ecossaise*. Secondly, Grimm imbeds this practice into the larger process of writing fiction. By adding a fictive author, eighteenth-century writers add a layer to the narrative of their works—an added "ornament" that we could no doubt include among the other literary strategies in Voltaire's work (embroidery, letter writing, etc.).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ I discuss Voltaire's manipulation of fictive elements in *L'Ecossaise* in chapter two of this dissertation.

Realizing that Palissot had moved the debate between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* to a larger and different receptive field, Grimm changes his own rhetoric to include more general problems such as contemporary literary practices and norms. In addition, the *philosophe* critic ends his second review with a qualitative remark on what exactly happens when the debate moves from written plays and pamphlets to audio-visual theatrical performance. Grimm writes that “Une lecture qu’on fait dans le silence et dans le secret ne produira jamais le même effet. On est seul, on n’a personne pour témoin de son honnêteté, de son goût, de sa sensibilité et de ses pleurs” (263).

For Grimm, the staining of theatrical performance by polemical pamphlets produces a confused spectator that doesn’t respond as he or she should. His analysis of the spectator’s reaction is contradictory. On the one hand, people act differently when in the company of others at a theatrical performance; but on the other hand, Grimm’s testimony seems to point to the fact that spectators responded a certain way, or were interested in certain aspects of both plays, solely due to the “bruit” from polemical pamphlets in circulation during the early summer of 1760.

Grimm’s uncertainty may hint at new forms of literary practice and new ways spectators understood and reacted to those works during this precise moment—and Grimm’s visible displeasure with both plays complicates matters even further. The critic knows that there is a battle to lose, and the slightest sign of weakness could fracture the delicate relationship between Diderot and Voltaire, or even worse, help fuel a nascent affinity between Palissot and Voltaire.¹⁸⁸ Grimm’s overt distaste for Voltaire’s work is

¹⁸⁸ In fact, during the summer of 1760, Palissot published a collection of letters between himself and Voltaire. *Lettres et Réponses de M. Palissot à M. de Voltaire*. Paris (?) BnF : YF-10553

lessened by what is hinted at, or even unsaid, in his criticism. He castigates Voltaire's text, but then smoothes over these critiques with praise or assertions that Voltaire's play comprises literary elements, while Palissot's comedy is little more than an egregious rip-off.

Grimm's third and final review of *L'Ecossaise* appears on August 15 1760, thus approximately two weeks after the play's premiere. Contrasting with Fréron's opinion of the event in the *Relation d'une grande bataille*, Grimm's review is glaringly short (a few paragraphs) and marked by an abrupt change in tone. First, the critic comments on how the play was received by spectators, arguing that "elle a eu le plus grand succès" (276). Then, Grimm explains the warm reception in more detail, attesting that "tout le monde sa[vait] la pièce par coeur," which gave the impression that the actors were not even performing a "pièce nouvelle" (276).

In our analysis of Barbier's account of *Les Philosophes* in chapter one of this dissertation, we learned that Palissot's spectators, much like Voltaire's, were also "in the know" about the events that they were about to see on stage.¹⁸⁹ Grimm's remarks show the same process of *preconditioning* in determining the critical success of a dramatic work—and may even lead us to believe that Fréron's hyperbolic *Relation* comprised elements of historical truth.

¹⁸⁹ "Comme cette pièce [*Les Philosophes*] était connue et qu'elle avait fait du bruit avant d'être représentée, l'empressement et le concours du public ont été jusqu'à l'extrême le jour de la première représentation. On n'a point vu un pareil tumulte : j'y ai assisté aux premières places. Elle a été applaudie et critiquée tout à la fois" (Barbier *Journal*, qtd. in Masseau 143).

Another striking feature of Grimm's last review of *L'Ecossaise* is his change in attitude towards the play. Grimm writes, "Voilà l'époque de l'établissement d'un nouveau genre plus simple et plus vrai que celui de notre comédie ordinaire," (276) whereas just a few weeks earlier, he could not help but lament the negative aspects of Voltaire's comedy. A new genre, that is also more simple and true than its comedic predecessors? What happened to bad character composition? What happened to the author's obligation to avoid staging living members of society? What happened to norms in satire and decency? Either Voltaire's play was better on the stage than on the page, or, Grimm has since changed critical strategies. In this last review, it seems as if Grimm removes the locus of judgment from himself (the critic) and places it on the public (the new judge). *L'Ecossaise* is a financial success with plenty of happy spectators, *ergo*, it is a literary success as well? Not so fast.

In the conclusion of his review, Grimm briefly analyzes the actors' roles in the play, complaining that he was not "content de la façon dont *l'Ecossaise* a été jouée; mais le public a été moins difficile" (277). In this final assessment of the play, Grimm creates two sources of judgment: the established critic (Grimm) and the public. And perhaps in order to keep cohesion in the *philosophe* ranks or not to anger his reading public (who might have enjoyed *L'Ecossaise*), Grimm chooses to leave the reader with the public's judgment and silence his own reservations about the play. Societal concerns and polemical battles trump honest literary criticism—a fact that underlines the precarious nature of the *philosophe* status as well as norms in theater criticism at this precise moment.

Grimm's reflections on the differences between performance and publication, as well as Fréron's *Relation d'une grande bataille*, diverge from norms in theater criticism. These are not mere plot descriptions, remarks on verisimilitude, or critiques of versification. But the ideological enemies' respective takes on *L'Ecossaise* were not the only creative manifestation of "theater criticism" during this battle. Due to the polemical nature of the event, writers from both camps sought to weigh in on the summer of 1760—asserting their opinions in a variety of creative media—but nevertheless all under the guise of "theater criticism." In the final section of this chapter, I will analyze some examples from an relatively unknown, heterogeneous corpus with the hopes drawing out some qualitative remarks on the critical "suite" of the Palissot/Voltaire affair—specifically in relation to the power of the spectator, publication/performance concerns, and finally, polemical events as a driving force, or source, for creative materials.

Creative Criticisms of the Affair, or, Trying to Define Literary "Criticism"

Olivier Ferret's critical edition of Palissot's *Les Philosophes* (2002) is a holistic approach to the Palissot/Voltaire affair and a goldmine of written materials that followed the two comedies. Because Voltaire published *L'Ecossaise* before *Les Philosophes* hit the boards at the Comédie-Française—due to this close proximity between both plays—many criticisms evoked the arrival of both comedies as a single event. In his edition, Ferret accompanies *Les Philosophes* with a selection of never-before-published criticisms from the summer of 1760. Ferret's goal is to introduce and situate each criticism in the historical context of a larger debate between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes*—this aim prevents the author from analyzing at length this collection of pamphlets, poems, letters, parodies, and elegies. Nevertheless, a close reading of some of these texts—as well as

some that are located in Paris at the Bibliothèque nationale-Mitterrand and the Bibliothèque nationale-Richelieu—reveals a crisis in determining “normal” theater criticism, and even literary criticism in general, during this period. These oft-overlooked texts illuminate an interesting world of polemics, performance, and judgment. In short, they show a different side of theater criticism with a posture that incorporates extra-scenic factors as often as it discusses elements on the stage.

Both comedies produced a surfeit of creative materials, but in this chapter on theater criticism, we will concentrate on written, unperformed works that were published under the guise of “remarks” or “criticism.” This critical stance unfortunately precludes a deep analysis of performed parodies, which as a genre, emerged as an important mode of criticism during the eighteenth-century, as well as in this specific case of the Palissot/Voltaire affair. Spectators at the Comédie-Italienne, the Foire St. Laurent, and the Passy Theater enjoyed live parodies of both *Les Philosophes* and *L’Ecosaise* with titles such as *Le Petit Philosophe*, *Les Philosophes de bois*, *Les Originaux ou les Fourbes punis*, *L’Ecosseuse*, and *L’Ecosaise en vers* during the summer of 1760.

A detailed study of these parodies is fully warranted, but requires a larger scope than the specific Palissot/Voltaire polemic to incorporate the traditions, and more importantly, the subversions of those traditions, that are inherent to this important theatrical genre.¹⁹⁰ Parodies differed from theater to theater and depended on factors such as the popularity of the original play’s author, the popularity of the parodist, and the genre of the original play. Adding more complexity to an already enigmatic genre, other

¹⁹⁰ For more information on parodies as forms of criticism see de Rougemont’s chapter on Parodies, or more recently, Isabelle Degauque’s *Les Tragédies de Voltaire au miroir de leurs parodies dramatiques: D’Oedipe (1718) à Tancrède (1760)*. Paris: Champion, 2007.

factors such as music, pantomime, budgets, and the censure heavily influenced the writing and reception of parodies. But even without an in-depth analysis of the performed parodies from the summer of 1760, what remains of our corpus is no less interesting, nor less important to a discussion on theater criticism.

André-Charles Caillean's *Les Philosophes manqués* is perhaps the most creative "criticism" of Palissot's comedy.¹⁹¹ Although Caillean published the work as a parody on May 15 1760, it is very improbable that he ever imagined the play would see a live audience because at the very same moment, Caillean was working on *Les Originaux, ou les Fourbes punis*, a "scène-par-scène" parody of *Les Philosophes*, which has a style and length that was more adaptable to the stage.¹⁹² In *Les Philosophes manqués*, a bizarre one-act "parody," Caillean stages allegorical figures of the Auteur, Comédie, Intrigue, Dénouement, Parterre, Cabale, and Intérêt. By taking a detailed look at Caillean's "parody criticism," we can draw out the complex way theater criticism worked during this affair, and more specifically, how theater criticism served goals outside of a strictly dramatic domain to incorporate concerns such as political alignment, advertisement for future publications, and general socio-literary remarks.

Les Philosophes manqués begins in the same way as a dinner party: Caillean introduces a new character in each scene, starting with a discussion between the Auteur (Palissot) and La Comédie. The critic's digs at Palissot are far from innovative—Caillean rehashes the commonplace criticisms that Palissot has gone too far in his on-stage critiques of Diderot and Rousseau and that *Les Philosophes* is a travesty to the French

¹⁹¹ Published in Ferret's critical edition of *Les Philosophes*, pp. 86-100.

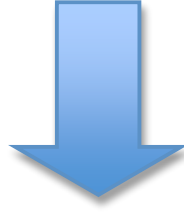
¹⁹² Whereas *Les Philosophes manqués* is a short one act farce that personifies allegorical figures such as "Le Parterre" et "l'Intrigue", *Les Originaux* is a full three act parody and reuses the same characters as Palissot's *Les Philosophes*.

stage. But more interestingly, Cailleau surpasses a mere reflection on the performance or the dramatic text of *Les Philosophes* to include a criticism of the written *suite* that followed Palissot's play. For example, the "Palissot" character argues that any problems caused by his original version of the play were rectified by a "préface," which justifies all of Palissot's nasty remarks against the *philosophes* (88). This is no doubt a reference to Palissot's *Lettre de sieur Palissot au public, pour servir de préface à la pièce*, published just a few days before Cailleau's *Philosophes manqués*, and intended to mitigate some of the abusive remarks made by critics after the premiere of *Les Philosophes*.¹⁹³

Cailleau's inclusion of Palissot's preface shows the urgent wish to "stay up to date" that categorized polemicists during this time. In a constant battle of one-upmanship, pamphleteers had to keep a keen eye on day-to-day publications and incorporate them in a mocking manner into their own polemical works.

But also, Cailleau's critique of Palissot's preface demonstrates the unique way that critics viewed theatrical production at this time. Instead of just focusing on the dramatic text, or even on a single performance, critics attacked an entire ensemble of works—a constellation of creative materials—which, taken as a whole, emerge as "*Les Philosophes*." Cailleau's conception of *Les Philosophes* calls into question traditional definitions of a play. This following diagram attempts to show this process of critical agglomeration:

¹⁹³ This pamphlet is reprinted in Ferret's "Introduction" to *Les Philosophes*, pp. 113-119.



“LES PHILOSOPHES” in critical discourse

Palissot’s polemical pamphlet is just as important as the dramatic text, and both works merge into one, single entity for critics to attack. By blending performed works with published pamphlets, Cailleau in turn asserts that Palissot’s *brochure* becomes part and parcel to any discussion of ‘*Les Philosophes*’ in critical discourse.

Cailleau also analyzes the manipulation of different receptive modes by partisans in the *philosophe/anti-philosophe* affaire. For example, in scene iii of *Les Philosophes manqués*, the author addresses the performance vs. publication dichotomy often associated with this specific literary polemic:

LA CABALE :

L’Auteur ! Je suis bien aise de le voir...Je ne vous connaissais, monsieur, que de réputation. Eh ! quoi ! vous avez l’air d’un honnête homme...

L’AUTEUR :

Vous me tenez ce discours, parce que j’ai été applaudi malgré vous et vos sifflets.

LA CABALE :

J’aime bien cette ambition...Voilà l’Auteur !...Je vous reconnais mieux à ces derniers mots...Avouez que vous aviez un grand nombre de partisans...Ils ont cru l’emporter sur moi...J’attends qu’on vous lise...On ne vous voit que la nuit...craignez le jour, monsieur, craignez le jour.

L’AUTEUR :

Mon style est si élevé, qu’il l’emportera.

LA CABALE :

Je ne le crois point, pour moi.

L’INTERET :

Ni moi...S'il se soutenait encore...

LA COMEDIE :
On en décidera à la lecture.

L'AUTEUR :
On se battra pour me lire...Et le libraire s'enrichira avec cette seule comédie.

LA CABALE :
Verbiage d'Auteur...On n'en est pas la dupe.

L'INTERET :
Fatuité...Les corrections m'ont trop affaibli.

LA COMEDIE :
Vous verrez que c'est moi qui gagnerai le plus à tout cela.

LA CABALE :
De quel vers venez-vous m'écorcher les oreilles ?

L'AUTEUR :
De quel vers ! d'un vers excellent ; il a été applaudi unanimement.

LA CABALE :
C'est souvent la coutume du Parterre d'applaudir ce qu'il n'entend pas...
(1.2, 90-91).

This short scene underlines a variety of aspects from publication strategies to norms in comedy surrounding Palissot's *Les Philosophes*. First, Cailleau ridicules the *Comédie* character when she says that literary success equals financial success ("c'est moi qui gagnerai le plus..."). Next, the author makes a qualitative distinction between the performance of *Les Philosophes* and the play's subsequent publication. Cailleau points out the fact that Palissot manipulated his dramatic text ("les corrections") to please the

audience to no avail: a fact that Grimm lamented as well and that Ferret confirms occurred after the second performance of *Les Philosophes*.¹⁹⁴

Paralleling Fréron's criticism of Voltaire's popular reception, Cailleau argues that Palissot's success is due to nothing more than an anti-*philosophe* cabal and its nasty control of the public. Lastly, the critic makes a disparaging remark vis-à-vis this very same public, arguing that it cheers for what it doesn't understand ("applaudir ce qu'il n'entend pas"). Cailleau emphasizes a disconnect between honest literary judgment and public opinion and bolsters the power of a more impartial, highly-educated *reading* public who will no doubt eviscerate Palissot's play during their textual analysis of the work.

Cailleau's harsh treatment of the public continues during the rest of his "parody critique." He argues that the public is nothing more than a force to be manipulated, pointing out that it is not the parterre "qui juge ordinairement," but rather, "c'est la Cabale"¹⁹⁵ (92). *Les Philosophes manqués* is a distinct form of literary criticism and a method to address both performative and textual aspects of Palissot's *Les Philosophes*. On the one hand, Cailleau regurgitates typical digs against the play, lamenting the staging of real people and disparaging a sort of "crise de la comédie."

But on the other hand, the critic's choice of a theatrical genre allows him to rework and manipulate original verses in Palissot's play and even address overtly "theatrical" aspects such as Crispin's walk on all-fours, textual alterations between

¹⁹⁴ For more information on Palissot's textual corrections, see Ferret's "Introduction", p. 12.

¹⁹⁵ The word "Cabale" usually connotes a group of paid spectators who either interrupt or cheer the performance, depending on who employs them. See the first section of my Introduction to this dissertation for more information.

different performances, the reception of the play by spectators, and qualitative differences between the play's performance and its publication. *Les Philosophes manqués* incorporates the litany of written materials that accompanied *Les Philosophes*, both attacking and adding on to the plethora of creative-critical works associated with the scandal: this emerges as a relatively new critical posture. But also, the *parodie-critique* reverts to literary paradigms from the previous century and shows the author's fear of public judgment and a conservatism that parallels seventeenth-century *doctes* like Scudéry and his calls for a more learned, *reading* public to officially scrutinize dramatic works.

‘Poème-Critiques’ and the End of Performance-Based Criticism

In their reviews from the summer of 1760, established critics such as Grimm and Fréron show a divergence from traditional methods of dramatic criticism. Instead of merely dotting their texts with long plot summaries, comments on versification or verisimilitude and lengthy character compositions, Grimm and Fréron discuss more theatrical issues such as performance; or, they write about more “political” issues like censorship and behind-the-scenes sponsoring. But from a generic point of view, neither critic eschews traditional norms of form. In the *Correspondance littéraire* and the *Année littéraire*, both Grimm and Fréron write in a critical medium and their readers expect them to use a judgmental prose that is commonly associated with literary criticism.

Diverging from critical prose, Cailleau's *Philosophes manqués* addresses both writing and performance in a performative and creative medium that still nevertheless asserts legitimate dramatic criticism as its *raison d'être*. So far, we have looked at forms of critical prose and critical parody, neither of which is chosen by the author of *La*

Vengeance de Thalie, a “poème critique de la pièce des *Philosophes*,” published anonymously and without permission on June 5 1760.¹⁹⁶ In this alexandrine poem, Thalia, the Greek muse of comedy and pastoral poetry, laments the horrors of “decadence” and “offense” caused by Palissot’s *Les Philosophes*. Although the poem reuses many of the same arguments against Palissot that characterized more traditional criticisms (copy of Molière, unfair portrayal of *philosophes*, bad versification, etc.), a few new critiques emerge that perhaps stem from the author’s conscious effort to change generic registers and employ poetry in verse instead of critical prose.

Aside from her discontent for overt “satire” and the denunciation of living people, Thalia also criticizes Palissot for his “attack” on the comedic genre (135):

Le comique en un mot est né pour faire rire ;
C’est un jeu délicat, et non une satire,
Loin de sentir jamais la déclamation.
C’est à ce goût parfait que mon intention
Est de revoir Paris applaudir et se plaire.
Je veux que ce miracle en lui-même s’opère
En comparant un jour un ouvrage nouveau. (135)

With criticism in verse, the poet hopes to punish Palissot internally, from inside the comedic genre—from one alexandrine poet to another. By masking criticism under poetic language, Thalia avoids the illogical problem of “denouncing by denouncing” or “criticizing nastiness with nastiness” that marks so many critiques of Palissot’s play. The author of this poem can stay behind an artistic veil without lowering herself to the mucky realms of pamphleteering and journalism. Even “Thalia’s” extra-theatrical digs come forth with nuance and tact. For example, she ends the poem with the following lines:

Il [Palissot] découvre en un coin le facteur littéraire,
Appuyant sans sujet une critique amère ;

¹⁹⁶ Reprinted in Ferret’s critical edition of *Les Philosophes*, pp. 132-138.

Tranchant de l'Isocrate en style d'écolier,
 Et décidant du vers, sans sentir le métier.
 Le serpent le fixait d'un air de complaisance ;
 Mais il fallut quitter cette douce présence.
 Il parcourt tout Paris d'un regard, et d'un saut,
 Subtilement, sans bruit il est chez P...
 Au milieu d'un fatras de paperasse folle,
 Il glisse adroitement sa criminelle fiole,
 Et du fond d'une alcôve observe le succès.
 La liqueur, à grands flots, coule dans les cornets.
 L'auteur pense, retourne, et voit cent catastrophes ;
 N'importe : un dieu l'ordonne, il fait *Les Philosophes*. (135)

The reference to Isocrates, the Athenian orator and inquisitor of Socrates, is probably a dig at Fréron, who is, no doubt, the most famous producer of “critiques amères” in a “schoolboy” style. Even under the guise of “protecting Comedy” and “le bon goût,” “Thalie” can’t seem to help herself from weighing in on the more “non-theatrical” elements of the polemic like the ideological association between Palissot and Fréron.

Although the poem asserts a critical tone with more subtlety than that of prose criticisms, *La Vengeance de Thalie* nevertheless emphasizes two extremely important extra-scenic factors of the play: the political genesis of the comedy’s staging at the Comédie-Francaise, and the plethora of written documents that stemmed from the play’s performance (“fatras de paperasse folle”). “Thalie” attempts to bypass the continuous chain of nasty post-performance pamphleteering by precisely criticizing this pernicious practice, but she is unable to do so. Even though the author recognizes the vicious, never-ending circle of *brochures*, *Thalie* emerges as just another rag in the Palissot affair, and little more than a fancy example of polemical pamphleteering.

Claude-Joseph Dorat’s *Epître à un ami dans sa retraite à l’occasion des Philosophes et de l’Ecoissaise* is another example of “critical poetry” with the specific

goal of weighing in on the Palissot/Voltaire affair.¹⁹⁷ Contrasting with the *Vengeance de Thalie*, however, Dorat's *Epître* was published in early September, and critiqued both plays rather than just Palissot's *Les Philosophes*. Following the same strategy as the previous "poème critique," Dorat personifies the Greek muse Thalia and attacks both poems from the point of view of theatrical comedy itself. In the previous chapter, we saw how the abbé Coyer, a noted *philosophe*, combined both plays into one lamentable event in his *Discours sur le satire de nos temps*. Dorat's poem takes up this disappointed and relatively non-partisan tone, first attacking Palissot:

Ô toi, moderne Aristophane.
 Qui parmi nous osa ressusciter
 Les cyniques clameurs d'une muse profane,
 De cet honneur fatal pourrais-tu te vanter ?
 Même en t'applaudissant, tout Paris te condamne,
 Ton triomphe est affreux, et doit t'épouvanter (lines 42-47)

Dorat makes a parallel between Palissot and Aristophanes, the putative enemy of philosophy and Athenian playwright who satirically staged Socrates' trial and subsequent condemnation.

By citing Aristophanes, Juvenal and Archilocus, Dorat shows erudition and knowledge of sources from Antiquity. This tactic was possibly a way for Dorat to prove that he is more knowledgeable than the average critic because of his understanding of comedy's origins and his ability to write in verse. But also, it is a way to change the semiotics of the debate between both sides to include a more nuanced vocabulary.¹⁹⁸ In *Les Philosophes*, Palissot uses the blatantly obvious anagram "Dortidius" to mock the

¹⁹⁷ Dorat's *Epître* can be found at the BnF Mitterrand (Z-Fontainieu-358 [5]).

¹⁹⁸ Dorat's emphasis on Greek Antiquity also shows his desire to debate Palissot's claim that he was a legitimate successor to Aristophanes and that the *philosophes* earned this harsh theatrical treatment.

philosophe Diderot. Instead of hitting his reader over the head with overt references, Dorat favors more subtle analogies to antiquity.

After arguing that Palissot is, in fact, not a modern Aristophanes, and nothing more than an “auteur infortuné qui ne cherche qu’à nuire” (line 50), Dorat then attacks Voltaire:

Mais quoi ! L’oracle de la France,
D’un peuple ingénieux l’amour et l’ornement,
Démentant aujourd’hui ces traits de bienfaisance,
Ces écrits précieux où la mâle éloquence,
S’allie au feu du sentiment,
De ce coupable excès partage la License,
Et dresse à la satire un honteux monument!
Quoi ! Celui dont la plume aux héros consacrée,
Du plus humain des rois crayonna le tableau,
Nous transmet sa vertu sur la terre adorée,
Et d’Homère souvent emprunta le pinceau ;
Qui retrouvant en soi les entrailles d’un père,
De la tendre Mérope exprima les douleurs,
Et fit couler dans tous les cœurs
Les larmes de Narbas, et celles d’une mère... (lines 52-66)

In his attack on Voltaire (“L’oracle de la France”), Dorat changes gears and moves from classical Greek literature to contemporary French writing. For instance, Dorat wonders how the author of something as horrible as *L’Ecossoise* could have also written a beautiful work about the “plus humain des rois”—no doubt a reference to the *Henriade*, Voltaire’s glorifying epic poem about Henri IV. Also in this short passage, Dorat alludes to *Mérove*, Voltaire’s 1743 tragedy, in which the elderly Narbas shares common tears with Mérove (“une mère” in the above passage) on learning about the deaths of their respective sons, Cresphonte and Egyste.

Although both critical poems highlight common themes such as the degradation of comedy, the horror of staging living people and the overall malevolence of satire,

Dorat's *Epître* criticizes both sides of the debate between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* equally and refuses to discuss the abundance of "paperasse" that stemmed from both comedies. Dorat attacks solely the *texts* of both plays, and refuses to comment on aspects of either performance. Whereas the unknown author of the *Vengeance of Thalie* hints at the political underpinnings of the affair (relationship between Palissot and Fréron) and the reasons behind its tumultuous public reception, Dorat treats both plays as static documents that he hopes to bury under more "proper" theater pieces in the repertoire of the Comédie-Française.

The "poème-critique" genre emerges as a way for writers to keep their criticisms inside a traditional literary framework. Both poets seek to rectify abuses in decency that were caused by *Les Philosophes* or *L'Ecossaise* and posit inflexible rules for comedy and theater in general such as, most importantly, not staging live people from Parisian society. Dorat, because he breaks down the "theatricality" of both plays—because he moves the critical locus from performance to text and from the public to the playwright—asserts both comedies as literature (albeit bad), and hides their eventful, social nature. Where there was once a discussion about tumult, cabals and battles, now there is little more than a subtle reflection on satire in the comedic genre.

In an earlier chapter, we looked at the way that Voltaire hoped the debate would move out of a more public sphere and into the realm of a literary few. It seems as if Dorat's poem helps confirm this appropriation of the polemic by learned, elite members in the Republic of Letters. This more "textual" turn in theater criticism attempts to remove a vocabulary of "bruit," "tumulte," and "incendie" from descriptions of the Palissot/Voltaire affair. Paralleling Coyer, Malherbes, and other writers, Dorat—through

his choice of genre and the content of his poem—reduces the “public” spectacle of the ongoing polemic.

Over the next few months, the Comédie Française enjoyed a relative period of “normalcy,”—Voltaire’s tragedy *Tancrède* appeared on its boards to praise from both sides of the literary war.¹⁹⁹ But the strife between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* had left its mark on the Republic of Letters—and not just in its content (the exact criticisms against the rival side), but also in its form (marketing campaigns and attempts to *precondition* the spectator or reader). Over the next few decades, and as France moved toward Revolution and subsequent terror, political and intellectual adversaries continued to wage war on the boards of the Comédie-Française. From Beaumarchais’ *Le Mariage de Figaro* to Hugo’s *Hernani*, playwrights closed the distance between events on stage and action in the audience in order to further partisan causes that sometimes reached beyond the “normal” scope of theatrical reception.

What began in the middle of the eighteenth century as a nasty ideological battle between encyclopedists and a brigade of budding Counter-Enlightenment pamphleteers, will emerge later under different forms and terms. For example, nasty battles at the Comédie-Française involved various non-theatrical concerns such as patriotism (Pierre De Belloy’s *Le Siège de Calais*), Royal authority (Beaumarchais’ *Le Mariage de Figaro*), and even the definition of legitimate government (André-Joseph Chenier’s *Charles IX ou l’école des Rois*). In the following chapter, I will briefly analyze some examples of this

¹⁹⁹ Except for a few mild criticisms, reviews of *Tancrède* by Grimm, Fréron, Collé, and Laporte all seem to be quite favorable. Although each criticism would half to be analyzed in its specificity in order to draw any profound conclusions, the criticisms as a whole, nevertheless, assert a relative feeling of relief in the return to more classical tragedy after a tumultuous summer of polemic comedy at the Comédie-Française.

theatrical *suite* in dramatic genres as disparate as historical tragedy and *comédie plaisante* in order to illustrate the ways that themes and strategies from the Palissot/Voltaire affair infused theatrical production at the Comédie-Française for decades after the original event in 1760.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE “THEATRICAL EVENT” IN FRANCE FROM 1760-1789

The Immediate Aftermath of the Palissot/Voltaire Affair

So far, I have examined eighteenth-century dramatic writing, performance, and criticism through the lens of two polemical plays from 1760. First, I provided close readings of Charles Palissot’s *Les Philosophes* and a series of pamphlets that served as the intellectual base for his theatrical criticisms of Enlightenment writers such as Denis Diderot, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Claude-Adrien Helvétius. These arguments from pamphlets already in circulation, when combined with performance-based critiques such as Palissot’s pantomime of Rousseau, produced a rowdy performance, a powerful dramatic text, and a theatrical criticism focused on spectator reactions.

Next, I examined a similar process of conditioning the spectator through texts and performance in Voltaire’s *L’Ecossoise*. In his *comédie sérieuse*, the famous *philosophe* ridicules the Counter-Enlightenment journalist Elie-Catherine Fréron, critiques the pecuniary nature of newspaper writing, and paints an ambivalent picture of social currents like pamphleteering and the gradual shift in literary judgment from an “enlightened” few to a more public arena. In that chapter, I hoped to show how *L’Ecossoise* emerges as a complex literary product that exemplifies Voltaire’s aesthetic ideas at the time, and especially, the *philosophe*’s uncertain relationship with the nascent *drame*. But even before his ideas about society and theater hit the stage, Voltaire cleverly used pamphlets, prefaces, and publication strategies to create a knowledgeable spectator. What resulted was an atypical theater criticism that underlines contemporary polemics, audio-visual performance, and the textual “paperasse” surrounding the play.

It is precisely this form of spectator-based theater criticism that I brought to light in my chapter on the critical “suite” of the Palissot/Voltaire affair. Here, I analyzed the effect of preconditioning processes such as pamphleteering and pre-performance publication on the spectator, as well as how these strategies changed norms inside the critical genre. For example, critics responded to pamphlet campaigns and parodies by discussing these practices in reviews of the performances of *Les Philosophes* and *L’Ecoissaise*. These para-texts were inextricably linked to descriptions of each play’s dramatic text or performance. However, this critical practice was short-lived, and members of both ideological sides called for a “theatrical” ceasefire. Exhausted after seeing two polemical comedies hit the boards of the Comédie-Française in 1760, writers inside the Republic of Letters then sought to attenuate the visible strife between the two rival parties and “cleanse” the famous theater by forcing a return to more classical themes and genres.

One reason why Parisian literary circles seemed to “calm down” after 1760 lies in the *philosophes*’ slow but steady victory over their Counter-Enlightenment rivals. In his work on pre-Revolutionary French culture, *Enemies of Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity*, Darrin McMahon argues that *philosophes* gained intellectual and institutional power over a diminishing Counter-Enlightenment throughout the 1760s and 1770s.²⁰⁰ This increasing dominance emboldened *philosophes* and gave them the ability to enforce their will to quell anti-

²⁰⁰ Elections to France’s most prestigious intellectual institution, the *Académie française*, demonstrate an acute example of *philosophe* domination. McMahon underlines the fact that “Marmontel [was elected] in 1763, Thomas in 1767, Condillac in 1768, Suard in 1774, Malesherbes in 1775, Chastelux in 1775, La Harpe in 1776, Chamfort in 1781, and Condorcet in 1782” (7).

philosophe attacks from manifesting at influential venues such as the Comédie-or the Académie Française. For example, in 1770, a mere ten years after the very successful staging of *Les Philosophes*, Royal censures officially banned Charles Palissot from staging his *L'Homme dangereux*, another Counter-Enlightenment play which mocked *philosophes*.²⁰¹ In addition, even though the Comédie-Française performed *Les Philosophes* occasionally during the 1770s, by the 1780s, censures had removed the Jean-Jacques Rousseau pantomime and softened the vicious digs at *philosophes* in several of the more *anti-philosophique* scenes.²⁰² The overt theatrical war between both groups faded during the 1770s, but themes from this battle recurred in dramatic works with regularity during the immediate years after the summer of 1760. Part of this chapter will investigate the on-stage aftershock of the *philosophe* vs. anti-*philosophe* fight.

More important, perhaps, than the exact themes in the debate between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* were the strategies that participants used to disseminate their ideas and affect spectators at the Comédie-Française. In the previous discussion of Palissot and Voltaire, I examined cultural practices such as *preconditioning* through pamphlets and prefaces and the reporting of visceral spectator reactions to performance. In this chapter, I will briefly analyze a few theatrical examples from the second half of the eighteenth-century with the hope of drawing out several ways by which *processes* from the Palissot/Voltaire affair permeated the dramatic genre on the eve of the French

²⁰¹ Palissot, Charles. *L'Homme dangereux, comédie par l'auteur de la comédie des Philosophes*. Amsterdam (Paris): Unknown Editor, 1670 (BnF YE 9863). For more information on the censorship of the play, see Nicholas Cronk's "Voltaire and the 1760s: the rule of the patriarch" in *Voltaire and the 1760s: Essays for John Renwick*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation (SVEC), 2008, pp. 9-11.

²⁰² See O. Ferret's "Introduction" to his 2002 edition of *Les Philosophes* for a more complete chronology of the play's eighteenth-century performances.

Revolution. In this last part, it will be important to keep in mind events such as pre-performance publication strategies, spectator-actor interaction, rowdy crowds, and the polemical mobilization of two diametrically opposed groups.

Healing the Nation Through Tragedy: Pierre de Belloy's *Le Siège de Calais*

Pierre Buirette De Belloy's *Le Siège de Calais* was first performed at the Comédie-Française on February 13, 1765.²⁰³ Hailed by its author as the “première tragédie nationale,” De Belloy's play tells the story of Calais' fourteenth-century bombardment by the English King Edward III during the Hundred Years' War.²⁰⁴ Although the French eventually lost the strategic Northern city to the English crown, Eustache St. Pierre and other *bourgeois calaisiens* were able to fend off a superior number of English forces for over six months.²⁰⁵

De Belloy focuses his tragedy on St. Pierre's capture, the fall of Calais, and the diplomatic relations between King Edward and Calais' political leaders. After finally vanquishing the French fighters and bringing the city to its knees, Edward agrees to spare Calais' innocent women and children if St. Pierre and his municipal staff sacrifice their lives as punishment for the entire town's insolence. In a stunning display of sympathy and courage, a local French noble's wife, Aliénor, begs Edward to let St. Pierre and the other *bourgeois* live, which he agrees to during the emotional final act of the tragedy.

²⁰³ All quotations from *Le Siège de Calais* are from De Belloy's *Oeuvres complètes*. t. II. Paris: Moutard, 1779, unless otherwise indicated.

²⁰⁴ See De Belloy's *Préface* (pp. 3-11), for a more detailed discussion of the “genre national” in France.

²⁰⁵ Eustache St. Pierre's heroic tale is perhaps best known through Rodin's sculptures from the 1880s. One can find versions of the famous artist's *Les Bourgeois de Calais* all over the world, including the Brooklyn Museum, the Rodin Museum (Paris), and the Philadelphia Art Museum.

According to Jacques Truchet, De Belloy's plot is relatively accurate in historical terms, and largely borrowed from Jean Froissart's fourteenth-century *Chroniques* (1439-1444).²⁰⁶ But perhaps more important than the play's late-medieval origins is the contemporary climate in which the play was written in 1763, and performed in 1765. Fresh from another defeat at the hands of the British, France had recently signed the Treaty of Paris and ceded large portions of the Caribbean and North America to its various European foes. *Le Siège de Calais*, then, emerges as an example *par excellence* of well-timed theater: for what better way is there to heal a broken nation than to stage French bravery, even in the face of embarrassing defeat?²⁰⁷

De Belloy's tragedy was an immediate success at the Comédie-Française and booksellers quickly printed copies of his work to disseminate in Paris and province.²⁰⁸ Accounts of the tragedy's premiere show that Parisian spectators received *Le Siège de Calais* with open arms and with intense emotion. To provide just one example, in his *Correspondance littéraire*, Grimm makes the connection between the play's performance and a natural disaster:

²⁰⁶ On the topic of Froissart's *Chroniques*, it is also interesting to note that De Belloy included a section of the fourteenth-century text in his 1765 "Nouvelle Edition" of *Le Siège de Calais*. In the conclusion to this edition, De Belloy pulls lines out of Froissart's *Chroniques* to state how the playwright either followed his predecessor accurately or diverged from the *Chroniques* to adhere to norms in tragedy (*Le Siège de Calais, tragédie, dédiée au Roi, par M. De Belloy ; représentée pour la première fois, par les Comédiens Français ordinaires du Roi, le 13 février 1765, suivie de notes historiques*. Paris : Duchesne, 1765. BnF Mitterand, 8-YTH-16462).

²⁰⁷ In fact, *Le Siège de Calais* was quickly printed and disseminated to French soldiers and colonists in San Domingo, making it the first French-language play ever printed in a French Territory outside of the hexagon (Truchet 1440).

²⁰⁸ *Le Siège de Calais* was printed and performed in Lyon, Bordeaux, Nancy, and other French provincial cities. In addition, De Belloy's tragedy became "required viewing" for newly enlisted soldiers in the French army (Truchet 1441).

Un orage imprévu éclate presque aussitôt qu'il se forme : une catastrophe subite porte la combustion dans le parterre, dans les loges, dans la salle entière ; et, après avoir fait lever brusquement *le Siège de Calais*, ce feu se répand en dehors de proche en proche avec la même rapidité, se glisse dans tous les cercles, gagne tous les soupers, et communique à tous les esprits une chaleur qui produit un incendie universel : tel, au dire des poètes auvergnats et limousins, le nocher, trompé par un calme profond, se trouve assailli par la tempête sans même en avoir soupçonné les approches. (CL, VI, 256.)

The famous *philosophe*'s review, which we first examined in the introduction to this dissertation, merits a more in-depth analysis. First, Grimm immediately focuses on spectators' reactions to the play instead of on the play's narrative or theatrical elements. Using a vocabulary of "incendie," "combustion," and "feu" to describe how the play affected the audience, Grimm's account seems more appropriate for a fire in Le Havre or an earthquake in Lisbon.

Even if we ignore his more hyperbolic statements, Grimm's review still indicates a powerful reception of the play by Parisians from all walks of life (in the *parterre* and in the *loges*). The author focuses intently on the play's effect on readers and spectators, splitting the shared exuberance between the audience in the theater and critics in the *salons*. By moving the locus of his criticism from the text to the audience, Grimm's account of *Le Siège de Calais* differs from traditional reviews of tragedy—a genre that usually encourages a more formal criticism due to its long history and rigid (when compared to comedy) set of rules.

Eyewitness accounts of De Belloy's premiere indicate that spectators eagerly attended performances of *Le Siège de Calais* well after its February 1765 premiere. In his *Journal*, Charles Collé argues that theatergoers lined up in front of the Comédie-Française for hours before performances of the tragedy until as late as the end of

March.²⁰⁹ But what if spectators were not just responding to a subliminal connection between De Belloy's patriotic rhetoric on stage and a recent war with the British? What if spectators recognized (and were still entertained by) ongoing ideological battles from the previous decade? Behind more overt statements on reconciliation and French pride lie ultra-contemporary themes from theater such as the recent on-stage debate between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes*. For example, in Act III of *Le Siège*, the English general Mauni makes the following assertion about patriotism and citizenship:

Je hais ces cœurs glacés et morts pour leur pays,
Qui, voyant ses malheurs dans une paix profonde.
S'honorent du grand nom de Citoyens du Monde.
Feignent, dans tout climat, d'aimer l'humanité.
Pour ne la point servir dans leur propre cité.
Fils ingrats, vils fardeaux du sein qui les fit naître,
Et dignes du néant, par l'oubli de leur être. (3.3)

De Belloy uses a vocabulary reminiscent of Palissot's in *Les Philosophes*. "Citoyens du Monde," fake humanitarians, people who care more about cosmopolitanism than their own cities: these insults hark back to Damis' criticisms of Valère and Dortidius in act I of Palissot's comedy.²¹⁰ De Belloy's on-stage digs at *philosophes* attest to the continuation of the very same debate that was launched theatrically during the summer of 1760.²¹¹ But also, criticisms of *Le Siège de Calais* make an explicit connection between De Belloy's

²⁰⁹ Collé, *Journal*, t. III (1765), p. 169.

²¹⁰ For example, in Act I, scene i. of *Les Philosophes*, the young hero Damis infers that *philosophes* have reaped benefits at home while most Frenchman were off fighting in wars.

²¹¹ It is also interesting to note that, like Palissot, De Belloy emerged on the Parisian theater scene as a "social outsider" rather than a member of a dominant social group. In his Pleiade edition of *Le Siège de Calais*, J. Truchet (see Works Cited) points out that De Belloy was an unknown and rather unsuccessful actor living in St. Petersburg. Moreover, the playwright wasn't even officially allowed on French soil until 1763 because a decade earlier, his uncle had convinced the courts to issue a *lettre de cachet* against his own nephew because De Belloy refused to study law and enter the family practice.

tragedy and the tumultuous summer less than five years earlier. For example, Diderot writes:

Le succès de la tragédie du *Siège de Calais* est un de ces phénomènes imprévus et singuliers qu'il serait, je crois, impossible de voir ailleurs qu'à Paris. Cette pièce a fait réellement un événement dans l'État, et depuis *Ramponeau*²¹² et la comédie des *Philosophes*, je n'ai rien vu dont le public se soit occupé avec autant de chaleur et d'enthousiasme. Ceux qui ont osé, je ne dis pas la critiquer, mais en parler froidement et sans admiration, ont été regardés comme mauvais citoyens, ou, ce qui pis est, comme philosophes : car les philosophes ont passé pour n'être pas convaincus de la sublimité de la pièce. (CL, VI, (*Lettre de M. Diderot sur le Siège de Calais*, April 1, 1765), 243).

According to Diderot, Paris had not seen an event (“événement”) like the performance of *Le Siège de Calais* since the storm surrounding Palissot's comedy in 1760. In addition, the *philosophe* underlines the impossibility of fair criticism (“de parler froidement”) in the case of De Belloy's tragedy due to the public's “chaleur” and “enthousiasme.” The play has become such a tour de force that *philosophes* will have to swallow their pride, accept some of De Belloy's digs at their expense, and laud the play like the rest of Paris.

At first, it appears that De Belloy's dramatic text and some criticisms of his tragedy share themes with the theatrical events involving Palissot and Voltaire in 1760. In both cases, playwrights incorporate insults against an enemy into their dramatic texts and draw on themes from current events such as the Seven Years' War with Great Britain. What is more, performances from the summer of 1760 and February 1765 indicate the fact that in both cases, spectators reacted viscerally to the events on stage. However, Elie-Catherine Fréron's review of *Le Siège de Calais*—the very same Fréron who waged overt

²¹² Diderot makes a reference to Jean Ramponeau, a Parisian cabaret owner who produced anti-clerical marionette shows during the 1760s and 1770s. He also served as the subject of *Le Plaidoyé de Ramponeau devant ses juges*, a farcical comedy that caused a scandal in 1761. For more information on this famous *cabaretier*, see Michèle Viderman's *Jean Ramponeau, Parisien de Vignol*. Paris, L'Harmattan, 2000.

war with *philosophes* just five years earlier—underlines an important difference between De Belloy’s “event” and the Palissot/Voltaire affair.

One might expect Fréron to be an ardent supporter of De Belloy’s French patriotism, and especially, the playwright’s disparaging remarks against *philosophes*.

However, Fréron sets a different tone in his initial review of the play:

Que diriez-vous d’un tableau où tous les visages, tous les mouvements, toutes les attitudes se ressembleraient ? Il y faut des contrastes, ou du moins des différences de caractères, comme dans une Pièce de Théâtre ; sans ces contrastes ou ces différences, il n’y a point de combat ou de variété de passions ; et sans combat ou variété de passions, point de tableau ni de Tragédie. (*AL*, VIII 292)

The critic attacks the emotional calibration of De Belloy’s tragedy. According to Fréron, De Belloy’s play fails to contrast crucial feelings such as love and grief, and therefore, the work is not a tragedy. Fréron further criticizes *Le Siège de Calais*, arguing that De Belloy is ignorant of late-Medieval military tactics (294) and gives too many lines to “unimportant” characters, such as Aliénor (295).

If Fréron’s criticisms had ended here, one could argue that his review of the play is nothing more than an honest attempt to measure *Le Siège* against classical norms in the tragic genre. But later in his review, Fréron inspects De Belloy’s evocation of unpatriotic *philosophes* and arrives at a surprising conclusion:

Ce qu’on peut reprocher à ces vers que dit *Mauni* [sur les philosophes], c’est que, sous *Philippe de Valois* et sous *Edouard III*, il n’y avait point, ainsi que sous *Louis XV*, de grands Philosophes qui s’honorassent du titre de *Citoyens du Monde*. Ce défaut ne vous aura pas échappé, Monsieur, en lisant *le Siège de Calais* ; l’auteur y fait quelquefois parler ses Acteurs comme s’ils vivaient de notre temps. (*AL*, VIII 315)

Instead of agreeing with De Belloy’s character Mauni that *philosophes* are a group of cold-hearted internationalists with little concern for their own *patrie*, Fréron takes De

Belloy to task for peppering his dramatic text with anachronisms such as the existence of a *philosophe* during the fourteenth century.

Never one to back down from contemporary polemics, Fréron then asserts that true *philosophes* don't even exist in current, eighteenth-century France ("sous *Louis XV*"). On the one hand, this example may just illustrate another one of Fréron's digs at contemporary *philosophes*. But on the other hand, the *de facto* result of Fréron's criticism is extremely important: Fréron wants De Belloy to avoid on-stage discussions about *philosophes* and he effectively defends the *philosophes* by arguing that De Belloy should not have mentioned them in *Le Siège de Calais*.

Although Fréron has nothing positive to say about his rival cohort, his critique of De Belloy warns dramatic writers against entering another on-stage ideological war with Grimm, Diderot, and other *philosophes*. Fréron's implicit request for a "dramatic ceasefire" between both sides may highlight the fact that the critic has learned an important lesson. After supporting Palissot²¹³ and writing against *philosophes* during the 1750s, Fréron found himself first as the butt of *philosophe* jokes in pamphlets, and then, ridiculed on the stage of the Comédie-Française in Voltaire's *L'Ecossaïse*. With *philosophe* dominance at a higher level in 1765 than in 1760,²¹⁴ it is possible that Fréron took both his personal history and the contemporary climate of the Republic of Letters

²¹³ It is important here to recall that Fréron read Palissot's *Les Philosophes* to the actors at the Comédie-Française (see chapter one, part two for a more detailed description of the relationship between Palissot and Fréron).

²¹⁴ For an indication of how *philosophes* began to increase their dominance at this precise time, it is important to note that in 1763, *philosophes* succeeded in pushing through Marmontel's *Académie* election despite vehement opposition by Lefranc de Pompignan and other anti-*philosophes*.

into consideration before writing his review of *Le Siège de Calais*—and with all of this in mind—he decided to not pursue the battle any further.

Even as late as 1765, the visible strife between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* continued at the Comédie-Française, albeit in a more reserved and nuanced fashion. It is important to note that De Belloy's tragedy focuses mainly on Gallic pride in the face of defeat, and any reference to the debate between the two rival factions is ancillary to the crux of the play. Nevertheless, Pierre Buirette De Belloy, like Charles Palissot and Voltaire, recognized the importance of staging contemporary themes from Parisian society in order to create a more interested, and therefore receptive, spectator.

Even though Fréron's review of *Le Siège de Calais* shows the slow death of the on-stage debate between the two rival sides, the Palissot/Voltaire affair of 1760 had an ongoing impact on theater at the Comédie-Française and theater criticism in publications such as the *Correspondance littéraire*. In the following sections, I will revisit preconditioning strategies used by playwrights and audience reactions to performance—this time against the backdrop of a theatrical corpus from the eve of the French Revolution. Although the plays I will study largely ignore the literary polemic between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes*, their authors nonetheless exhibit similar strategies of affecting the spectator that were put into motion by Palissot, Voltaire, and their respective clans.

Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro*: A Theatrical Marketing Campaign in Pre-Revolutionary France

This dissertation would not be complete without a discussion of the biggest “theatrical event” from the eighteenth century: the premiere of Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* on April 27, 1784. At the time, or shortly

thereafter, contemporaries hailed the play as being “the Revolution already in action” (Napoleon) and as having “killed the Nobility” (Georges Danton).²¹⁵ Although critics have since dropped the explicit *Mariage*-Revolution link,²¹⁶ critics at present nonetheless continue to emphasize the eventful nature of the second play in Beaumarchais’ *Figaro* trilogy. For example, the eminent twentieth-century *Voltaire*en, René Pomeau, argues that *Le Mariage* had the biggest first night “dans l’histoire de notre histoire théâtrale” (144), and the historian Claude Petitfrère points out that “...jamais [dans l’histoire du théâtre] une première de théâtre n’avait été tant espérée, vécue avec autant d’excitation” (8).

Petitfrère’s emphasis on the excited “hope” of the public is key in understanding how Beaumarchais cleverly fashioned his own event. Spectators at the Comédie-Française, as we shall see, received *Le Mariage de Figaro* with great anticipation, and Petitfrère’s use of the term “espérée” conveys the fact that by 1784, the audience had been waiting for the work for over eight years because of the author’s inability to get his play past the Royal censure.²¹⁷

The staging of Beaumarchais’ play will forever go down in history as a prime example of successful marketing—a strategy that harks back to Voltaire’s efforts to

²¹⁵ For more “political” reactions to Beaumarchais’s play, see Francine Lévy’s *Le Mariage de Figaro: essai d’interprétation*, p. 14.

²¹⁶ For more information on the “Revolutionary” aspects of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, see Philip Robinson’s edited volume, *Beaumarchais: homme de lettres, homme de société*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2000—and more specifically, included articles by Gérard Kahn and William Howarth.

²¹⁷ William Howarth points out that the first hint of Beaumarchais’s desire to write *Le Mariage* can be found in the “*Lettre modérée* to *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775), where a continuation of its plot is humourously sketched out” (157). Gérard Kahn confirms this in his erudite critical edition of *Le Mariage*, writing that “Dans la Préface du *Mariage*, publiée avec la pièce en 1785, Beaumarchais affirme avoir rédigé cette suite du *Barbier de Séville* déjà envisagée par lui dans la *Lettre modérée sur la chute et la critique du Barbier de Séville* parue en juillet 1775, pour répondre au ‘défi public’ du prince de Conti et que ce dernier, mort le 2 août 1776, ‘daigna la voir le premier’” (11).

precondition his audience before the premiere of *L'Ecossaise* with pamphlets like *À Messieurs les parisiens* and a published version of the play itself. And like in Voltaire's case, Beaumarchais' attempt at audience persuasion is both exterior and interior to his play's narrative:

For Beaumarchais, this opening night was the culmination of a campaign to have his play performed during which he appealed to the public, and to the abstract notion of a public, in a struggle to overturn the king's prohibition. What makes this appeal to the public in a struggle against the king particularly fascinating is that it is also the subject of the *Mariage de Figaro* itself. (MacArthur 57)

In *Le Mariage de Figaro*, the character Figaro must overcome adversity to vanquish a Royal force, personified in Count Almaviva and a group of scheming nobles. What is most interesting is that the playwright presents his real-life battle with Louis XVI over censorship at a microcosmic level in Figaro's fight with the Count Almaviva over the latter's "droit du seigneur" (*prima noctis*)—or, legal capacity to steal Suzanne, Figaro's wife, away from him for one night of pleasure.

Beaumarchais, like his character Figaro, emerges as a "meneur du jeu" in convincing the court around him to support his cause and disapprove of royal injustice.²¹⁸ For the playwright, this meant a decade long campaign of public and private readings of different drafts of his play, and a series of letters and pamphlets to various Parisian politicians with the sole aim of getting *Le Mariage* staged at the Comédie-Française.²¹⁹ In his detailed analysis of the play's genesis, Gérard Kahn provides an account of Beaumarchais' readings:

²¹⁸ For Beaumarchais, this meant overcoming strict censorship laws and a litany of financial and political problems with the crown.

²¹⁹ One *pre-conditioning* pamphlet in circulation during the early 1780s was *La Romance*, a fragment of romantic dialogue between the characters Figaro and Suzanne (Kahn 23).

Il y en eut, entre autres, [les lectures] chez l’auteur, en présence de Grimm, le 5 avril 1782 ; chez la princesse de Lamballe, à la demande répétée du duc de Fronsac ; devant le grand-duc et la grande-duchesse de Russie, de passage à Paris, le 26 mai 1782, grâce à l’entremise de Grimm, en présence de la baronne d’Oberkirch ; chez la maréchale de Richelieu, le 30 mai 1782, ‘devant les évêques et archevêques’ ; chez la duchesse de Villeroi, en présence du comte de Lauragais et de l’acteur Fleury, au milieu d’une foule considérable. (19)

By effectively trying to “sell” his product (the play) to some of France’s most distinguished politicians (Richelieu), critics (Grimm), nobility (Lauragais, Fronsac) and artists (Fleury), Beaumarchais sought to cause so much of a stir that Louis would be forced by public opinion to acquiesce and allow *Le Mariage* to hit the boards of the Comédie Française. According to contemporary reports, Beaumarchais read excerpts of his play whenever it was possible and to whoever was willing to listen—and by a certain point in the early 1780s, readings of *Le Mariage* had become veritable social events. Jeanne-Louise Campan, a contemporary of Beaumarchais and lady-in-waiting to Marie-Antoinette, attests in her *Mémoires* that “les lectures de *Figaro* se multiplièrent à tel point, par la complaisance calculée de l’auteur, que chaque jour, on entendait dire: j’ai assisté ou j’assisterai à la lecture de la pièce de Beaumarchais” (qtd. by Kahn 19).

Beaumarchais’ intense marketing campaign converged with a more psychological preconditioning element: the author’s sordid romantic and financial histories. By the time *Le Mariage* hit the boards of the Comédie-Française, Beaumarchais had already moved on to his third wife and was implicated by authorities in the untimely deaths of the previous two. In addition, he was on trial for forgery and fresh from an arms deal with the

Americans during their war for Independence.²²⁰ Parisian theatergoers were not ignorant of these steamy pieces of information: this combination of theatrical, marketing, and biographical elements resulted in an unrivaled night at the Comédie Française and the highest grossing play up until that point in the history of French theater.²²¹

Beaumarchais, a self-proclaimed “worshiper” of Voltaire,²²² seems to have taken some strategies out of the old master’s bag of tricks and published pamphlets to help construct his “theatrical event.” Beaumarchais’s tactics, though, did not end with his censorship victory over Louis XVI and the premiere of *Le Mariage*. William Howarth identifies an interesting literal and figurative clash between written text and audio-visual event during the fifth performance of Beaumarchais’ comedy:

The audience [was] showered from the gods with printed leaflets containing the text of a scurrilous verse, which, reviewing the unsavoury personalities of the other characters, ended with this reference to Figaro:

*Et quant à Figaro, le drôle à son patron
Si scandaleusement ressemble,
Il est si frappant qu’il fait peur
Et, pour voir à la fin tous les vices ensemble,
Le parterre en chorus a demandé l’auteur.*

While some contemporaries simply interpreted this episode as the hostile act of an enemy, there were those who chose to believe that Beaumarchais himself had exploited the circumstance by having the epigram printed and distributed (even touching up the text in the process), on the grounds that adverse publicity is better than no publicity at all. (188)

²²⁰ For more information on Beaumarchais’s interesting biography see René Pomeau’s *Beaumarchais ou la bizarre destinée* or Howarth’s *Beaumarchais and the Theater* (especially chapter 3, “Diplomat and Secret Agent,” pp. 28-37.

²²¹ Petitfrère points out that *Le Mariage* grossed 6,511 “livres de rente,” a record “dans l’histoire du théâtre” (9).

²²² For more information on Beaumarchais’s relationship with Voltaire, see Jack Undank’s article, “Beaumarchais’ Transformations,” pp. 829-831.

We will never know if somebody actually threw slanderous papers down to audience members in late August 1784. But the apocryphal bent of this anecdote is not as important as the fact that Beaumarchais was—at the very least—viewed by contemporaries as capable of interrupting his own performance with self-denigrating pamphlets.

In the case of Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise*, Charles Palissot's previous theatrical critique of *philosophes* served as (unplanned) publicity for Voltaire's play. Spectators at the July performance of *L'Ecossaise* were probably eager to see how the great "Patriarch of Ferney" would respond to Counter-Enlightenment attacks against his encyclopedic colleagues. With *Le Mariage de Figaro*, Beaumarchais raises the bar, realizes the effect of texts on his spectators' "horizons of expectations," and purposefully alters the way by which audience members viewed his play—even during the performance! In his staging of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, Beaumarchais capitalizes on certain strategies from the Palissot/Voltaire debate, illustrates his ability to grasp consciously the importance of a theatrical marketing campaign, shows that he relies on himself alone rather than on a cohort of friends, and uses every preconditioning tool to its fullest capacity.

The public reactions to *Le Mariage de Figaro* will forever be attached to the precise moment of the play's premiere and the concerted effort by Beaumarchais to precondition his theatrical spectator. This historical specificity has convinced some critics to downplay the theatrical, narrative, and performative elements in *Le Mariage de Figaro*. But we have to keep in mind that Beaumarchais's play is neither a mere act of political propaganda, nor does it invite us to ask questions such as "Juge-t-on ici une œuvre dramatique ou un pamphlet politique?" (Levy 14). The play is a timeless love

story and a masterful balance between seriousness and *gaieté* that explores complicated political, theatrical, and emotional questions. At present, drama censures no longer exist and the Revolution has come and gone, yet theaters continue to stage *Le Mariage* all over the world—an irrefutable fact and living proof of Beaumarchais’ dramatic excellence. But no longer do crowds wait outside the theater in a state of “ebullition” for ten hours before a performance of *Le Mariage*, nor do stampeding deaths occur as soon as the doors open (Petitfrère 9).²²³

Violence in the Theater: The Case of Marie-Joseph Chénier’s *Charles IX*

In *Le Théâtre et la Révolution. La lutte des classes au théâtre en 1789 et en 1793*, the famous Marxist historian Daniel Hamiche was the first to reverse the idea that the “[H]istoire du théâtre en France semble s’assoupir au *Mariage de Figaro* pour se réveiller dans le tumulte d’*Hernani*. Rien ne semble s’être passé entretemps” (15). Hamiche goes on to paint an interesting picture of theater during the French Revolution; and over the last twenty years, scholars have further debunked the notion that between *Le Mariage* and *Hernani*, good theater played a back seat to more pressing issues such as political representation and violent outrage at the established orders.

Studies by Graham Rodmell, Paul Friedland, and Susan Maslan on the Anglophone side; as well as French-language studies by Marie-Hélène Huet, Jean-Marie Apostolidès, and Martial Poirson have changed our perception of theater from the Revolutionary years.²²⁴ These critical inquiries into the Revolutionary era reveal—along with the sheer explosion in the number of theaters during the period—a desire by

²²³ Petitfrère writes that the day after *Le Mariage*’s premiere, “On racontera...que trois personnes sont mortes étouffées” (7).

²²⁴ See “Works Cited” for complete bibliographic information.

Revolutionaries to use theater as an important tool in forming a national identity (Rodmell 10).²²⁵

If we follow the themes of pre-conditioning through publication and the reporting of spectator reactions to performance by critics into the Revolutionary years, one play stands out from the rest as a natural successor to Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro*: Marie-Joseph Chénier's *Charles IX ou l'école des Rois*. Written in 1787 and not performed at the Comédie-Française (which had then been baptized the Théâtre-National) until the Royal Censure was eliminated in 1789, Chénier's tragedy echoes Beaumarchais' effort in a variety of ways.²²⁶ In a recent article on the genesis of Chénier's tragedy, Charles Walton highlights this connection between *Le Mariage* and *Charles IX* by pointing out that *Charles IX* attracted "audiences in sizes unseen since Pierre-Augustin Caron Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro* five years earlier" (127).

In *French Drama of the Revolutionary Years*, Graham Rodmell makes an even more explicit link between Chénier's *Charles IX* and Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage*:

It is interesting to note the comparison between the campaigns of readings and polemic indulged in by Beaumarchais (whose play was written in 1778 and accepted in that year by the Comédie-Française but did not open until April 1784 after it had been considered by no fewer than half a dozen censors) and the similar campaign waged by Chénier in the case of *Charles IX*. (12)

²²⁵ In addition to Rodmell's study, the articles in Martial Poirson's edited volume on theaters and troupes show a distinct *theatromania* during the Revolutionary years. For specific information on theaters, see Maud Pouradier's "Le débat sur la liberté des théâtres" (65-77); and on actors, see most notably, Florence Filippi's "Les comédiens contre le texte: acteurs en quête d'autorité dans le répertoire révolutionnaire" (155-169).

²²⁶ It is interesting to note that the original title of Chénier's tragedy was *Charles IX, ou la St. Barthélemy*. By the time the tragedy found its way to the stage, Parisians had already stormed the Bastille, and Chénier changed its name to the more apropos, *Charles IX, ou l'école des Rois*.

Beaumarchais' play is a relatively light-hearted comedy with a happy ending, whereas Chénier's tragedy explores how the Medici family and the Papacy manipulated King Charles IX during the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of French protestants in 1572. But once again, it is more fruitful, as I see it, to link the two plays in terms of their *processes*—their respective abilities to “faire date” and create a “theatrical event”—rather than show an explicit connection in their content.

First, it is a historical fact that Beaumarchais and Chénier read theoretical texts and plays by *philosophes* such as Diderot and Voltaire. Both late eighteenth-century playwrights recognized the paramount importance of theater as an educative, persuasive tool and sought to precondition audience members before the premieres of their respective plays. In the preface to his tragedy, Chénier provides an example of this desire, writing that “le théâtre est d’une influence immense sur les mœurs générales...il faut faire une école de vertu et de liberté” (qtd. by Walton, 137). Although he would agree that all Enlightenment literary output should seek to promote change and teach citizens important lessons about society, Chénier distinguishes between theater and other creative genres:

Un livre, quelque bon qu’il soit, ne saurait agir sur l’esprit public d’une manière aussi prompt, aussi vigoureuse qu’une belle pièce de théâtre...Toutes nos idées viennent de nos sens ; mais l’homme isolé n’est ému que médiocrement : les hommes rassemblés reçoivent des impressions fortes et durables. Personne, chez les modernes, n’a si bien conçu que M. de Voltaire cette électricité du théâtre. (qtd. by Rodmell 62).

Chénier's evocation of Voltaire is no mere accident. The playwright's recognition of an “électricité du théâtre”—a powerful energy that surpasses that of a mere literary work—ties together some of these plays with intense audience reactions during the second half of the eighteenth century.

Chénier's 1788 *Discours préliminaire* indicates that the playwright thought he was carrying the torch of Enlightenment—a flame of knowledge originally lit by *philosophes* like Chénier's idol, Voltaire. The author of *Charles IX* evokes the polemic between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes* and chooses to unyieldingly side with Voltaire's clan. With language reminiscent of the intellectual wars from three decades earlier, Chénier warns those who critique philosophy by equating this group with enemies of the state:

Je sais qu'on imprime encore, à la fin du dix-huitième siècle, que la philosophie est une invention pernicieuse, et que tout sera bouleversé, si elle vient à triompher dans l'esprit des hommes. C'est dire en d'autres paroles, que tout sera bouleversé quand les hommes auront du bon sens. Si c'est une vérité, il faut convenir du moins qu'elle n'est pas évidente. On peut d'ailleurs prédire aux ennemis de la philosophie, que tous leurs efforts seront inutiles. Permis à eux de retourner de la lumière aux ténèbres; mais qu'ils ne se flattent pas d'y ramener l'Europe; elle s'avance à grands pas des ténèbres à la lumière. C'est la marche nécessaire de l'esprit humain, qui ne peut rétrograder depuis l'invention de l'imprimerie. (Chénier, *Discours préliminaire* 27)

For Chénier, the progression and perfection of humankind is closely linked with technological inventions such as the printing press. Although some of his contemporaries use this tool to speak ill of *philosophes*, the press nonetheless remains a vital part of the Enlightenment project and a way to further disseminate *lumières* throughout French society and beyond.

After this praise of the press in theoretical terms, Chénier, over the next few years, would show his affinity for the printed word in very practical ways. In addition, the playwright's evocation of anti-*philosophes* proves that debates between two diametrically opposed ideological groups—a fight that reached its climax with Palissot's and Voltaire's plays in 1760—continued to the eve of the French Revolution.

To make sure that audience members were well disposed to his play, Chénier launched a pamphlet campaign that echoed Voltaire's efforts during the staging of *L'Ecossoise* in the early summer of 1760. With a strong affinity for Voltaire and his conception of drama, and then by personally witnessing Beaumarchais's model pamphleteering campaign just five years earlier, Chénier had the intellectual and practical tools to successfully create a "theatrical event." But what is more, Chénier might also have learned the art of publicity from another one of the masters of the trade, none other than Charles Palissot, the now-former *anti-philosophe*! Rodmell attests that:

Charles IX was not Chénier's first play for the Comédie-Française. Probably helped by the friendship of Palissot, whom he met in his mother's salon, he had succeeded in having a heroic comedy...and a tragedy produced by that theatre (1785-86). Both were failures. When Suard banned *Charles IX* Chénier embarked upon a campaign, much as Beaumarchais had done in the case of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, of readings of his play in various salons. This he combined with use of the published word, such as his pamphlet on censorship, *De la liberté du théâtre en France*, which appeared in June 1789 and in which he 'plugged' his own play. (62)

Readings, pamphlets, marketing campaigns: Chénier's *Charles IX* is a clear successor to Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro*—and like Beaumarchais, Chénier suffered intense criticism by royal authorities. Part of the reason that the censure disliked Chénier's play so much was because it linked the weak sixteenth-century king Charles IX with his contemporary counterpart, Louis XVI.²²⁷ At the time, writers criticized Chénier's staging of real moments from French history, a practice that conservative reviewers thought of as unfit for high tragedy at one of Europe's most prestigious theaters. Chénier drew from the

²²⁷ Chénier cleverly blends historical analysis with contemporary polemics by writing about both Charles IX and Louis XVI in the same paragraph of his *Epître dédicatoire* that accompanied his tragedy. At a certain point in the text, the reader must have wondered which King Chénier was referring to when he wrote about a pernicious "wall of separation" between the King and the people (Chénier, *Epître dédicatoire* 6).

same arguments that some of his friends had used to justify themselves in earlier battles at the Comédie-Française. According to Rodmell, Chénier harked back to theatrical norms in Ancient Greece to rationalize his mise-en-scène of contemporary figures from French politics:

Chénier's justification of his play was, in part, that Greek theatre had been full of praise of Greece and Greek heroes, sometimes even whilst they were still alive. Why should not French theatre, perhaps especially in the dramatic days of the Revolution, do the same thing? (Rodmell 68)

Chénier's evocation of Ancient Greece parallels Palissot's justification for staging *philosophes* such as Diderot and Rousseau in his 1760 satire. According to Palissot, the great Greek dramatist Aristophanes put contemporaries like Socrates and Cleon on the boards, and therefore, it was permissible for Palissot to do the same.²²⁸ However, Chénier's work is less polemical than Palissot's—Chénier chooses his terms wisely, and calls his on-stage evocations of actual people “praise”—a strategy he hopes will soften some of the harsh criticisms made against him during the late 1780s. Undeterred by critics and helped by strategic alliances with theater personalities such as Palissot and Joseph Talma (the lead actor at the Comédie Française), Chénier continued his battle to get *Charles IX* up on the theater's boards.

In one of the first English-language studies on Chénier's tragedy, H.C. Ault argues that, “from August 1789 to August 1790, Chénier was agitating, in pamphlets and in the *Journal de Paris*, to have his play performed and, that achieved, was equally busy justifying the performance and defending his tragedy” (398). Ault then goes on to describe the effect of this “campaign,” noting that the premiere of *Charles IX* was “a

²²⁸ For a more detailed discussion on Palissot's justification for staging the *philosophes*, see chapter one of this dissertation.

night of boundless and noisy enthusiasm,” and “the most successful, as it had been the longest awaited first night of the century” (398).

Did spectators greet the premiere of *Charles IX* with more acclaim than the first night of *Le Mariage de Figaro*? Even with a quantitative analysis of ticket sales and write-ups in contemporary newspapers, it would be difficult to measure the difference in audience reception of the two plays (how does one measure ‘bruit’?). What is perhaps more interesting is that both plays follow the Palissot/Voltaire affair insofar as they were all performed for an audience in a heightened state of anticipation due to pamphlets, letters, and published prefaces.

All three of these “theatrical events” from after the Palissot/Voltaire affair caused nothing short of an uproar at the Comédie-Française—and in Chénier’s case, one could even credit the relationship between pamphlets and spectators as the chief reason for the play’s eventual performance on August 20, 1789. Reluctant to perform the play, actors at the newly established Théâtre National originally rejected *Charles IX* out of a desire not to offend royalist protectors.²²⁹ Not wanting to bite the hands that fed them, actors viewed associates to the Crown as important sources of revenue because the rich nobility paid *comédiens* more than the average rate for performances in privately owned *théâtres de société*.²³⁰

²²⁹ Joseph Talma, the lead actor at the Comédie-Française, disagreed with his fellow *Comédiens* over Chénier’s tragedy and was temporarily expelled from the troupe for several months (Walton 131).

²³⁰ For more information on the world of “théâtres de société,” see Dominique Quero and Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval’s *Les théâtres de société au XVIIIe siècle*. Brussels: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles. 2005.

With opposing views on *Charles IX*, audiences and actors clashed at the theater in late August, 1789. In an article about the staging of *Charles IX*, Charles Walton writes about the power of the parterre to determine the actors' choices:

On 19 August, during a performance of a previously banned play, *Ericie ou la Vestale* by Fontanelle, some spectators called out for Chenier's *Charles IX*. When the actors replied that the ban had not yet been lifted, a spectator claiming to speak on behalf of the audience instructed the actors to seek permission from the new mayor of Paris, Jean-Sylvain Bailly, and report back at the following performance. The next day, the actors did as they were told...[That night,] the audience had been prompted by a flyer that Chenier had distributed throughout the theatre before the performance, *Appel aux spectateurs*. (131)

Walton's perspicuous chronology of Chénier's premiere shows the eventual victory by spectators over the more "conservative" actors at the Théâtre-National. Providing evidence for Walton's link between pamphlets and spectator behavior, eyewitness accounts indicate that the crowd's pent up anxiety from the night before turned into sheer bedlam the following day. In his *Souvenirs de la Terreur*, Georges Duval sets the scene of the performance on August 20, or, one day after Chénier published his *Appel aux spectateurs*:

Déjà la place était couverte du monde, et des groupes nombreux circulaient dans le jardin du Luxembourg. Dans les cafés environnants, on ne trouvait plus une place pour s'asseoir. Les uns se pressaient déjà au pied des marches du péristyle, les autres faisaient des motions. Tout cela était fortement animé, et de nombreuses figures y apparaissaient sombres et menaçantes. On avait l'air de se mesurer, comme à l'approche d'un combat. (I, 126-7)

Duval's choreographic vocabulary of agitated, militant bodies resembles Fréron's description of Diderot, Marmontel and Grimm's behavior at *L'Ecossoise*'s premiere in

1760.²³¹ Both authors use a polemical vocabulary to indicate that the audience attended the play with a predesigned goal in mind.

Spectators had not just arrived at the theater to see any old tragedy: the audience was there for the sole purpose of watching Chénier's *Charles IX*, and they would settle for nothing less. What is more, newspaper readers from the period probably noticed that the distinction between real violence in the Marais and choreography in the theater blurred in reviews of the performance. Using primary sources such as the *Chronique de Paris*, Walton sheds light on the premiere:

The National Guard arrived several times to try to restore order, but their presence was not always enough to calm audiences, who were now tearing out benches and brawling amongst themselves. Exacerbating matters further, rumors circulated that the actors were going to hand the keys to the Theatre over to the king. Realising the importance of the situation, one newspaper declared that if the actors did so, 'la contre-revolution serait faite'. (140)

This testimony makes the explicit link between the audience's desire to see *Charles IX* and the political implications (a Counter-Revolution) of not giving spectators what they want. The blatant political rhetoric in this account, however, differs from the vocabulary used in the previous accounts of *Les Philosophes* or *L'Ecossaise*—and this important change invites us to note differences as well as similarities among some of the “theatrical events” in this dissertation.

The reported behavior of spectators at *Charles IX*'s premiere emphasizes violence and tumult to a higher degree than critics who wrote about audience members at performances of plays by Palissot, Voltaire, De Belloy, and Beaumarchais. Primary sources reveal that some audiences during the Revolution moved from an energetic,

²³¹ See my analysis of Fréron's *Relation d'une grande bataille* in chapter three of this dissertation.

visceral reaction to theater into acts of overt violence at performances. Or, taking another point of view, the reviews of *Charles IX* differ from the reviews of our previous examples—the *rhetorical use* of an energetic spectator has been replaced with the *rhetorical use* of a violent one by theater critics.

In either case, the spectator's reaction to the performance of *Charles IX* seems to have superseded other factors for consideration in reviews from the Revolutionary years. Over the course of this dissertation, I hope to have shown that the shift of critical discourse onto the audience was a gradual process in theater and its criticism; and therefore, this discursive phenomenon did not originate with Revolutionaries. It is essential to point out that the rhetorical rise of the visible spectator did not have any overt link with political change or Revolution.

The relationship between Revolution and theater is particular to each play, venue, and historical event—a fact that prevents us from making sweeping associations between the two. After the abolishment of censorship, the explosion in the number of theatrical venues and political events such as the King's trial or 8 Thermidor, it becomes increasingly difficult to make wholehearted statements about either “theater” or “The Revolution.” And even if we focused only on the early Revolution years, Rodmell reminds us that, “it would be mistaken to suppose that the events of July 1789 immediately effected a radical transformation in either the organization of the Parisian theatre world or the nature of plays performed on its stages” (14).

While this analysis of the relationship between political power and theater is most definitely true, it nevertheless leaves space for us to examine a noticeable change in spectator behavior at the theater or the reporting of spectator behavior in eighteenth-

century theater criticism. Even without an overall conclusion about how theater “worked” during the Revolutionary years, we can nevertheless conclude here by asserting that as political and social rhetoric became increasingly violent and boisterous, so did testimonies to how spectators reacted to theater.

CONCLUSION: VOLTAIRE, “*LE CRI PUBLIC*,” AND THE INTERNET

During the second half of the eighteenth century, as I hope to have shown, writers incorporated the spectator into every part of the dramatic process—from dramaturgical construction, to performance, to criticism. This process culminated during the pre-Revolutionary period, surpassing in intensity the nascent seventeenth-century concern for audiences that we examined in reactions to Corneille’s *Le Cid*.

French literature textbooks have argued for decades that seventeenth-century dramatists focused their efforts on placating a selective group of royal *doctes*, whereas through their theater and theoretical works on theater, Enlightenment *philosophes* such as Voltaire and Diderot brought about a fundamental change in shifting the intellectual burden from the text to the live event, and from the institutional critic to the subjective spectator. With this study, I hoped to have modestly diverged from more canonical accounts of Enlightenment theater by pointing out that more “lowly” writers such as Charles Palissot, and more “dirty” practices such as pamphleteering, also aided in the gradual, rhetorical rise of the theatrical spectator.

Although most *brochures* or *libelles* from this era never find their way to a modern reader, these often-polemical texts can reveal some of the “subjugated knowledge” that hides behind more canonical works from the eighteenth century.²³² In a recent study on theater and politics during the French Revolution, Paul Friedland

²³² The term “subjugated knowledge” derives from Michel Foucault’s *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 7. Foucault argues that academic discourse tends to use and reuse the same sources and secondary studies, a process that hides important, forgotten texts and ideas behind canonical norms.

underlines the relationship between pamphlets and major works from the period.

Friedland argues that pamphlets,

Often highlight aspects of the particular historical context in which they were written that other texts, whether intentionally or unintentionally, have been content to gloss over. The obscure, somewhat paradoxically, often sheds a new and unexpected light on concepts that we have come to think of as clear and self evident. In this sense, then the noncanonical helps us to find new ways of reading the canon. (7)

Diderot's theoretical works on the *drame*, Voltaire's poetics of tragedy, Beaumarchais' exciting biography, political pamphlets during the Revolutionary years: students of eighteenth-century France have analyzed these concepts for decades—if not centuries—but rarely as a series of interdependent events inside the dramatic arts.

In this study, I have concentrated on the genesis of polemical plays, highlighted visible changes in critical discourse as a result of those dramatic works, and theorized about the different ways a spectator could have interpreted a dramatic performance. Rather than asserting a new way to “read” Voltaire's comedic corpus or a different understanding of the Revolution, I hoped to have shown that eighteenth-century spectators responded to ephemeral, polemical pamphlets in addition to the events that occurred on stage. In doing so, theater audiences—and not just playwrights—emerged as important agents inside the world of pre-Revolutionary theater productions and literary criticism. What is perhaps even more interesting, however, is that this social practice—the strategic use of texts to precondition the public—also penetrated other aspects of eighteenth-century society.

After a decade of nasty squabbles with Elie-Catherine Fréron and Lefranc de Pompignan during the 1750s, Voltaire entered a more serious battle to “écraser l'infâme:” the Calas affair, which lasted from 1762-1765. This famous example of religious

intolerance began with the alleged suicide of Marc-Antoine Calas, the son of a prominent Toulousian protestant, Jean Calas. Implicated in the affair from the beginning (due to Toulouse's arch-Catholic judges), Calas *père* was eventually accused of murdering Marc-Antoine because of his son's putative relationship with a Catholic woman. After a quick and slanted trial, Jean Calas was violently tortured and killed on the wheel in 1762.²³³ Voltaire caught wind of the case after Jean Calas' death and was horrified by the overt anti-Protestantism of the Toulouse courts. The great "Patriarch of Ferney" then made it a personal goal to convince the court to overturn their original ruling symbolically and legally re-instate the Calas family in the Toulouse district.

The following excerpt is from Voltaire's letter to his friend, Henri Cathala, written shortly before the public "re-instatement" trial in July 1762:

On pense qu'il est important que les deux pièces originales, c'est-à-dire les lettres de la mère et du fils [de Jean Calas], soient imprimées à Paris, elles disposeront le public, elles l'animeront et la cour, déjà instruite, ne pourra s'empêcher de faire venir la procédure à Toulouse. [...] Mon impression est qu'on touche le public par l'impression de la lettre de la mère et du fils auxquels on ne peut répondre et que le cri public force le chancelier à interposer l'autorité royale (D10554 [July 3 1762])

With a desire to publish strategic documents that might "disposer le public," "animer" its heart and cause a general "cri public," Voltaire's treatment of Calas' restitution procedure parallels the *philosophe*'s effort before the premiere of *L'Ecossaise*. In both cases, he hopes to create a knowledgeable and sympathetic public before a major event. However, before *L'Ecossaise*, Voltaire merely seeks to rally spectators against an ideological and literary opponent, whereas in the

²³³ For more information on the Calas Affair, see Haydn Mason's landmark work, *Voltaire: A Biography*, especially sections on Voltaire during the 1760s.

Calas Affair, Voltaire implores the public to aid the *philosophe* in vanquishing an ignorant enemy and pushing through the Enlightenment project of reason.

In a recent article about Voltaire in the 1760s, James Hanrahan points out that, “For Voltaire, the public was the educated and literate *theatre-going* public who read his works and those of his contemporaries. More than simply ‘lettré’, the public that Voltaire imagined was also enlightened” (151, emphasis mine). Voltaire’s definition of his public has two important implications for this study on “theatrical events” in eighteenth-century France. First, Voltaire viewed theater spectators as agents of the Enlightenment—an important group of individuals who, like Voltaire, sought to destroy intolerance and sometimes push for social progress. This overt link between spectators and people who cause social change (like in the Calas Affair) explains why Voltaire prods, pleads, and persuades his audiences; but also, it shows us that Voltaire truly believed that theater spectators possessed a significant amount of social agency.

Secondly, Voltaire’s parallel treatment of publics shows that some of these preconditioning processes in theater permeated more serious arenas such as the judiciary and Civil Rights. Voltaire’s desire to heighten a spectator’s awareness of Fréron’s faults or Pompignon’s idiocy turns into a concerted effort to ready the public for an event that pits religious ignorance and state-sponsored torture against law and due process.²³⁴

²³⁴ For a more detailed discussion of *philosophe* opinions on capital punishment, see the first few chapters of Lisa Silverman’s monograph, *Tortured Subjects: Pain, Truth, and the Body in Early Modern France*.

Preconditioning was an important practice inside the world of theater. Realizing this fact, Voltaire brought this strategy to other aspects of French society, because for Voltaire, the theatergoer and the social activist were one and the same. Although he wasn't alive to see the premiere of Chénier's *Charles IX*, Voltaire probably would not have been shocked at the increased amount of agency that spectators demonstrated in subverting the intentions of censors, actors, and politicians—nor would he have found it bizarre to see perhaps *some* of these same audience members tear down the Bastille and dismantle the political underpinnings of the Ancien Régime.

The specific historical context in which these “theatrical events” occurred has long passed, and the public importance of theater has since lost considerable ground to serial novels (19th century), film (early 20th century), television (mid 20th century), and as of the 1990s, the Internet.²³⁵ The speed with which we now have access to information and the fact that we have no qualms about viewing live people from society in our media outlets create an insurmountable gap between us and the early-modern members of society who pioneered the rise of journalism and fully entered something that might be called a public sphere.²³⁶

²³⁵ I do not mean to downplay the qualitative differences among these media (i.e. the collective experience of theater vs. the atomistic privacy of the internet). I hope to merely show the chronology of media that society has viewed as important from the eighteenth century to today.

²³⁶ It is important to note the difference between the terms “first entered” and “fully entered” the public sphere. In *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle*, Joan DeJean accurately points out that our notion of the term “public” was first used during the *Le Cid* affair in 1737 and further employed during the battle between Ancients and Moderns at the end of the seventeenth century (35-37). Whereas DeJean's study shows the first evocations of a reading public, my study has attempted to highlight the crystallization of, and the dependence on, a sphere of readers and spectators.

During the Palissot/Voltaire affair, some spectators attended performances of *Les Philosophes* or *L'Ecossaise* after reading the prefaces, pamphlets, and published letters from a decade-long battle between *philosophes* and anti-*philosophes*. These audience members possibly entered the Comédie-Française with a keen notion of each play's content—a fact perhaps confirmed by eyewitness testimony claiming that spectators shouted lines from plays even before the curtain rose and the actors opened their mouths. Then, to stoke the fire even more, both Palissot and Voltaire bolster their preconditioning efforts with literary and performative criticisms of the rival cohort.

The use of media outlets as a venue for polemical stone throwing should not shock us as too far removed from current social practices—a fact most clearly demonstrated during any recent Presidential campaign. But also (and perhaps more interestingly), eighteenth-century audience preconditioning—a concerted effort to render somebody “bien disposé”—has clear successors in our society at present. Here is just one possible example among many.

When *Pixar Pictures* or *Dreamworks Productions* releases a new animated feature, their goal is to make sure that children (and their parents) know the name of each character in the film before the premiere—a feat that producers accomplish through interactive games on websites, TV commercials, and toys that fast food restaurants sell in specifically marketed meals to young consumers (e.g. the “Happy Meal”). Any intelligent marketing director would agree that a failure to precondition audience members before a movie premiere leads to a certain death at the box-office. What is more, these “ancillary”

features like toys and video games have even subjugated the overall importance of the event itself—the film.²³⁷

The contemporary process of “enlightening” the viewer before the actual event has strong ties to material consumption—a factor that seems less pertinent (although not completely absent) in the eighteenth century than ideological, religious, or political concerns. This is largely due to the fact that there were only a limited amount of seats to sell at the Comédie-Française—therefore writers had to convince only enough people to attend a single “run” of performances. Quantitatively speaking, this is simply a far less amount of people than modern-day, international marketing campaigns seek to influence. Nevertheless, “viral marketing” techniques²³⁸ such as the mass emailing of links to the film’s trailer, *Facebook* advertising, or even a *Toy Story II* doll sold at Burger King six months before the film’s debut—a toy that walks and talks and repeats lines from the film—might not be far cries from the pamphlets published before an eighteenth-century dramatic premiere. These “marketing techniques”—whether during the eighteenth century or today—seek to render a customer/spectator more “ready” for the big event.

Over two hundred years ago, the swirling whirlwind of *a priori* texts, public readings, and café discussions was an important component of the actual performance itself—and the desire to know information ahead of an important event continues into our

²³⁷ For demonstrations of how video games have trumped motion pictures, see Clive Thompson’s “Gore is Less: Videogames Make Better Horror than Hollywood,” or Andrei Dumistrescu’s study on how video games bring in more revenue than films (see Works Cited for complete bibliographic information).

²³⁸ Viral marketing refers to the mass distribution of movie websites, snippets, and trailers through emailing, click-referencing advertisements on websites, or pre-existing social networks (e.g. *Facebook* or *Myspace*). For more information, see Stefano Calicchio’s *Pass the Virus! How to exploit the viral marketing to give an uproarious success to your own ideas*. New York: Lulu Books, 2008.

own era. Nowadays, we might consider it a bad idea to try a restaurant without reading a review, and rarely would we see a movie without first getting the opinion of our favorite critic. As paying customers, we want all the information that we can get our hands on; otherwise, we might make the wrong decision. It appears that eighteenth-century spectators wanted this knowledge too—but unlike us, they didn't always choose to sift through the *paperasse*. It was (sometimes quite literally in Beaumarchais' case) thrown down from above.

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²³⁹ I have chosen this date in order to differentiate between my own "primary" and "secondary" sources. Given that a significant number of eighteenth-century works were not published until well into the nineteenth century, and that many of my "primary" sources were secondary critical sources at the time of their publication, 1850 seems to be a logical choice to separate the works that I have consulted for this dissertation.

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VITA

Logan James Connors was born in Princeton, New Jersey, and graduated from Montgomery High School in 2000. At Montgomery, Logan was an avid sports enthusiast (cross-country running, baseball, ice hockey), mock-trial participant, and cast member of various plays and musicals. In the fall of 2000, Logan entered the University of Rhode Island, and graduated *summa cum laude* with degrees in history and French literature in 2004. At URI, Logan participated in student government, worked for the campus ambulance squad, and spent a semester at the Université d'Orléans, in France. In addition, he was vice-president of the Debate team, and won the URI Presidential Medal for Excellence for having the best overall GPA among French and history majors.

In 2004, Logan entered the graduate program in French Studies at Louisiana State University, earning a Master of Arts degree in 2006. During his time at LSU, Logan won awards such as the Andrew Mellon Fellowship for the Humanities, the Alexander Hoguet award for the Best New Graduate Student, and the LSU Graduate School Dissertation Fellowship. In 2007, Logan moved to Lyon, France, to serve a two-year stint as *lecteur* at the prestigious *Ecole normale supérieure*. Since beginning graduate school, Logan has published in American, British, and French journals and collections, and presented at conferences in the U.S., Finland, England, Germany, Poland, and France. In the fall of 2010, Logan will begin a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of French at Bucknell University, in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.