The Politics of Appropriation in French Revolutionary Theatre

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the popularity of plays from the ancien régime in the theatre of the French Revolution. In spite of an influx of new plays, works dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were amongst the most frequently performed of the decade. Appropriation resulted in these tragedies and comedies becoming ‘Revolutionary’ and often overtly political in nature. In this thesis, I will establish how and why relatively obscure, neglected plays became both popular and Revolutionary at this time. I shall draw on eighteenth-century definitions of appropriation to guide my analysis of their success and adaptation, whilst the theoretical framework of pre-history and afterlives (as well as modern scholarship on exemplarity and the politicisation of the stage) will shape my research.

To ensure that I investigate a representative selection of appropriated plays, I will look at five very different works, including two tragedies and three comedies, which pre-date the Revolution by at least thirty years. Voltaire’s Brutus enjoyed successive Revolutionary afterlives from 1789-1799, whereas Lemierre’s Guillaume Tell was only truly successful as political propaganda during the Terror. Meanwhile, Molière’s Misanthrope was subjected to censorship and Revolutionary alterations, but could not rival the extraordinary success of one of his lesser known comedies, Le Dépit amoureux, which suddenly became one of the most popular plays in the theatrical repertoire. Finally, Regnard’s Les Folies amoureuses became popular in the highly politicised theatre of the Revolution in spite of the fact that the comedy had no obvious connection to politics or republicanism. The power of appropriation was such that any play could become Revolutionary, as both audiences and the government used appropriation as a method of displaying their power, attacking their enemy, and supporting the progress of the French Revolution.
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1: INTRODUCTION

French Revolutionary theatre did not only see an influx of new dramas, but also the return of previously unpopular works to the stage.\(^1\) Those plays which suddenly became popular did not, however, make their re-appearance in their original form. It was necessary for them to be ‘appropriés aux circonstances’, which, in some instances, changed their very foundations.\(^2\) A clear example of this can be found in the changes wrought on the dénouement of Voltaire’s tragedy, *La Mort de César*. Performed mere days after Louis XVI’s execution in 1793, the play could not close on its original ending, in which Antoine (Mark Antony) rallies the Romans to join his cause against Brutus and Cassius shortly after Caesar’s murder. Such a scene was, as the journal reviewing the production made clear, out of step with Revolutionary events: ‘Dans la mort de César, les aristocrates et compagnie s’attendoient à applaudir la harangue d’Antoine en faveur du tyran massacré par les conjurés; mais les acteurs, trop patriotes pour ne pas changer un dénouement aussi peu compatible avec les circonstances, ont laissé ces messieurs avec un bon pied de nez, en terminant la pièce par la tirade […] de Cassius’ (p. 228).\(^3\) The speech in question was entirely new, and transformed the tragedy’s plot:

CASSIUS

Que la haine des rois et de la tyrannie
Suscite des vengeurs à la terre asservie.
Le moment est venu de finir à-la-fois
Les longs malheurs du monde et les crimes des rois;
Qui monte sur un trône outrage la nature,
Et c’est un saint devoir de venger cette injure
[...]
En enfonçant ce fer dans le coeur d’un tyran,
Nous offrons à vos yeux un présage effrayant.

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\(^1\) Susan Maslan indicates that no less than a thousand new plays were performed in Paris during the Revolution. See *Revolutionary Acts. Theater, Democracy, and the French Revolution* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 15.

\(^2\) *Journal des Théâtres*, 1 August 1795.

\(^3\) *La Vedette, ou journal du departement du Doubs*, 8 February 1793. Although this journal is fervently pro-revolutionary and thus biased, there is no reason to doubt this portrayal of the adjustment to the play.
After the Revolutionaries had executed Louis XVI in much the same way that Brutus and Cassius had killed Caesar, the political and ideological basis of the tragedy had to be altered to approve of this act. This also ensured that ‘les aristocrates’ did not have an opportunity to protest against the Revolution through the play.

Appropriation was not, however, a single, one-off event, but rather an ongoing process, with the plays it affected continuing to change in different ways. Another ending created for *La Mort de César* saw Brutus, Cassius and the Roman people swearing an oath of loyalty - or devotion - to Rome:

BRUTUS       S’il faut d’autre sang affermir ton empire,  
             Ah! que Rome soit libre et que Brutus expire.

CASSIUS      Formons les mêmes voeux aux pieds de cet autel:  
             Mourir pour son pays, c’est se rendre immortel.

ROMAINS     Nous jurons d’imiter son courage héroïque.  
             VIVE LA LIBERTE! VIVE LA REPUBLIQUE! (III. 10)

These additions were probably inspired by other *ancien régime* tragedies. The line ‘Ah! que Rome soit libre et que Brutus expire’ is an echo of the words spoken in Lemierre’s tragedy, *Guillaume Tell*: ‘Que la Suisse soit libre, et que nos noms périssent!’ Meanwhile, the vows of Brutus and Cassius recall Lucius Junius Brutus’s similar oaths sworn on *l’autel de Mars* in Act I of Voltaire’s tragedy *Brutus*. Historical accuracy was clearly subservient to the Revolutionary cause: it was more important that *La Mort de César* cited in *La Vedette*, p. 228.


6 This was also a revolutionary slogan. See Chapter 5, ‘*Guillaume Tell*: From Laughing Stock to National Hero’.

7 See Chapter 4, ‘Revolutionary Brutus: Royalist, Republican, Reject’.

4 *La Mort de César*, cited in *La Vedette*, p. 228.
César supported the course of the Revolution, even if its very content had to be radically changed to achieve this goal.

The necessity of ensuring that every single play within the theatrical repertoire was pro-Revolutionary in sentiment was described in a police report dating from 1793: ‘Il est temps qu'une loi sage fasse taire tous ces échos de la tyrannie, et que la voix de la Liberté ait seule le droit de se faire entendre’.8 This did not always require plays to be entirely rewritten - as was the case with La Mort de César - but could be effected by replacing royalist, ancien régime terminology with more ‘Revolutionary’ vocabulary. Another of Voltaire’s tragedies, Adélaïde du Guesclin (1734), was altered in this way, with references to the ‘roi’ replaced by ‘foi’.9 In some cases, even these minor changes were not necessary, with plays becoming Revolutionary through the process of linking verses and lines (positively) with the Revolution. The audience’s determination to link what they saw on the stage with the events taking place in Paris was described in a police report from 1797: ‘les spectateurs appliquaient souvent des traits aux circonstances présentes’.10

The phenomenon was so wide-spread that contemporary journals noted it, with one describing this ‘trend’ in 1798:

On distingue au théâtre deux sortes d’applications; celles qui font allusion à quelques événements politiques, ou à quelques personnages célèbres, auxquels le public applique certains passages de telle ou telle pièce qui paroissent lui convenir […] Les secondes ont pour objet les acteurs mêmes.11

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9 For example, the verses ‘vous le priez ! Plaignez-le plus que moi / Plaignez-le; il vous offense; il a trahi son roi’ were altered to ‘vous le priez ! Plaignez-le plus que moi / Plaignez-le; il vous offense; il a trahi sa foi’. See Le Courrier des Spectacles, 29 June 1797. Reproduced in François-Alphonse Aulard, Paris pendant la réaction thermidorienne et sous le Directoire: recueil de documents pour l’histoire de l’esprit public à Paris (Paris: L. Cerf, 1900), IV, p. 196.
Remarkably, it appears that it was the ease with which a play could be ‘applied’ to contemporary events which marked out the level of success it would enjoy. This is demonstrated by an account of Destouches’s *Le Philosophe amoureux*:

> Ces deux vers seuls des Philosophes amoureux ont été applaudis par application: 
> Il faut d'un criminel écouter la défense; / Condamner sans entendre est une violence.12

It is probable that these lines were applied to the government as a reaction against the violence of the Terror. The fact that the writer took the effort to illustrate that these lines were the only ones interpreted in such a way indicates some level of disappointment; it almost appears that it is this apparent failing of the comedy in the audience’s eyes which is the cause of the mediocrity ascribed to it. It seems, indeed, that the tendency to apply the content of plays to the Revolution was unstoppable, even when efforts were made to stop such behaviour. *Le Courrier des Spectacles* described its popularity, or omnipresence, in 1795: ‘si les acteurs du Théâtre-Français craignent des applications, qu’ils ne jouent donc pas cette pièce [Adélaïde du Guesclin], ni aucune autre; car on en peut trouver partout’.13 Every play could be linked to the Revolution, regardless of whether it pre-dated 1789 or not.

The theatre, then, was deeply affected by the Revolution, and influenced it in turn. Plays were judged according to new standards, were interpreted in the light of their radically altered environment, and were performed on new stages, with at least 50 theatres opening in Paris.14 Not only did this cause the repertoire to be completely ‘remodelled’, but the works which had formed part of the pre-Revolutionary repertoire were re-made and reborn, as the example of *La Mort de César* demonstrates. They

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were, in short, appropriated.\textsuperscript{15} It is those dramas dating from before the Revolutionary period, but which abruptly became popular or politically prominent from 1789-1799, which I will investigate in my thesis. In examining the Revolutionary careers of \textit{ancien régime} plays, I shall ascertain how they were influenced, changed and re-envisaged by the theatre of the French Revolution - that is, the politics of appropriation.

Three main topics will be outlined in this introduction. Firstly, I shall examine modern scholarship on the theatre of the French Revolution, with particular emphasis on work dealing with the relationship between politics and the theatre. This will enable me to identify those theories that will be drawn on in my thesis and present the theatrical model that I will use. Secondly, I will set out the major ‘phases’ of the theatre - that is, the general situation of the stage at key points of the Revolution. I shall then consider recent ideas about the dominance of \textit{ancien régime} plays on the French Revolutionary stage and put forward my theory regarding this phenomenon. All of this information will influence and shape my investigation into individual plays and their careers on the stage from 1789 to 1799. I will close the chapter by establishing the issues that will be considered throughout this thesis and formulating key research questions.

\textit{The Theatre of the French Revolution: Spectators, Politics and Influence}

The model of Revolutionary theatre that will be formed from the findings of my research is an inherently active one. It was not in any way a mirror which simply replicated external events and developments, but an active, creative force that influenced its environment and was, in turn, influenced by the Revolution. There was an ongoing dialogue between spectators and the stage, and between the stage and the government (or politics). Spectators responded strongly, vocally, and even violently to what was performed before them - meaning that they were able to shape and change

\textsuperscript{15} For the definition of \textit{appropriation} as understood in this thesis, see Chapter 2, ‘The Theory and Methodology of Revolutionary Appropriation’.
plays, performances, and the theatre itself. On the other hand, the government used (and exploited) the stage to justify their decisions, to ‘educate’ the audience, and to promote Revolutionary ideals. The stage was thus - literally - caught at the centre of complicated, sometimes conflicting, influences - with the boundaries between stage and spectator, theatre and politics, blurring and becoming weak, occasionally even imperceptible.

I shall therefore reject the reflective model of theatre that was used in early scholarship on the theatre of the French Revolution. This model has been advocated by the likes of Eugène Jauffret, who in highlighting the strong relationship between the theatre and its environment, argues that during times of political crisis the stage ‘représente alors plus particulièrement l’esprit public, et paraît être une image fidèle de la société, dont il exprime les passions, les entraînements, les folies, les instincts généreux’. In this strictly passive role, the stage is influenced by its environment, but does not exert its own influence. Ernest Lunel echoes this theory, describing theatre as ‘le miroir des époques’. This reflective model has also been implicit in some examples of modern scholarship. Mark Darlow has suggested that, at this time, the theatre acts as ‘a representative system which re-enacts a particular species of that social drama (the repression or expulsion of that threat to social unity), inscribing this central anxiety of the Revolutionary situation at the work’s most basic level, to replay the re-establishment of cohesion in a mode akin to the festival’.

The result of this is that ‘plays are self-conscious re-enactments [...] of the social drama surrounding the contemporary audience’ (p. 400). In other words, the stage reflects events taking place in society. The defeat of the enemy within a drama is therefore the defeat of the enemies of the Revolution, with that victory then being

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adopted as the victory of the French Revolution. To return to the example of *La Mort de César*, the new ending of the tragedy - in which the Roman people join Marcus Brutus in swearing an oath on the altar - is a way of including spectators in Brutus’ ‘triumph’. It creates a sense of unity - or cohesion - amongst spectators that may not have been a reality, whilst furthering the Revolutionary cause. Whilst this is a useful idea, the Revolutionary career of plays such as Voltaire’s *Brutus* demonstrates that the audience was divided into two camps, prepared to do (ineffective) battle - for example: ‘l’opposition a été toujours la même & avec la même chaleur jusqu’à la fin’, and ‘Quelques Noirs ont voulu applaudir les discours insidieux d'Arons, & les citations des Actes des apôtres, faites par Messala. Ils ont été repoussés avec perte. Les patriotes étoient trop forts’.

There may have been a sense of unity amongst the Revolutionaries, but not amongst the audience.

Furthermore, the French Revolutionary stage itself adopted a far more active role than this reflective model of the theatre will allow. Paul Friedland, in *Political Actors*, has indicated that politics and theatre were so closely linked that they became a single entity: ‘the Revolution had given birth to a world [...] in which the political and the theatrical intermingled to such a great extent that neither was properly distinguishable from the other’. Yet it was not simply a case of the theatre falling under the influence of politics. The theatre impacted upon politics - and the very way they were administered - in the same way that politics affected the stage: ‘Revolutionary politics borrowed, at its very inception, from the theatrical mise-en-scène. And Revolutionary theater increasingly came to be regarded as an affair of state. Politics, in short, became entertaining. And theater suddenly became important’ (p. 180). This does not mean that the theatre had previously been unimportant - merely that the stage’s

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19 Both citations have been taken from reviews of Brutus’s first revolutionary performance in November 1790. See *Le Journal de Paris*, 18 November 1790, and *La Chronique de Paris*, 18 November 1790.
political aspect had now become more pronounced and obvious. The extent to which politics and theatre merged together is, however, debatable. This is a subject that has also been touched upon by Susan Maslan, who stresses that ‘Revolutionary theater and Revolutionary politics did not transform themselves one into the other. On the contrary, theater and politics were important to each other during the Revolution because both were distinct and powerful fields that had their own ambitions, dynamics, and history and that, in different ways, created new meanings, new practices, and new possibilities’.21

In my model of Revolutionary theatre, I have drawn on Maslan’s findings rather than those of Friedland owing to Maslan’s more active model of spectatorship. The role played by the audience in Revolutionary theatre presents one of the primary points of opposition between their works, with Friedland arguing that ‘the general trend - for both theatrical and political audiences - is towards spectators’ silence and toward their separation from the representative stage’ (p. 300). Maslan, on the other hand, regards the theatre as a platform for the spectator to comment on, and influence, politics (p. 17):

In the theater, spectators retained the right to approve or disapprove, actively and explicitly, of the representations before them. This was a right that revolutionary audiences had to win and to enforce, and the successful battle to establish and maintain audience supremacy in the theater is central to the Revolution’s literary, cultural, and political history.

Where Friedland argues for the increasing passivity of the spectator (p. 300), Maslan’s model of audience behaviour is active, creative and powerful. As Mark Darlow has summarised, ‘Friedland tends to postulate a rather passive theatrical public, tracing a series of reforms establishing a separation between actor and spectator and an increasingly illusionistic approach; whereas Maslan claims that embodied representation establishes theatre as an alternative practice of publicity from the

disembodied, print-centred Habermasian public sphere [...] and considers theatre as a rowdy and troubled arena’ (p. 387).

There are numerous accounts (from multiple contemporary journals) of the vocal, physical and very violent response of spectators to performances on the Revolutionary stage, and many of these will be considered in this thesis. It is thus Maslan’s portrait of an ‘arena’, a sort of battleground, that will be used in my investigation. The theatre of the French Revolution was a sphere in which what was seen on stage was inherently connected to - was, indeed, a part of - the very real world of the spectators. And, as the pro-Revolutionary journal *Chronique de Paris* argued in 1790, citizens had a right to make their viewpoint and values known, with the theatre providing no exception: ‘Quelques personnes prétendent que le spectacle est institué pour y écouter la tragédie, & non pour y faire des motions. Nous leur répondrons qu’il n’est aucun lieu où un citoyen puisse élever la voix’.22 There was little to no separation between spectator and stage, so that the theatre became the perfect method for audience members to vocalise their standpoint: a standpoint that could be in support of a play, or opposed to it, or which could even ‘correct’ the work before them, as was the case with a performance of Voltaire’s *Brutus* in 1790, when spectators opposed the hero’s hatred for the monarchy by shouting ‘vive le roi!’23 This was no passive audience, but a creative force that played an integral part in performances.

If spectators were powerful and sometimes divided, however, the need for cohesion (highlighted by Darlow) is a theme that emerges in the scholarship of Lynn Hunt. Discussing the Revolution in a non-theatrical context, she argues that with the loss of the king’s authority and position at the centre of society, Revolutionary society was left without a ‘sacred center’.24 The result was that ‘charisma came to be most

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22 *La Chronique de Paris*, 26 July 1790.
23 See Chapter 4, ‘Revolutionary Brutus: Royalist, Republican, Reject’.
concretely located in words, that is, in the ability to speak for the Nation. Revolutionary language was “fanatical” [...] because it had been invested with sacred authority’ (p. 26). In my contribution to this field of knowledge, a closer inspection of theatrical texts from the ancien régime which became prominent during the Revolution will show the existence of a ‘language of appropriation’. From eighteenth-century tragedy to seventeenth-century comedy, violent, extreme lexis relating to warfare, revenge and glory is a common tie between these appropriated works, with even the three-act comedy Les Folies amoureuses featuring a character dressed as a warrior urging everybody to war, declaring ‘Je vois dans vos regards briller votre courage. / Que tout ressent ici l’horreur et le carnage’ (III. 10). Just as - in Hunt’s words - ‘certain key words served as revolutionary incantations’ (p. 21), specific lines of dialogue from theatrical plays pre-dating the Revolution would be repeated and celebrated, even in non-theatrical contexts. For instance, in 1793 a politician was reported to have cited a verse from Lemierre’s tragedy Guillaume Tell in discussion: ‘Disons comme Guillaume Tell: Que la France soit libre, et que nos noms périssent!’

More than this, the theatre could serve as an educational example to spectators: as Eric Négrel has argued, ‘La médiation de la scène permet de créer les conditions d’une communication politique exemplaire, d’en proposer le modèle et le fonctionnement. La scène élabore la fiction d’un allocutaire idéal’. René Tarin has, in great detail, examined how the stage became a pedagogical instrument: ‘le théâtre ne veut plus être une école de frivolité ou un plaisir mondain. Il prétend instruire, c’est-à-dire informer et former l’opinion’. According to Tarin, it is this didactic function which sets the theatre of the French Revolution apart from other periods of French

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26 Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel, 3 July 1793, p. 19. All italics in original.
theatre history (p. 14). In agreement with Darlow’s perspective, Tarin highlights the role of cohesion in the ‘new’ theatre, as it must ‘agir sur l’imaginaire collectif pour renforcer la cohésion sociale (par l’illustration et la défense des nouvelles valeurs)’ (p. 19). I would suggest, however, that such cohesion was never achieved: beyond evidence of warring spectators, the theatre itself was a continually changing, unstable institution.

As Jeffrey Ravel points out, ‘the revolutionaries did not fix a new legislative framework for French public theatre between 1789 and 1799’. Instead, ‘the new theatrical regime, like its political counterpart, emerged fitfully from the clashes between political factions in the assembly, the streets of Paris, and the nation at large’ (p. 222). With Revolutionaries attempting to use the stage as a didactic tool, and theatre audiences using it as a method of expressing their viewpoint, the stage was very much at the centre of the action, and full of contradictions. It was a tool for influencing spectators and giving the appearance of cohesion, but also a violent battleground, with audiences fighting to dominate and correct the performance before them. Theatre may not have become interchangeable with politics, but it was very much a political sphere. It was a violent, active force, and almost from the very beginning, pre-Revolutionary compositions took centre stage.

A particularly striking example of Revolutionary appropriation, which has been examined by numerous scholars, is Marie-Joseph Chénier’s *Charles IX*. Although the tragedy pre-dated the Revolution, it became a sensation after it was banned, with spectators (successfully) forcing its staging. Graham Rodmell indicates that the tragedy’s popularity was due to its ‘connection’ to contemporary events: ‘*Charles IX* [...] invited comparisons between the Court which had urged Charles to this crime and the Court of Louis XVI who, like Charles, was felt to be lazy, weak-willed, under the

evil influence of a woman and inaccessible to his subjects.30 Marvin Carlson similarly contends that the tragedy’s success was due to its political connotations, and furthermore suggests that Charles IX was a ‘template’ - that is, that it established a pattern for the Revolutionary stage:

> It was the first time within memory that a play had been demanded by a political rather than a literary faction. It meant that the new popular leaders considered tragedy as a legitimate form of political propaganda, thus opening the way to Revolutionary drama [...] The pattern for Revolutionary artistic expression was thereby set within a month after the Bastille fell.31

Maslan, meanwhile, has a slightly different attitude, seeing the work’s success as the result of the populace’s newfound control over the theatre: ‘Charles IX was performed and freedom of the theatre was established because groups of people – rather than their representatives in the political field or the Habermasian public sphere – demanded that the play be performed. [...] the audience asserted that no permission and no command beyond its own were any longer relevant’.32

It is likely that public calls for the performance of a play (on political grounds) led to political leaders then taking advantage of this situation and exploiting dramas for their political potential. Charles IX was the first example, however, of the plays that would rise to popularity during the French Revolution owing to their appropriation by the Revolutionaries. In spite of the fact that they pre-dated 1789, they offered some connection to, or comment on, contemporary events, becoming both relevant and political. The success of Revolutionary drama did not, therefore, depend upon its literary qualities, but upon its ability (or inability) to play the role that theatrical texts were expected to play: providing an educational example of how a Revolutionary should act; re-enacting the ‘Revolution’ (or at least the defeat of a threat) to re-enforce

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32 Maslan, Revolutionary Acts, p. 49.
the Revolutionary cause, or providing audiences with the opportunity to express their (political) views. These new ‘requirements’ would only be met through the complete transformation of the theatrical repertoire, and the emergence (or re-emergence, in some cases) of formerly obscure ancien régime plays.

The Phases of French Revolutionary Theatre

The Theatre of the French Revolution was not a static, unchanging institution. From 1789-1799 it continued to change and adapt, and would go through various ‘stages’. Some were more susceptible to political influence than others, with censorship and government action more prominent in some years, and the audience’s vocal, creative influence more noticeable in others. This is all important background information against which my case studies will be set. My thesis is not intended to give a comprehensive history of the theatre of the French Revolution, but the main developments that affected the Revolutionary theatre will be outlined here. This data has been drawn from a range of modern scholarship on this subject, as well as from some primary sources. Any government articles that specifically affected one of the plays in my corpus will be discussed in the relevant chapter, with only that information which affects the theatre (and its repertoire) in general being detailed below.

Initially, it could be argued that the Revolution had a ‘liberating’ effect on the French stage – at least as far as the audience was concerned. In 1789, pamphlets encouraging the populace to unite to force the performance of Charles IX linked the stage with liberty: ‘réunissons nos voix pour demander, au nom de la liberté, la prompte représentation de Charles IX’. 33 The use of the phrase ‘au nom de la liberté’ indicates that the theatrical realm was perceived as an extension of the state, or rather of political

affairs. This is confirmed by La Chronique de Paris from 26 July 1790, which argued that

Quelques personnes prétendent que le spectacle est institué pour y écouter la tragédie, & non pour y faire des motions. Nous leur répondrons qu’il n’est aucun lieu où un citoyen ne puisse élever la voix, quand ceux qui l’entourent ne lui imposent pas silence.

There was thus no division between the stage and Revolutionary politics, and no restriction on who could (and who could not) make their voice heard. This became evident at performances of Brutus, when spectators corrected characters upon the stage and jeered at aristocrats in the audience.34

Spectators were not, however, satisfied by their increased influence over the stage, with the Chronique de Paris emphasising ‘la nécessité d’un second Théâtre’ so that the public would not be denied any play it desired: ‘Alors si l’un des deux refuse de jouer une pièce véritablement désirée, l’autre se hâtera de la donner pour attirer la foule et satisfaire le public’.35 Finally, in January 1791 came the event that had a transformative impact on the theatre: the abolition of the Comédie-Française’s privileges. With this act, the Revolution affected every stage in Paris, and ‘les fit tous égaux dans l’ordre social’.36 Not only did every individual have the right to open their own theatre, but censorship was restricted and the tragedies and comedies of playwrights who had been deceased for over five years became public property.37

As Jeffrey Ravel has pointed out, ‘these provisions were all challenged during the next several years’.38 Rather than establishing a new, fixed theatrical order, the Revolutionaries’ achievement was that ‘they did decisively destroy the old one’ (p. 222). In this new, chaotic theatre, the work of deceased authors - and thus of the ancien régime - became an attractive prospect, whilst the increased number of theatres

34 See Chapter 4, ‘Revolutionary Brutus: Royalist, Republican, Reject’.
35 La Chronique de Paris, 26 July 1790.
36 Lunel, Le Théâtre et la Révolution, p. 11.
38 Ravel, The Contested Parterre, p. 222.
operating in Paris made the theatre more accessible and caused the number of performances given to plays to rise dramatically. It was a new world, and the ‘playwrights, legislators, and others who backed the law of 13 January 1791 wished to eliminate all surviving Old Regime ideological, economic, and military restraints on the theater’ (p. 223). The stage had seemingly been set free.

Whilst spectators may now be expected to have a greater influence over the theatre, their power would soon dwindle. Maslan has suggested that their influence remained considerable until around 1793-94. This period ushered in a new era of censorship. In 1793, it was decreed by the National Convention that:

Tout théâtre sur lequel seraient représentées des pièces tendant à dépraver l’esprit public, et à réveiller la honteuse superstition de la royauté, sera fermé, et les directeurs arrêtés et punis selon la rigueur des lois.

Similarly, the Comité de Surveillance du département de Paris announced on 15 January 1794, that the actors and directors of the Parisian theatres went against the government’s ideal of theatre at their own risk: ‘Les théâtres doivent être l’école de la vertu et des mœurs; les directeurs et les acteurs sont responsables des abus qui se commettent sur la scène’. When such censorship was successful, the stage became a reflection of the ideals and values of one set of people. In the words of Rodmell, ‘1793 saw the Revolution change into reverse gear, certainly as far as theatrical freedom was concerned. Increasingly the tendency was for productions to become mere propaganda’.

And yet, as Darlow has argued, the dramas of the Revolution, and the arts in general, cannot be regarded as ‘pure state propaganda’. Through an analysis of two contemporary (Revolutionary) plays, he comes to the conclusion that ‘rather than

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42 Rodmell, *French Drama of the Revolutionary Years*, p. 33.
consider works as vehicles of State propaganda, these artifacts are very much spaces for negotiated, and sometimes contested political meanings’ (p. 88). Whilst a play might appear to be ‘Revolutionary’, the power of appropriation was such that it could be interpreted quite differently. For instance, a police report from 1793 states that audiences at the Théâtre de la République linked the (positive) character of Porsenna in Mutius Scaevola with the Duke of York. As a result of linking a royal with the virtuous Porsenna, the outraged writer comes to the conclusion that whilst the play ‘peint des couleurs les plus fortes la haine des rois et l’amour de la liberté’, even the Théâtre de la République ‘n’est pas encore lui-même à l’abri de la contagion’. Thus, whilst only ‘pro-Revolutionary’ works were ‘safe’ at this time, there was no guarantee that they would be understood ‘correctly’. Even passages from Guillaume Tell, which had been financed by the government in August 1793, had to be censored (see chapter 5).

Even so, the strength of the political stranglehold over the theatre was seen as having been weakened following the fall of Robespierre in 1794, with the Journal des Théâtres triumphantly declaring that ‘le théâtre français reprend sa gloire, les belles-lettres leur éclat, la France sa liberté’. This in itself, however, is a political statement, with the term gloire’s connotations of hierarchy and power. Furthermore, the theatre is evoked in conjunction with the French nation itself, placing the status of the stage at the centre of questions of national identity and politics. In other words, the theatre remained political and highly important to the Revolution, with a journal angrily condemning state censorship of the repertoire in 1797. Rodmell has described the situation of the

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theatre from 1795-97 as ‘chaotic’, although the stage became a less dangerous space, as the threat of execution (for going against the Revolution) was removed. The creative, ‘rowdy’ audiences of former years largely disappeared, however - as Tissier has stated, ‘avec le Directoire, il tendra à n’être plus un théâtre d’information, auquel le peuple participe activement’. And, as Rodmell and Carlson have both stated, ‘political’ works lost their appeal: Rodmell identifies the point at which spectators began to lose interest as 1794-95 (p. 41), whilst Carlson indicates that such plays largely vanished in the final two years of the Revolution (p. 259). This is borne out by the falling performance figures of Brutus and Guillaume Tell after the Terror, with only a brief rise in popularity in 1799.

Consequently, the stage was at the centre of a prolonged battle for political dominance through much of the French Revolution. The major (changing) influences which had an impact on the stage from 1789-99 will inform my analysis of appropriated works, but my thesis is not intended to give a comprehensive history of the Revolutionary theatre. Instead, I will investigate the fortunes of my corpus during the early, very vocal, battle for supremacy of the early years of the Revolution; during the censorship and dangers of the Terror, and during the dying years of the Revolution, when spectators were losing interest and political tragedies slowly disappeared from the stage. What is noteworthy, however, is that plays from the ancien régime were able to dominate the repertoire through the many changes to which the theatre was subjected, with comedies such as Regnard’s Les Folies amoureuses (1704) and Molière’s Le Dépit amoureux (1656) performed in every year of the Revolution (see chapter 3).

47 Rodmell, French Drama of the Revolutionary Years, p. 15.
50 For all performance statistics, see Chapter 3: ‘Defining the Corpus: Performance, Statistics and Political Appropriation’. 21
The Popularity of Older Works on the Revolutionary Stage

The dominance of ancien régime drama over the Revolutionary stage is impossible to miss; Michele Leon has calculated that in 1791, such pre-Revolutionary works accounted for 57.4% of all performances in Paris. Whilst this statistic would drop in subsequent years of the Revolution, ancien régime plays did remain very popular, accounting for between a third and half of all performances until 1798, after which that number dropped to a quarter. It may seem strange that the theatre appropriated older works instead of turning to the new plays written during the Revolution. Why, after all, turn to the past when the world as they had known it was being changed forever? This phenomenon has obviously been touched on in modern scholarship, with several theories having been put forward to explain this unusual development. I shall discuss the merits and flaws of these arguments here, after which I shall outline my own argument on the dominance of ancien régime drama from 1789-99.

It is, of course, likely that an element of convenience is involved in this aspect of Revolutionary theatre, as Tissier has made clear: ‘on recourt constamment au repertoire du passé, maintenant tombé dans le domaine public: gain de temps, gain d’argent, succès assuré’. In discussing the predominance of older comedies from January 1791 onwards, he proposes that these works were a form of ‘escape’ from obviously Revolutionary plays: ‘peut-être ce regain d’intérêt pour le répertoire ancien, et surtout pour le répertoire comique, vient-il aussi, comme certains contemporains l’avaient déjà remarqué, de ce qu’une fraction du public s’est vite lassée de la suite “fastidieuse” des pièces de circonstance, des drames poussés à outrance noir, et même des pièces où étaient ressassés les termes de “liberté” et de “patriotisme”’ (I, p. 42). Whilst it is probable that an element of ‘escapism’ is involved in this trend for comedies, those texts

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51 See Mechele Leon, Molière, the French Revolution, and the Theatrical Afterlife (University of Iowa Press, 2009), p. 28.
52 Tissier, Les Spectacles à Paris pendant la révolution, I, p. 41.
which suddenly became popular at this time were not immune from Revolutionary fervour - with terms such as ‘liberté’ appearing regularly in Regnard’s 1704 comedy, *Les Folies amoureuses*, which was performed on 69 occasions in 1791 alone.\(^53\)

Tissier furthermore suggests that the dramas of the *ancien régime* were later used by the Jacobins as a means of hiding their use of political propaganda: ‘Le théâtre politique des Jacobins n’est qu’un théâtre imposé, dans un sens politique unilatéral. On dore la pilule au public incertain et peu informé politiquement en mêlant aux pièces révolutionnaires un répertoire de l’*ancien régime*’ (II, p. 31). But if the theatre had become a political sphere, closely controlled by the government, could the repertoire of the *ancien régime* escape being invested with political (or Revolutionary) implications? Maslan has warned against a strict division between political and non-political plays during the Revolution: ‘the ways in which theatres, plays, and audiences participated in and helped create Revolutionary culture cannot be construed within a framework that restricts them to a pre-established dichotomy of political/nonpolitical or republican/monarchist’ (pp. 22-23). Moreover, she stresses that whilst a play may not be ‘political in the narrow sense’, it can still be Revolutionary by representing ‘a distinctly revolutionary social sensibility’ (p. 22). Thus, whilst the repertoire of the *ancien régime* may not have been composed to advocate the Revolution, or recreate political events, their popularity during this period can still be politically significant, and cannot be reduced to a simple ‘sugaring of the pill’.

The removal of the majority of Molière’s plays from the stage in 1794 - in addition to the censorship of comedies by D’estouches, Regnard and Diderot - indicates that they were considered as somehow opposing, or being harmful to, the Revolution.\(^54\) Consequently, those comedies which were regarded as ‘suitable’ for performance at this

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\(^{53}\) See Chapter 7, ‘Cross-dressing, Role Play, Knights Errant and Tyrants: Overthrowing the Stereotypes of Power in Regnard’s *Les Folies amoureuses*’.

time must have been seen as either supporting the Revolution or as being compatible with the Revolutionary ethos. This was the sentiment expressed in La Décade Philosophique in 1794, as it warned ‘Auteurs comiques, souvenez-vous-en bien, chez un peuple républicain, c’est-à-dire qui a de bonnes mœurs, il n’y a de ridicule que le vice; il ne peut y avoir d’intérêt que pour la vertu’.55 The term ‘un peuple republican’ is entirely dependent on the idea of how a good Revolutionary should behave; and acceptable – or pleasing – comedy is only rendered such through its observance of these Revolutionary values. Thus, whilst ancien régime compositions may not appear - on the surface - to have any connection to the Revolution, they do not, in fact, contrast so very sharply with those plays with blatantly Revolutionary titles: Lemierre’s tragedy Guillaume Tell, though predating the Revolution by over twenty years, became so closely bound to the Revolution that it was given the sub-title Les Sans-culottes Suisses.56 These works may have been created for a different audience entirely, but that was no hindrance to becoming Revolutionary themselves.

As Jean Duvignaud has made clear, older works became successful because Revolutionary qualities were projected onto them by spectators:

Durant la période révolutionnaire, c’est au théâtre classique que l’on revient: Molière (surtout Le Tartuffe), Corneille ou Voltaire paraissaient trouver une jeunesse nouvelle, parce qu’on projette sur ces auteurs la vivacité actuelle du combat politique.57

Sophie Marchand similarly argues that this moment in history ‘représente autant une appropriation des textes par le public, que l’investissement, inédit à cette ampleur, du

55 La Décade Philosophique, 1794, I, p. 275.
56 See Chapter 5, ‘Guillaume Tell: From Laughing Stock to National Hero’.
fait dramatique par le politique’. 58 As a consequence, the very meaning of dramas changed:

Dès lors, l’œuvre dramatique apparaît moins comme une forme achevée et autonome […] que comme une forme creuse et en devenir, susceptible d’être investie par l’imaginaire culturel des spectateurs et redessinée par des époques et des circonstances ayant totalement échappé à l’intentionnalité de l’auteur (p. 215).

In other words, the texts of the ancien régime were granted afterlives; they were ‘reborn’, and given entirely new identities by the political upheavals of the Revolution. 59 Their success was, as Marchand stresses, dependent on events and developments in society and politics in Paris: ‘c’est […] à l’aune de l’actualité politique que se décide la fortune des pièces, sans grande considération de leurs qualités poétiques ou leur cohérence narrative’ (p. 215). French Revolutionary theatre was a ‘théâtre de l’instant’ (p. 216), and comedy was not immune from its power. She considers Destouches’ comedy, L’Ambitieux et l’indiscrète, as being Revolutionary in spite of the temporal, or cultural, space between play and Revolution: ‘la valeur de l’œuvre tient alors à une actualité politique dissociée de ses caractéristiques littéraires et de son intentionnalité première’ (p. 214).

A play did not need to refer directly to the Revolution to be appropriated by the French Revolutionary theatre. The stage now inhabited a political world, where spectators were prepared to ensure their voices were heard and to influence what was performed before them - as Marchand again points out, ‘pas une représentation ne se passe sans que la pièce ne suscite la lecture sur scène de vers de circonstances émanant de spectateurs, qui édifient progressivement, aux côtés du répertoire officiel, un répertoire second, hybride, entre art et politique’ (p. 218). There was no space on this

59 For a discussion of afterlives / pre-history, see Chapter 2, ‘The Theory and Methodology of Revolutionary Appropriation’.  

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stage for dramas entirely divorced from the Revolution: it was impossible. Even the comedies performed during the Terror had to adhere to republican values to be permitted on the stage. As Darlow has put it, ‘Revolutionary theatricality presented itself in alignment with the ethical concerns of the outside world, and in dialogue with its spectators’ (p. 400). Under the influence of Revolutionary politics and spectators, ancien régime plays were reborn - new popularity, new spectators, new meanings. Thanks to their exposure to, and relationship with, the political and social world of the Revolution, they took on implications, themes and ‘roles’ which they had not previously known. To cite Marchand, ‘un certain nombre d’œuvres anciennes n’accèdent pleinement au répertoire qu’avec retard, comme si les potentialités du texte ne pouvaient devenir sensibles que dans certaines circonstances’ (p. 214).

Ancien régime dramas could thus become Revolutionary: according to Emmet Kennedy, they could even become ‘the most revolutionary plays performed in Paris during the Revolution’. Referring to plays such as Voltaire’s Brutus and Lemierre’s Guillaume Tell, he suggests that their popularity was due to the fact that ‘they spoke to contemporaries transparently about their republicanism, but not so dangerously as a play about the execution of the king might have’ (p. 51). They were thus safer to put on the stage than plays which dealt openly with the Revolution - that is, modern plays. But with Brutus being performed to celebrate the execution of Louis XVI, and the play’s hated tyrant being openly referred to as representing the French king, the appropriated tragedy had clearly come to symbolise Revolutionary events. That is, ancien régime plays, having become Revolutionary, were as closely bound to the Revolution as any modern play could be. They were not a ‘safe’ option, because regardless of their date of

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composition, they had been changed into modern, contemporary, and above all, Revolutionary, plays.

My argument, based on the findings of this thesis, is that the dominance of ancien régime drama from 1789-99 was a form of power display. It would be simple to have new, pro-Revolutionary tragedies staged to honour and promote the new regime; to have old, ancien régime works fulfilling this role, however, is not only more difficult, but more impressive. It was less overt (less propagandist) and yet, simultaneously, more effective – for the names associated with the chosen works (such as Voltaire and Molière) were then incorporated into the Revolutionary cause. The Revolution became something that was predicted in an earlier age; and in a very real way, transforming those works that had been performed under the reign of a king into Revolutionary plays was a way of ‘twisting the knife’ into the royalists and conservative forces who would oppose the Revolution. Theatrical appropriation could thus exploit the repertoire of the ancien régime, with this exploitation acting as a demonstration of power.

Issues of Research

The object of my research is the appropriation of those plays which, dating from the ancien régime, became popular during the Revolution. Due to the changing nature of the French theatre - and due to its close relationship with Revolutionary politics - these works were granted an afterlife that was both unexpected and astonishing in its vitality. Their meaning was created (anew) by spectators and political figures, who understood their content within a strictly Revolutionary context. Once appropriated, these works not only re-enforced the glory of the Revolution, but also offered a pedagogical ideal. In other words, having been influenced and re-envisioned by spectators, these texts then took on an active, creative role themselves. They were part of a new theatricality, which existed to serve the Revolution. The findings of my research on this topic will
contribute to knowledge of the politicisation of Revolutionary theatre. More importantly, it will also draw attention to, and analyse, works which have been hitherto neglected in eighteenth-century theatre studies. Examining them using the framework of Revolutionary appropriation will offer a new insight into their success and role on the stage, whilst focusing on archival, contemporary sources will bring formerly forgotten, or little discussed, information to the fore.

The appropriation of ancien régime dramas is a subject which entails several issues which must be investigated. Firstly, why were obscure, largely unsuccessful works chosen over established, famous plays for appropriation in the theatre of the Revolution? For instance, Molière’s Le Dépit amoureux was only rarely staged prior to the Revolution, but from 1789-99 it was performed more frequently than Le Misanthrope, Tartuffe or L’Ecole des femmes. As modern scholarship has established, the qualities that made a play ‘good’ during the Revolution had completely changed, but what could a comedy such as Le Dépit amoureux (which features a cross-dressing woman marrying her sister’s suitor in secret) offer Revolutionary audiences? Were better-known works somehow resistant to appropriation, necessitating the use of formerly ‘rejected’ plays? More specifically, it is unclear how tragedies and comedies which had only rarely been staged before 1789 made their return to the public’s consciousness. At a time when a play could become Revolutionary in spite of its complete temporal and cultural disassociation with the Revolution itself, why was it that works such as Guillaume Tell - which had formerly been ridiculed - were the ones ‘selected’ for appropriation?

There is also the question of how Revolutionary treatment of tragedies differed from that of comedies. I will heed Maslan’s warning against using a political/apolitical binary opposition, but if comedies could be Revolutionary too, were they Revolutionary in the same way as more obviously political tragedies? And how could comedies
suddenly become successful in the highly politicised sphere of the theatre when they had no obvious link to politics? I shall also consider whether there are any common features linking appropriated plays. Factors such as the vocabulary, themes, plots and the types of characters presented in these plays will all be compared, to ascertain whether their appropriation was based on separate individual merits, or whether there were certain features which acted as a ‘requirement’ for appropriation.

Finally, the very nature of Revolutionary appropriation - and how it operates - is a question that will guide my analysis of each case study in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. How does appropriation impact on plays? Is it a one-off, single act which establishes a new interpretation or set of meanings for a text, or does it continue indefinitely, continually altering a drama until that drama is removed from the stage? When different spectators understand a play in different ways, can that play have (strongly) divergent interpretations at the same time, or is its appropriation determined by the dominant sector of the audience? Moreover, I shall identify the tools of appropriation - that is, the way in which a text’s meaning is altered, be it through censorship, additions to the text or simply (mental) association. There is also the question of how best to consider appropriation: is it a sliding scale, with some examples of appropriation more overtly political than others, or is it more uniform in nature?

In terms of structure, this thesis is in two parts: ‘Part I’ deals with the theory, methodology and information underpinning my thesis, whilst ‘Part II’ is devoted to the five plays that will act as my case studies. More specifically, ‘Part I’ consists of this introductory chapter, followed by a section devoted to my use of theory and methodology, as well as the definition of ‘appropriation’ as it will be understood in this thesis. Chapter 3 will deal with performance statistics and the way in which I chose and defined my corpus. ‘Part II’ contains each of my case studies, which are presented in four chapters: two on tragedies, and two on comedies. Each will stand alone on its own
merits, but will be informed by my findings on appropriation - the key, defining term of this thesis. ‘Part II’, and the thesis as a whole, will then draw to a close with my overall conclusion and reflections on the politics of Revolutionary appropriation. For now, however, my next chapter will discuss the term ‘appropriation’ in Early Modern and Revolutionary dictionaries and texts, which will then allow me to move on to outline the theories and methodologies that will be drawn on and used in this thesis.
2: THE THEORY AND METHODOLOGY OF REVOLUTIONARY APPROPRIATION

The theoretical and methodological basis for my investigations into the French Revolutionary stage include three main points, which are as follows: the meaning and implications of the term ‘appropriation’, the theories I shall draw on to guide my analysis, and finally my chosen methodology. The term ‘appropriation’ is at the core of my research, and this will be the guiding-thread throughout my thesis. I shall consider the eighteenth-century French definition of appropriation – that is, the term as it was understood during the Revolution. Using contemporary dictionaries, works on the theatre and Revolutionary texts, I shall establish how the word and concept of appropriation was regarded and used. More specifically, it is important to ascertain how it was viewed during the Revolution. Was it perceived positively or negatively? Was it a deliberate action or simply a ‘natural’ process? How did it relate to comedies and tragedies? An extensive analysis of this concept will enable me to form a theory of appropriation informed by contemporary views, which will shape and contribute to my subsequent investigations.

In terms of theory, I shall also turn to modern scholarship on the key issues of textual interpretation and literary reception. These are vital concepts for an examination of theatrical texts that rose to sudden prominence at a crucial moment in history, and so a consideration of the ideas and work of Terence Cave on pre-history and afterlives, as well as Hans Robert Jauss’s horizon of expectations, will provide key insights and analytical tools. Rather than draw exclusively on one theory relating to literary analysis, I shall create a new theoretical framework tailored specifically for my purposes drawing on existing critical thought. As the eighteenth-century notion of appropriation will feature prominently in my use of theory and methodology, my discussion of theoretical
methods will come after I have established my understanding of *appropriation* so that this key term can be interwoven into my theoretical framework.

Finally, I shall set out the methodology for my research, in light of the chosen theoretical framework. As I am looking at a phenomenon that affected some dramas more than others, an examination of individual literary texts is advisable. A combination of close reading, statistical data, bibliographical methods and a review of Revolutionary journals will be used in my thesis. How I intend to use these methods, as well as the nature of the sources under consideration, will be outlined once I have established my theoretical framework. This will ensure that my methodology is ideally suited and adapted to my research. I shall now begin by analysing the meaning and implications of *appropriation* in the eighteenth century in Revolutionary and theatrical contexts.

*Appropriation*

*Appropriation* is clearly a key term for my investigations. Given that the ‘resurrection’ of *ancien régime* plays on the French Revolutionary stage was an eighteenth-century phenomenon, a consideration of their understanding of the term will help to avoid anachronism. This will also enable me to gauge the extent to which this was a deliberate process. Moreover, I shall consider how the term was used in a theatrical context: was it an established practice, widely acknowledged? Was *appropriation* a neutral act, or did it have negative, cultural or even political connotations? To gather this information, I shall look at eighteenth-century dictionaries, including those dating from the Revolution. As dictionaries contain a normative definition of *appropriation*, I shall extend my investigations to uses of the term in contemporary texts by the likes of Rousseau and Mercier.
Definitions of appropriation can be found in dictionaries dating from the seventeenth century, when the term has the double sense of ‘rendre une chose propre, nette, agréable’; and secondly ‘appliquer un passage à quelque chose qui luy convient bien, qui luy est fort propre’.¹ The second sense of applying a passage to an outside element disappears, however, by the end of the eighteenth century. Instead, this action is encapsulated by appliquer: ‘Il se dit [...] figurément, de l’adaptation d’une maxime, d’un passage, d’un discours, d’une science, ou en général d’une chose à une autre’.² This action was frequently associated with Revolutionary theatre, with contemporary journals commenting on the phenomenon:

On distingue au théâtre deux sortes d’applications; celle qui font allusion à quelques événements politiques, ou à quelques personnages célèbres, auxquels le public applique certains passages de telle ou telle pièce qui paroissent lui convenir […] Les secondes ont pour objet les acteurs mêmes.³

The driving force behind these applications was the audience itself, although actors seemingly encouraged this trend: ‘les spectateurs appliquaient souvent des traits aux circonstances présentes, et les acteurs eux-mêmes ont employé l’illusion de la scène à témoigner leur joie particulière et à augmenter celle du public’.⁴ What is more, works of the ancien régime were subjected to these topical / political interpretations, with a police report outlining the contemporary application of verses from Destouches’s comedy, Le Glorieux - though as the report makes clear, these applications were not always in keeping with the Revolutionary ethos:

Suppression d'un passage dans la comédie du Glorieux. Le ministre de la police ayant dénoncé l'application constante donnée par des malveillants à la réponse

²Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française, 5th edition (1798).
³Le Censeur Dramatique, April 1798, III, p. 306.
Application was thus a method of connecting specific sections of plays with the events, or developments, of the Revolution - though this connection was not always made in favour of the Revolution, and was thus not always desirable.

In spite of the fact that *approprier* no longer carried this sense of *appliquer* by the eighteenth century, they were still connected, with *application* becoming a method (facet) of *appropriation*. The transformation of the term *appropriation* at this time extends beyond its separation from *appliquer*, however; indeed, it undergoes a distinct metamorphosis in eighteenth-century France. For instance, on the eve of revolution, Féraud likens the action of *approprier* to *conformer*; this meaning is indicated to be fairly new in France in the 1780s, or at least specialised, as Féraud adds that ‘l’Acad. ne le met point en ce sens.’ Strikingly, this definition of the term had been accepted by *l’Académie Française* by the end of the Revolution, as the fifth edition of 1798 demonstrates when it classifies *approprier* as ‘proportionner, faire cadrer, rendre propre à sa destination.’ It might therefore be the case that this definition of *approprier* sprung from the Revolutionary period – for whilst this sense of adapting, or conforming, may appear neutral, Revolutionary dictionaries would clearly link it with the Revolutionary cause.

In 1795, *approprier* is included in definitions of such political expressions as *républicaniser* and *nationaliser*. In the entry for *républicaniser, appropriation* is associated with the process of making something republican: ‘ce verbe est aussi

5 Rapport du bureau central’, 29 September 1798. See <http://www.cesar.org.uk/cesar2/> [accessed 20 June 2012]. References to kingship, the aristocracy and any remnants of the ancien régime were frequently purged from theatrical texts at this time, so that spectators may have been linking the verses with this tendency. See Chapter 6, ‘Resetting the Clock on Le Misanthrope and Le Dépit amoureux’.
émployé activement pour rendre républicain ou approprier et adapter un objet au Système républicain’. Rather than indicating the action of conforming an object according to an indeterminate outside influence, appropriation is linked to the Revolutionary cause. This is repeated in the definition of nationaliser, which denotes ‘rendre un objet national ou l’approprier à la Nation’. Not only is the term closely associated with a specific set of politics, but it has lost the neutrality it possessed in the late 1780s, as the definition of populariser presents appropriation as something that is both good and necessary – it is the action of ‘approprier et adapter une chose au génie du Peuple et au bien de la chose publique’.

As though to underline its link to the Revolution, this act is then likened to purging ‘une langue’ of ‘toutes les expressions, qui tiennent à l’ancien régime oppressif’. The removal of vocabulary pertaining to the absolute monarchy was a phenomenon that impacted on the Revolutionary fortunes of plays such as Molière’s Le Misanthrope, with phrases such as ‘Amis de Cour’ having to be replaced by the non-court specific ‘Amis du jour’. Appropriation can therefore be regarded as a deliberate action. And yet whilst the term undoubtedly came to denote the process of making something ‘Revolutionary’, it also had a second meaning – that of possession. Immediately before the Revolution, it was defined as the ‘action de s’approprier une chose [...] de la prendre à son usage.’ Such a definition hints at the possibility of exploitation, of taking possession of an object for a definite purpose.

Of course, deliberately altering and adapting an object to suit an external influence (here, the Revolution) would necessitate the agent of this appropriation to take possession of whatever he meant to adapt. The two ideas underpinning appropriation – those of possession and adaptation – are therefore inherently linked at this time. The

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9 See Chapter 6, ‘Resetting the Clock on Molière’s Le Misanthrope and Le Dépit amoureux: Positive and Negative Appropriation’.
10 Jean-François Féraud, Dictionnaire Critique de la Langue Française (1787-1788).
latter cannot take place without the former, whilst the taking possession of an object is
done in order to adapt it or to use it in some specific way. There is consequently no
doubt regarding intent: it is an open, deliberate process, done for a specific purpose. It is
also Revolutionary, and as such is political. In order to ascertain how this phenomenon
relates to (and influenced) the theatre, I will now consider salient uses of the term
appropriation in texts emanating from the Revolution and the eighteenth century.

Appropriation in the Theatre

In addition to approprier’s general use in communicating the idea of making one
element conform to another, writers often used it in works relating to the theatre, with
both Rousseau and Mercier incorporating it in their arguments on theatre. Their ideas
and theories on the theatre are not under consideration; rather, I shall concentrate
specifically on their usage of the term approprier. In the Lettre à M. D’Alembert sur les
Spectacles, Rousseau links appropriation with making foreign, or unfamiliar, plays
conform to the theatrical repertoire: ‘tout Auteur qui veut nous peindre des mœurs
estrangères a pourtant grand soin d’approprier sa Pièce aux nôtres. Sans cette précaution,
l’on ne réussit jamais’ (p. 25). Appropriation is a process that enables dramas to remain
popular, with a ‘good’ drama being defined as one which does not transgress the limits
of spectator sensibilities: ‘On dit que jamais une bonne Pièce ne tombe; vraiment je le
crois bien, c’est que jamais une bonne Pièce ne choque les mœurs de son tems’ (p. 25).

It is thus a necessary process, entailing the alteration of a play to suit its
audience; a basic requirement brought about by the nature of the stage: ‘l’effet général
du Spectacle est de renforcer le caractère national, d’augmenter les inclinations
naturelles, et de donner une nouvelle énergie à toutes les passions’ (p. 26). Within a

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11 See: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1758), Lettre à M. D’Alembert sur les spectacles, ed. by M. Fuchs
(Geneva: Droz, 1948), and Louis-Sébastien Mercier, Du théâtre ou Nouvel essai sur l’art dramatique
(Amsterdam: E. Van Harrevelt, 1773).
Revolutionary context, appropriation would thus entail ‘reinforcing’ Revolutionary expectations. The question of a play’s former reputation and status in the repertoire therefore becomes irrelevant during the French Revolution. Appropriation could be regarded as the process of altering a text to suit its environment, that is, of removing any barriers between play and audience. More than being simply necessary, appropriation becomes a positive activity when it enables a play to become popular – that is, when it achieves its objective. Consequently, texts which were revised during the Revolution and went on to experience a surge in popularity can be considered as having been successfully appropriated.

Mercier also discusses the need to alter a play to make it conform to its environment, but lends the term a more obviously political aspect:

quelle étude plus digne du poëte que de bien sentir ce qu’il faut exposer à son siècle au moment où il écrit; et d’approprier tellement son drame aux circonstances, que les abus soient à la fois dévoilés, attaqués et corrigés, s’il est possible (p. 41)

Approprier here signifies altering a theatrical work to suit its social context. One author who significantly changed one of his own plays according to the sentiments and values of the Revolution was Lemierre: his tragedy Guillaume Tell (1767) was rewritten in the early Revolutionary years to include terminology and dialogue that was more ‘in keeping’ with the Revolution.12 Such appropriation, however, was deemed by Mercier to not only be necessary, but also desirable, a skill to be esteemed and respected. It is necessitated by the very nature of tragedy, which ‘sera entendue & saisie par tous les ordres de citoyens, qui aura un rapport intime avec les affaires politiques, qui […] exaltera dans son cœur un patriotisme éclairé (pp. 39-40).’ This statement emphasises the need for drama (and tragedy in particular) to be patriotic. Moreover, the inherently political nature of tragedy becomes evident.

12 See Chapter 5, ‘Guillaume Tell: From Laughing Stock to National Hero’. 37
In being so closely connected to ‘circonstances’ and ‘les affaires politiques’, it follows that its appropriation would also be political. If appropriation is carried out in light of circonstances, and allows tragedy to encourage ‘un patriotisme éclairé’, then it must be informed and shaped by specific political events, shifts and developments. This is borne out by the changing interpretation of ancien régime tragedies during the Revolution, when the Roman campaign against the exiled monarch of Voltaire’s Brutus was described as taking place in France, not Rome. Tragedy was therefore ripe for political appropriation, and the changing landscape of Paris at this time necessitated such appropriation. Both Rousseau and Mercier’s texts indicate that appropriation was central to the success of drama upon the stage, and that it was a ‘natural’ process – to be expected and, to some extent, encouraged. The changes wrought upon politics and society by the French Revolution was therefore a trigger for a new wave of appropriation within the theatre, with tragedy being particularly susceptible to such treatment.

Revolutionary Appropriation

Revolutionary journals certainly portrayed the theatrical appropriation of plays very positively. In 1795, the Journal des Théâtres praised the appropriation of plays to support, or adhere to, contemporary circumstances:

J’ai vu jouer Miltiade à Marathon et Oedipe à Colone, appropriés aux circonstances, sur le théâtre de l’Egalité [...] Les artistes de ce théâtre méritent des éloges, par les soins qu’ils ont mis à jouer tous les chefs-d’oeuvre qu’un de leurs camarades remet très-agréablement à l’ordre du jour.

Given that Miltiade à Marathon dates from the Revolution, appropriation was clearly not restricted to the plays of the ancien régime. It was also linked with being patriotic, with the name of the theatre (de l’Egalité) revealing its Revolutionary nature.

13 See Chapter 4, ‘Revolutionary Brutus: Royalist, Republican, Reject’.
14 Journal des Théâtres, 1 August 1795. Miltiade à Marathon (1793) and Oedipe à Colone (1786) are both operas by Nicolas Guillard.
Meanwhile, although dictionary definitions of *appropriation* (as well as its usage by Mercier and Rousseau) indicate that *appropriation* was an action which was purposefully carried out on plays, a Revolutionary review of playwright Marie-Joseph Chénier’s work demonstrates that drama was not always a passive object in this process. Chénier is praised for his use of historical (Roman) themes and characters, which he ‘appropriated’ into his work:

> Avec quel art heureux le Poëte n’a-t-il pas su approprier à son sujet des inductions historiques qui l’enrichissent! Avec quel art encore il désigne sous des noms Romains des hommes de fange et de sang que la délicatesse du goût répugne de nommer, autant que le sentiment de l’humanité révoltée de l’horreur qu’ils inspirent! (p. 90)

There is consequently no doubt that appropriation worked in favour of the Revolution – with the Revolution being seen as opening up a new world of possibilities for gifted poets: ‘La révolution en amenant de nouvelles lois et de nouveaux usages, a ouvert aux Poètes une source nouvelle de beautés que nous admirons dans les anciens, sans nous croire appelés à les imiter jamais’ (p. 90).

The use of the term *imiter* here indicates that it is closely linked with appropriation, though they cannot in any way be considered as interchangeable. The theatrical definition of *imitation*, as provided by Marmontel in 1787, certainly evokes the sense of making a text ‘conform’ to a new audience, but appears to go one step further - that is, it is a process that results in a new text:

> *Imiter* […] c’est, dans sa langue même, recueillir d’un ouvrage obscur et oublié, des pensées heureuses, mais indigne mises en œuvre par l’inventeur, et les placer, les assortir, les exprimer comme elles devraient l’être.¹⁶

Revolutionary dictionaries describe the act of *imiter* as being ‘un Auteur qui prend, dans ses écrits, l’esprit, le génie, le style d’un autre Auteur.’¹⁷ *Imitation* is thus, like

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¹⁵ Saint Ange, in *La Décade Philosophique, Littéraire et Politique / par une société de républicains*, 1798, XVIII.
application, a facet of appropriation - though more extreme, or marked, than application. The new versions of Molière’s comedy *Le Misanthrope* that were produced during the Revolution under new titles and under the names of other authors (for example, Fabre d’Eglantine’s *Le Misanthrope Corrigé*) can thus be regarded as instances of imitation. This contributes to the appropriation of Molière and *Le Misanthrope* by the Revolution (by associating them with Revolutionary ideas), although I shall be focusing on the appropriation of the original text (that is, the text still attributed to the first author), rather than on such examples of imitation.

The sense of ‘possession’ conveyed by appropriation extends beyond one individual taking ownership of a text - instead, it appears to denote the possession of an object by everybody. In Revolutionary texts pertaining to the stage, it was used to denote the adoption of the repertoire of the ancien régime by various (unnamed) theatres: ‘La facilité de s’approprier tout l’ancien répertoire, cette immense richesse publique, sans en payer aucune rétribution, a fait concevoir à une foule de petits théâtres sa prétention de rivaliser la scène des Lekain, des Molé, des Préville.’

This repertoire belongs, not to the individual, but to everybody. The term was used again to describe the idea that a play belongs to society in general and not to the playwright, as the author argues that ‘La nature ne suggère […] pas cette appropriation publique’.

This forms a counterpoint to the political appropriation suggested by Mercier; rather than being strictly political, appropriation can be ‘public’, in the sense that the object (that is, play) is taken into the power and possession of the audience in general. With the strict regulations controlling the theatrical sphere lifted in January 1791, and with every theatre having the right to perform any play from the ancien régime, the potential for this manner of appropriation increased drastically during the Revolution.

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18 *La Décade philosophique, littéraire et politique / par une société de républicains*, XIV, 1797, p.361.
Beyond the stage, there is some evidence that *appropriation* became inherently bound to and characterised by the Revolution, as it became synonymous with rendering an object more ‘Revolutionary’. As the following excerpt from the ‘Arrêtés du comité de salut public’ demonstrates: ‘Le comité de Salut public invite David, représentant du peuple, à lui présenter ses vues et projets sur les moyens d’améliorer le costume national actuel, de l’approprier aux mœurs républicaines et au caractère de la révolution.’\(^{20}\) The necessity of adapting to the Revolution was also made clear in a reference to ‘ce glorieux régime’, which ‘peut nous causer de déchiremens, si nous ne voulons approprier nos mœurs à ce nouveau Gouvernement’.\(^{21}\) From 1789-1799 then, *appropriation* becomes the process of conforming to the Revolution, to a new set of *circonstances*. Within the theatre, however, the very active nature of the stage means that appropriated plays also influenced these circumstances.

*Pre-history and Afterlives*\(^ {22}\)

Given that Revolutionary appropriation entails persons adopting and altering plays dating from a period far removed (temporally and culturally) from their own, Cave’s methods of *pré-histoire* and afterlives will be drawn upon to facilitate my investigations. Neil Kenny and Wes Williams define these methods as follows: ‘writing pre-histories is an attempt to interpret literary and other texts in something approximating to their own terms, writing the ‘afterlives’ of texts and motifs involves showing how “their own terms” have been developed, distorted, forgotten, rejected, or


parodied by subsequent writers’ (p. 4). The strictly Revolutionary alterations made to Voltaire’s *La Mort de César* correspond closely to this representation of an ‘afterlife’, as the tragedy was changed (or ‘distorted’) to conform to a situation of which Voltaire could have had no knowledge. Pre-history, meanwhile, allows critics to examine - in the words of Anna Holland and Richard Scholar - ‘texts of the past that move and keep moving’ (p. 2). This will therefore be the ideal theoretical basis for my research.

In Cave’s method of *pré-histoire*, literary texts that have survived from a long-forgotten past can be used as a gateway to a deeper understanding of that world: ‘A condition d’admettre la part de l’aléatoire dans l’objet littéraire, on peut en tirer une information précieuse qui n’est disponible par aucune autre source’ (p. 12). It is our role to respect these artefacts, to examine them closely in the hope of learning their secrets, however deeply these may be buried: ‘On ne pourra que retourner constamment à l’objet, l’écouter avec attention, suivre son message codé jusque dans ses replis internes’ (pp. 12-13). The dramas appropriated during the Revolution are, arguably, more informative than factual texts such as newspapers, as these would have been read once (possibly twice) and then discarded, whereas a play or imaginative work could remain in the public consciousness for many years: for instance, Voltaire’s *Brutus* was performed in every year of the Revolution from 1790 onwards. In terms of examining these plays, close reading seems the most obvious method of ‘l’écouter avec attention’ - which means to ‘retourner constamment à l’objet’. In other words, due attention must be paid not only to the text as a coherent whole, but to its minute details.

Such artefacts are not simply reflective of history, but instead play a very active role. Whilst they are influenced by factors such as politics and religion, ‘cette relation

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24 See Chapter 1, ‘Introduction’.
26 See Chapter 4, ‘Revolutionary Brutus: Royalist, Republican, Reject’.
n’est d’ailleurs pas uniquement passive. Loin d’être un simple reflet du monde et de la culture qui les produisent, les textes littéraires s’y engagent’ (p. 12). The political, social and theatrical furore caused by the return of Voltaire’s Brutus to the stage in 1790, and attempts to ape the titular character’s behaviour in Revolutionary France, are striking examples of the power and influence of such literary objects (see chapter 4). With the rowdy, sometimes violent audiences of the Revolution responding vocally to the stage performances before them, the effect of these plays upon spectators is clearly demonstrated - as is the way in which spectators sometimes altered and shaped these works. As Cave states, literary objects ‘entrent dans l’histoire, dans le sens fort de cette expression’ (p. 12).

These objects are, however, highly complex: ‘Les objets qu’on appelle littéraires sont souvent des objets troublés ou troublants: au seizième siècle comme aujourd’hui et comme au temps de Platon, un soupçon plane sur les objets; ils s’entourent de précautions apologétiques ou de gloses rectificatrices’ (p. 15). By paying attention to the troubles within a text, it is possible to gain greater insight into the perception of the work and its place in history:

Le dépistage d’un « trouble » permet de localiser une région problématique de la perception, de retrouver une sorte de fêlure dont l’auteur et ses contemporains ne sont peut-être pas pleinement conscients, mais qu’ils ressentent comme un malaise, une tache floue à l’horizon de la pensée (p. 15).

In the case of Revolutionary theatre, the concerns of spectators and literary figures regarding the presence of rebellious peasants, an exaggeratedly evil tyrant and a symbolic hat upon the stage in Lemierre’s tragedy, Guillaume Tell, in 1767, may be considered as examples of such ‘disturbances’.28 In 1767, no one could know that these same themes, or motifs, would become synonymous with the Revolution, or that Guillaume Tell would be funded by the Revolutionary government as a ‘patriotic play’

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(see chapter 5). And yet the origins, or seeds, of that distant future were already present on its first appearance on the stage.

Afterlives: ‘Returns from the Dead’

In the specific instance of my own investigations, the return of formerly obscure, forgotten plays on the French Revolutionary stage means that the term ‘afterlife’ becomes particularly useful. Holland and Scholar define afterlives as ‘an astonishingly vital sequence of incarnations or lives made anew’. The question, then, is how to decide what constitutes ‘vital’ within my thesis, so as to be able to judge which plays experienced an ‘afterlife’. Kenny’s and Williams’s statement that afterlives involve demonstrating how texts have been ‘developed’ or ‘distorted’ will be used as a general gauge: that is, if a play’s interpretation, or content, changed markedly during the Revolution, then its appearance on the stage can be considered an afterlife. Thus, the performance of Le Misanthrope with new verses to replace those which referred to the court or the aristocracy can be regarded as an afterlife (see chapter 6). Not all texts, however, were changed so obviously through appropriation - some, such as Regnard’s Les Folies amoureuses, continued to be published with the same content as before, and with no indication of Revolutionary changes, censorship or additions.

And yet the extraordinary popularity of this comedy during the Revolution - it numbered amongst one of the most performed works of the decade - suggests that it was viewed, or appreciated, in a very different way to previous years. It could certainly be argued that a sudden rise to such prominence during the Revolution is evidence of an afterlife, but it will not be seen as sufficiently strong proof in this thesis. To avoid

31 See Chapter 7, ‘Cross-dressing, Role Play, Knights Errant and Tyrants: Overthrowing the Stereotypes of Power in Regnard’s Les Folies amoureuses’.
32 For all performance statistics, see Chapter 3, ‘Defining the Corpus: Performance, Statistics and Political Appropriation’.
abusing the theory of ‘afterlives’, I shall only use this term when there is concrete evidence to demonstrate that a play’s interpretation has changed significantly from previous years. Thus, whilst the appropriation of plays such as *La Mort de César* changed their basic theme (and even structure), resulting in a Revolutionary afterlife, not all instances of appropriation will lead to a play being granted an ‘afterlife’. This is particularly true of works which were appropriated negatively - that is, those plays which became successful based on a lack of problematic content. Molière’s comedy *Le Désert amoureux* rose to prominence due in part to the absence of *ancien régime* terminology and historically or culturally-specific references; in this instance, whilst the play’s action may have been perceived as taking place in Revolutionary France, its action and plot were left unaltered. It thus did not differ radically enough from its former incarnation for its Revolutionary career to be definitively termed an ‘afterlife’.

It is possible, however, that some plays may have enjoyed several afterlives during the French Revolution. As Holland makes clear, texts continue to change throughout history, granting them new afterlives and interpretations:

> the critic is attempting to trace the progress of a labile, Protean object, as fleeting and evanescent as any ghost, in its oblique and shifting forward progress through time, to track that object as it crosses a succession of thresholds into diverse downstream contexts, metamorphosing as it goes (p. 8).

Whilst the ten years of the Revolution may appear to be too brief a time-span to allow for a ‘sequence of incarnations’ clearly separate from each other, the speed with which French politics (and society) were changing means that it is entirely possible for a play to have experienced multiple Revolutionary afterlives. Voltaire’s *Brutus* was widely regarded as supporting Louis XVI in 1790, before being used to justify regicide in 1793. The contrast between these two points in time can only be accorded to two, separate, afterlives. The method of afterlives is thus a useful tool in differentiating between the successive (oppositional) interpretations of *ancien régime* plays.

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33 See Chapter 4, ‘Revolutionary *Brutus*: Royalist, Republican, Reject’.  
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I shall also draw on Hans Robert Jauss’s approach to literary history, including his use of the ‘horizon of expectations’. Though distinct from Cave’s method of pre-history, they are by no means incompatible, given that Jauss stresses the impossibility of any literary work remaining unchanged by time: ‘A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence’ (p. 21). Consequently, new meanings and interpretations become possible as readers (or spectators) understand the individual aspects of the work in a modern context - the text being ‘an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers [...] that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence’ (p. 21). This bears more than a passing resemblance to pre-history, which outlines how literary objects can take on new meanings of which the original author could not have been aware: ‘on account of their singularity, it is only in the course of their reception in downstream contexts that their full signifying power is realized’.

Thus Lemierre’s tragedy Guillaume Tell could be performed during the absolute monarchy, and yet be hailed as a radically pro-Revolutionary tragedy during the Terror, as ‘new’ spectators responded to it in its very different context.

The importance of the historical context is underlined by Jauss, who points out the impact of ‘history’ on the reader / spectator: ‘the historical context in which a literary work appears is not a factical [sic], independent series of events that exists apart from the observer’ (p. 21). Instead, the historic (or political, social, cultural) context of the work shapes the spectator’s horizon of expectations, and decides whether the literary

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object will continue to be understood and valued. A text, or play, can only remain current for as long as it is comprehensible and ‘relevant’, or contemporary, to its audience:

A literary event can continue to have an effect only if those who come after it still or once again respond to it - if there are readers who again appropriate the past work or authors who want to imitate, outdo, or refute it. The coherence of literature as event is primarily mediated in the horizon of expectations (p. 22).

The return of *ancien régime* dramas to the stage during the French Revolution is thus evidence of their connection to Revolutionary audiences: some element(s), that may have lain latent for decades, suddenly struck new resonances with audiences, allowing ‘their full signifying power’ to be realized.36

The idea of a horizon of expectations will thus complement my use of Cave’s pre-history and afterlives. The expectations, values, experiences and wishes of persons during the Revolution would have shaped their appropriation of *ancien régime* drama: expectations derived from the events taking place around them, from government propaganda, and from the type of plays performed regularly at this time. Their expectations as regards certain playwrights may also have been decisive, especially when one considers Voltaire’s status as a beacon for the Enlightenment - a factor that may partially account for the increased popularity of his plays during the Revolution.37

With Revolutionary appropriation shaped by the horizon of expectations (or by events and developments both outside and within the theatre), individual plays could be seen and understood in entirely new ways - ways which may never have been anticipated beforehand. When a play’s basic meaning or signification changed so drastically that it bore no resemblance to its former interpretation, it was granted a Revolutionary afterlife.


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Such will be the basic theoretical basis of my thesis, and of my examination of specific works appropriated during the French Revolution. The stress placed by both Cave and Jauss on the changing signification of literary objects, as well as Cave’s warning against colouring these objects with modern information or values, means that any aesthetic judgements must be avoided. It is not important if those plays appropriated by the Revolutionary theatre remain popular today, or if they have been completely forgotten. What matters is how - and why - plays from the ancien régime were appropriated during the Revolution. The tools of pre-history, afterlives and the horizon of expectations will be used as and when they are helpful and relevant, and so the strength of their presence in individual case studies will vary from chapter to chapter.

**Methodology**

In order to address the nature of Revolutionary appropriation on the stage, a series of case studies will be conducted on plays that were appropriated during the Revolution. This reflects the importance that Cave places upon literary texts in terms of the knowledge and information that they reveal. The criteria for this selection will be outlined in the next chapter, but the number of case studies will be restricted to four. This will enable me to analyse each work in sufficient detail – and will, in the words of Cave, allow me to ‘l’écouter avec attention’ (*Pré-histoires*, p. 13). Close reading will thus be the method employed most frequently and consistently throughout my thesis. I shall pay particular attention to any common themes, characters or lexis: for example, the works in my corpus feature a similar vocabulary, or a ‘language of appropriation’. I shall also focus on any lines that were used to make applications or which were singled out in contemporary sources as being especially popular or favourable.

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My research will be guided by statistical data - that is, the pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary performance figures of plays from the *ancien régime*.39 A comparison of these two sets of performance statistics will enable me to ascertain which plays owed their popularity to the Revolution (that is, were appropriated) and which works from the *ancien régime* had simply succeeded in maintaining their former popularity. I shall collect this data from a number of sources. Pre-Revolutionary performance figures will be taken from Joannidès’s *La Comédie Française de 1680 à 1900*, which contains the performance statistics for every play performed at the Comédie Française. Owing to the number of theatres operating in Paris from 1789-99, and the need for year-by-year statistics, Revolutionary performance figures will be collected from a range of sources. *Theatre, Opera, and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris* will be used for overall performance figures for the Revolutionary period.40 Tissier’s *Les Spectacles à Paris pendant la Révolution* will be drawn on for year-by-year statistics,41 whilst Revolutionary journals and the online database *César* will be referred to for the exact date of individual performances when the date is significant - when, for example, a performance coincides with a momentous event such as the execution of Louis XVI.42

Bibliographical methods will also be used to guide my analysis. I shall compare (and count) Revolutionary editions of plays that are available in the Bibliothèque nationale de France or on *Gallica*,43 and count those listed in the Catalogue Collectif de

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France (CCFr). The increasing digitalisation of eighteenth-century texts (for example on Google books) has been a considerable advantage. Numerous new editions of *ancien régime* plays (such as the ten editions of Voltaire’s *Brutus* that appeared from 1789 to 1793) are a strong indication of Revolutionary appropriation. The *avertissements* contained in some of these editions will be analysed for any ‘hints’ of changes to the perception, interpretation or content of the play. Where there are different versions of the same play in existence, I shall compare and contrast the differences between these texts, paying due attention to the significance of the date of publication. In the case of some works, such as Lemierre’s *Guillaume Tell*, a critical edition containing all pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary variants of the play, as well as Revolutionary notes and censorship, has been compiled in modern scholarship. Where such resources are available, I will draw on these critical editions, though not exclusively, and will continue to refer to Revolutionary editions.

Close reading of plays will play a prominent role in my thesis. Apart from comparing and contrasting different Revolutionary editions of works, I shall also look for vocabulary that may be common to the plays appropriated at this time. I will also examine the themes, lexis and characters of individual compositions to ascertain whether they may have become linked to contemporary events. This close reading will, however, be informed by Revolutionary reports of these plays: their interpretation, their strengths, and their failings. To this end, I shall discuss a representative sample of eighteenth-century accounts of each work in my corpus. I will collect these from the writings of cultural figures such as Grimm, although I will also consider the work of

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visitors to Paris at this time, with both the German dramatist August von Kotzebue and Gerhard Anton von Halem discussing the theatre at some length. Alongside individual accounts of theatrical performances, I shall also consider the evidence presented in the contemporary press.

I will search for, and analyse, theatrical reviews in journals that are available on *Gallica, César*, or other such databases, with many now being available in digitised form. Government articles mentioning the plays within my corpus - such as the decree of August 1793 regarding the financing of ‘patriotic’ plays such as *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell* - are clear evidence of political appropriation. Reports of political meetings in which theatrical verses were cited or characters featured in the plays of my corpus were named will also be examined in order to ascertain how these works, and their dialogue, were regarded in a cultural or political context. For instance, the citation of a verse from Lemierre’s *Guillaume Tell* in political discourse, with ‘Switzerland’ replaced by ‘France’, is evidence of how closely the play was associated with contemporary events: ‘Que la France soit libre et que nos noms périssent!’ These sources are particularly important in cases where the hero of an *ancien régime* play had been elevated to the status of a national exemplar - as was the case with Lucius Junius Brutus - as the image of the exemplar promoted by the government was bound to impact on the corresponding play’s appropriation.

I have also included police reports from 1793-1799 (all available years) in my research. These have all been taken from *César*. These reports outline particularly noteworthy audience responses to plays; verses that were applauded with extreme enthusiasm; instances of ‘bad’ behaviour on the part of spectators, and undesirable

48 See Chapter 4, ‘Revolutionary Brutus: Royalist, Republican, Reject’.
50 See Chapter 4, ‘Revolutionary Brutus: Royalist, Republican, Reject’.
51 See Chapter 5, ‘Guillaume Tell: From Laughing Stock to National Hero’.
52 *César: calendrier électronique des spectacles sous l’ancien régime et sous la révolution* [accessed 29 February 2012].
content in plays that must be removed. They are thus an immensely rich resource.
Whilst they may promote one, specific interpretation of the plays in my corpus (a
particularly Revolutionary interpretation), this is in itself evidence of political
appropriation. Revolutionary iconography of figures who were either the author of, or a
character in, the plays under discussion will also be considered. Both Gallica and César
have digitalised images that are no longer subject to copyright, and which offer an
alternative perspective on the appropriation of plays. Finally, I have also searched the
archives of the Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie Française so that I can incorporate
new, previously undiscussed material into my thesis. Through this consideration of
every available resource, I shall present a well-informed perspective and examination of
theatrical appropriation.

Journals of the French Revolution\textsuperscript{53}

Given the importance of eighteenth-century journals to my thesis, they merit a short
section to outline their political leanings and bias. Revolutionary journals are an
immensely valuable resource: as Robert Darnton points out, the press ‘was an active
force in history, especially during the decade of 1789-1799, when the struggle for power
was a struggle for mastery of public opinion’.\textsuperscript{54} Many publications had a propagandist
value, with La Vedette (a Jacobin journal) being sent ‘free of charge to all the
municipalities and political clubs in the province’, with instructions for officials to ‘read
the paper aloud publicly [...] because its pages “express in purest form the principles of
republicanism”’.\textsuperscript{55} An extraordinary number of publications were created during the


Revolution, with 335 founded in 1790 alone. Few lasted long, and the number under discussion here is considerably lower.

Only articles, or reviews, that directly name the plays in my corpus or the characters they feature have been used in my research. Reviews of performances, references to national exemplars (such as William Tell and Brutus), and accounts of applications and audience behaviour at the theatre, are all indications of how the plays in my corpus were perceived. Some journals would even print the most ‘important’ verses from so-called patriotic plays, which offers an insight into the basis of the appeal of these works and why they were appropriated. These are obviously subjective sources: the political leanings of individual journals would have an impact on their presentation of plays, particularly those seen as ‘belonging’ to one camp. Such political bias is, however, ideal evidence of political appropriation, with the very subjectivity of some publications offering an insight into how they wished the text to be understood and the manner of its appropriation.

Two of the more moderate journals of the Revolutionary period are Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel and La Chronique de Paris. Both printed a high number of articles relating to the theatre of the Revolution, meaning that I have drawn on them more frequently than journals with less theatrical content - although as La Chronique de Paris ceased to circulate in August 1792, it is only relevant to the moderate phase of the Revolution. Both were pro-Revolutionary: Pierre Rétat outlines the Gazette Nationale’s ‘engagement révolutionnaire modéré’ (p. 118), whilst delineating how La Chronique de Paris’s fervent Revolutionary involvement was nevertheless very moderate. It was a ‘journal à la fois fortement engagé dans la lutte révolutionnaire, et modéré’, which was ‘très sensible à l’opinion publique’ (p. 59). They

provide a portrait of how dramas were viewed and appreciated by a non-radical audience. The *Gazette Nationale* is also useful in a slightly different way, as it became ‘the Revolution’s semiofficial newspaper of record, devoting most of its columns to transcripts of Assembly debates’.

I shall draw on such transcripts when they contain quotations of the plays in my corpus, or references to their characters, as evidence of political appropriation.

Amongst those publications that were less moderate in their Revolutionary involvement are *Les Révolutions de Paris, Les Annales Patriotiques et Littéraires, Le Journal Universel, L’Almanach des Républicains* and *Le Journal des Débats et des Décrets*. The very titles of some of these publications indicate their affiliations, but *Les Annales Patriotiques et Littéraires* and *Le Journal des Débats et des Décrets* are no less extreme in their stance. *Les Annales Patriotiques et Littéraires* was ‘violemment révolutionnaire’ - something that was illustrated by their description of triumphant spectators applauding republicanism at the theatre on the night of Louis XVI’s execution. *Le Journal Universel*, meanwhile, expressed its Revolutionary spirit ‘sous forme de discours célébrateur’ (p. 166). It is consequently very likely that these journals will exaggerate their descriptions of performances and promote an interpretation of the works in my corpus that was strictly, and extremely, pro-Revolutionary.

Although I shall mainly focus my attention on the theatres of Paris, I will consider foreign and provincial journals when they offer particularly strong evidence of theatrical appropriation. *L’Esprit des Journaux*, the *Journal Encyclopédique ou Universel* and *Le Courier de Lyon* will thus be considered alongside the Parisian press. Some journals, such as *La Vedette*, were just as violently pro-Revolutionary as

61 Whilst *L’Esprit des Journaux* was initially linked with Paris, Pierre Rétat classes it as ‘presse étrangère de la langue française’ (p. 361).
the most radical examples of the Parisian press, but whilst the subjectivity of such a publication is obvious, they are (like *Les Révolutions de Paris*) a valuable source of evidence.\(^{62}\) It is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the provincial press in any detail. Only content relating directly to the plays in my corpus, and offering an insight into Revolutionary appropriation, will be considered. This means that provincial journals do not have a prominent presence in this thesis; rather, they will supplement the evidence of Parisian journals.

Finally, theatre or literature journals will also be considered, from *Les Spectacles de Paris* to the clearly pro-Revolutionary *Journal des Théâtres et des Fêtes Nationales*. These may offer a more literary, or specialist, view of the plays under consideration, and tend to be more conservative in their viewpoint: for example, the *Courrier des Spectacles* railed against the tendency to change (or censor) older plays containing ‘passages qui pouvaient rappeler l’amour que les Français avaient autrefois’, with a report of Voltaire’s *Adélaïde du Guesclin* containing a list of Revolutionary alterations (such as the line ‘il a trahi son roi’ being replaced by ‘il a trahi sa foi’).\(^{63}\) Another theatrical journal, *Le Censeur Dramatique* attempted to deny any political involvement. Having outlined the loss of ‘knowledgeable’ audiences in theatres, the journal’s first issue in 1797 opened with the following statement: ‘Toute discussion politique étant exclue de ce Journal, nous n’examinerons point si c’est à la Révolution que nous devons ces changemens étranges, et cette introduction des Bonnets rouges à la place des têtes pensantes’.\(^{64}\) Such a claim to being apolitical is not convincing, and the obvious lack of enthusiasm for the Revolution makes it clear that, like the *Courrier des Spectacles*, this is a conservative publication. Literary journals therefore tend to be at

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\(^{62}\) For an example of *La Vedette*’s pro-revolutionary agenda, see Chapter 1, ‘Introduction’.


\(^{64}\) *Le Censeur dramatique ou journal des principaux théâtres de Paris et des départemens*, 1797, I, p. 8.
the other end of the spectrum from the rabidly pro-Revolutionary Les Rêvolutions de Paris and La Vedette. In considering every sort of journal, from moderate to radical, from political to literary, I shall have access to a myriad of perspectives on the plays in my corpus, with the very subjectivity of some publications offering invaluable insight into attempts to appropriate specific plays.

Appropriation and Afterlives
My methodology for investigating the politics of appropriation in French Revolutionary theatre thus has two main strands: the plays themselves, and contemporary reports of their performances. This information will all be judged against the backdrop of the changing nature of the theatre,\textsuperscript{65} but will ensure that due attention is paid both to the literary object itself, and its context. I have taken every precaution possible to avoid colouring and distorting my analysis of these works with modern knowledge. Whilst I will consider pre-Revolutionary interpretations of these works to establish whether or not these were radically changed by the Revolution, I will not attempt to outline a ‘correct’ or ‘modern’ reading of any of these works. As both Cave and Jauss have made clear, the signification of texts changes over time and as they are exposed to new audiences. Although the theories of pre-history, afterlives and the horizon of expectations will be used as tools in my research, my findings will be based almost entirely on the plays themselves and eighteenth-century texts. Before beginning my analysis of the corpus, however, the criteria against which these were chosen must now be outlined. The next chapter will outline how I defined my corpus, as well as the statistical data that will provide the basis for all subsequent case studies.

\textsuperscript{65} See Chapter 1, ‘Introduction’.
3: DEFINING THE CORPUS:

PERFORMANCE, STATISTICS AND POLITICAL APPROPRIATION

It is striking that in the theatre of the French Revolution, the likes of Molière, Voltaire, Regnard, Destouches, Marivaux and Rousseau all number amongst the fifty most performed playwrights; perhaps even more surprisingly, many of the most popular works from 1789 to 1799 pre-dated the Revolution by several decades: for example, of the seven most popular plays, only two (Desforges’s *Le Sourd ou L’Auberge Pleine*, 1790, and Arnould’s *La Forêt Noire*, 1791) date from the Revolutionary period (see appendix). Moreover, each of the other five works was written in or before 1775, placing them at a considerable distance from the Revolution in terms of culture, society and politics. The dominance of *ancien régime* compositions in the Revolutionary repertoire indicates that theatrical appropriation was not only present in Paris at this time, but that it was surprisingly common. A selection of *ancien régime* dramas which were performed during the Revolution will be chosen and identified in this chapter as case studies.

All plays included in my corpus must satisfy one of two criteria. The first is statistical, based on a comparison of a play’s pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary performance figures. If a work’s increase in popularity from 1789 onwards is particularly marked, and is so great that it cannot be attributed to the increase in theatres operating in Paris, then it is probable that its newfound success is bound to the Revolution and is thus the result of appropriation. Rather than rely solely on statistical significance, however, I shall also consider plays when there is evidence that they became politically or culturally prominent from 1789-99. Thus, if a play from the *ancien régime* was mentioned in political discourse, was heavily censored or even

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rewritten during the Revolution, it will be deemed suitable for inclusion in my corpus. The use of two criteria - the one statistical, the other cultural - ensures that I will be able to investigate different types of appropriation. Instead of restricting myself to the most popular plays of the Revolution (primarily comedies), or those which were used as political propaganda (such as Lemierre’s *Guillaume Tell*), I shall analyse both and be in a position to compare my findings.

In terms of ensuring that the works selected for my corpus were decisively appropriated during the Revolution, only plays that were written prior to 1770 will be considered. The performance statistics for any compositions written after this date will not span a sufficient length of time for me to be absolutely certain that their Revolutionary popularity was due to the changed political environment; the performance figures available for earlier plays will, however, reveal a long-term pattern which will enable me to determine whether their popularity during the Revolution is in contrast to (or in keeping with) their earlier fortunes. Whilst such an approach does eliminate some *ancien régime* works which became Revolutionary sensations, such as Beaumarchais’s *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775) with its 313 performances from 1789 to 1799, I have chosen instead to focus on the appropriation of earlier works which had demonstrably fallen from prominence to return dramatically to popularity in the course of the Revolution.

Furthermore, I have decided to focus my research on those plays that were performed at the Comédie Française prior to 1789. My consideration of the term 'appropriation' has shown that it was used primarily to refer to works of tragedy and comedy of the kind that were performed at the Comédie Française.\(^2\) Whilst this does not mean that opera, farce and other theatrical genres did not have an influence on the Revolution, concentrating my attention on comedies and tragedies will enable me to

\(^2\) See Chapter 2, 'The Theory and Methodology of French Revolutionary Theatre'.
focus on the political ramifications of classical theatrical genres. On a practical level, concentrating on the Comédie Française also facilitates the process of collecting pre-Revolutionary statistical data and ensuring its accuracy. Meanwhile, all Revolutionary figures presented in this chapter relate to Parisian theatres. Whilst reviews or general accounts of provincial performances will be considered when they demonstrate evidence of appropriation, no provincial performances will be included in my compilation of performance figures. This ensures that the pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary performance statistics presented in this chapter are comparable.

*Performance Statistics: Sources*

My starting point for identifying those dramas which enjoyed a particular level of popularity during the Revolution was *Theatre, Opera, and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris*. This invaluable text not only lists every play which was performed in Paris from 1789-1799, but also offers a compilation of tables presenting the most popular plays (p. 382) and dramatists (p. 383) from this decade. The table of the hundred most frequently staged dramas of the decade was a clear indication of what was successful at this time, whilst the table of the most popular dramatists was similarly useful. This text was therefore the ideal source for selecting a wide range of *ancien régime* works - and playwrights - which were highly popular during the Revolution. Even so, another source will be required for year-by-year Revolutionary performance figures. All statistics in *Theatre, Opera and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris* are based solely upon notices in *Le Journal de Paris* and the *Petites Affiches*; consequently, it is possible that the statistics included in this work are slightly lower than the reality (p. ix). Moreover, it only presents performance figures for the entire decade of the Revolution, whereas I require performance statistics for each year from 1789-1799. *Theatre, Opera and*
Audiences in Revolutionary Paris will, however, provide the foundation for my initial selection of case studies.

For year-by-year statistics, André Tissier has compiled the performance figures for every play performed from 1789-1795 in all Parisian theatres, and divides them politically (according to changes to the government), with the result that there are usually two sets of figures per year. As political context is of extreme importance in analysing the appropriation of ancien régime plays, Tissier's work is ideal for my purposes. Unfortunately, whilst Tissier covers the most eventful years of the Revolution, he does not consider the years 1796-1799, which will force me to draw on two sources for year-by-year statistics. Figures for these years will be taken from the online database, César: calendrier électronique des spectacles sous l’ancien régime et sous la révolution. César lists individual performances for each play, specifying both the theatre and date of the performance. Although it would be possible to use César as my sole source for this data, a comparison of the statistics published by Tissier and César reveals the former to be more detailed and comprehensive. I will therefore make full use of Tissier's highly detailed work for the eventful years of 1789-1795, before turning to César for the final years of the Revolution. Whilst this approach is imperfect, it is the 'pattern' (drops and increases in popularity) that these figures reveal that is important to my research, as this is the information that will guide my understanding of the appropriation of specific plays.

Finally, the Revolutionary performance figures for each play in my corpus must be measured against their pre-Revolutionary statistics to establish the extent to which their popularity increased during the Revolution. Whilst Revolutionary performance

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4 <http://www.cesar.org.uk/cesar2/> [accessed 1 July 2012]  
5 For instance, César lists only 5 performances of Guillaume Tell in 1793 (each one at the Théâtre de la Nation). By contrast, Tissier lists 15 performances, including 4 at the Théâtre de Molière and 5 at the Théâtre Patriotique. <http://www.cesar.org.uk/cesar2/> [accessed 1 July 2012].
figures for many plays will be higher than their pre-Revolutionary statistics owing to the increased number of theatres operating in Paris from 1791 onwards, it is the scale of this increase that is important. There are several possible sources for this statistical data, such as Henry Carrington Lancaster's highly detailed works, spanning the Comédie Française from 1680 to 1774. In this instance, however, the fact that these texts do not present any information pertaining to the fifteen years immediately prior to the Revolution means that a key segment of information is missing. Consequently, Lancaster's work could only be used as a source for my thesis if it was used in conjunction with another collection of performance figures. The online database, César, offers a more comprehensive collection of performance figures, as does Joannidès's Comédie Française de 1680 à 1900. When the figures from these two sources were compared against those presented by Lancaster, there was some discrepancy between César and Lancaster, whereas Lancaster and Joannidès matched exactly. I therefore decided to use Joannidès's Comédie Française de 1680 à 1900 for all pre-Revolutionary performance statistics.

Whereas Joannidès includes performance figures for each year, however, I will group these statistics into decades, and follow each play from its premiere (or from 1680 for older works) through to 1789. Apart from facilitating the process of contrasting pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary performance figures, considering a play's popularity across a decade (rather than a single year) will reveal long-term trends - which is key to establishing the presence of Revolutionary appropriation. The use of ten-year categories will also ensure conformity when it comes to considering the

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8 For example, both Lancaster and Joannidès state that Voltaire's comedy Nanie was performed on 12 occasions in 1749, whilst César only gives details of 1 performance in that year. <http://www.cesar.org.uk/cesar2/> [accessed 29 February 2012].
performance statistics of plays during the ten years of the French Revolution. Joannidès’s pre-Revolutionary statistics will be contrasted against the overall Revolutionary performance figures published in *Theatre, Opera and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris*, with the results of this comparison indicating the presence of Revolutionary appropriation. Year-by-year performance figures for plays during the Revolution will only be compiled for those works that have been chosen for inclusion in my corpus, either due to their statistical significance or due to the evidence of political appropriation.

*Political Appropriation of Plays*

Such are the guidelines shaping my selection of statistically significant case studies. It does not always follow, however, that the most frequently staged *ancien régime* plays of the French Revolution would make the best case studies. Some compositions saw no increase in their performance figures during the Revolution, but were still appropriated by means of censorship, government support and the appearance of new, ‘Revolutionary’ versions penned by modern authors. For example, Molière’s *Le Misanthrope* was barely performed any more during the Revolution than it had been in earlier years, but was nevertheless culturally and politically prominent with its main character, Alceste, being referred to as a Jacobin and sections of the text being rewritten so that they did not contradict, or oppose, the Revolution.⁹ Low Revolutionary performance figures are thus no barrier to a drama being included in my corpus, provided there is evidence to suggest that it became politically, or culturally, prominent from 1789-99.

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⁹ See Chapter 6, ‘Resetting the Clock on *Le Misanthrope* and *Le Dépit amoureux*: Positive and Negative Appropriation’.
There is no one source which I can consult for this information. Instead, this information will be gathered from a selection of contemporary sources, such as journals, correspondence and political documents. References to plays (or their dialogue and characters) in government discourse, as well as state financing or censorship of specific works, are all clear indications of political appropriation. The number of new editions which were published of ancien régime compositions is also worthy of note when this figure is particularly high, as it indicates Revolutionary interest in the work - interest that might not be obvious from performance figures alone. As an example, Voltaire’s Brutus was printed in five separate editions in 1793, whereas the far more frequently performed Les Folies amoureuses by Regnard was only printed in one individual edition during the Revolution.\(^\text{10}\)

To get as nuanced a view of appropriation as possible, I shall endeavour to obtain a balance between the number of statistically significant and politically appropriated case studies in my corpus. Although the two categories are not mutually exclusive, a consideration of contemporary sources and Revolutionary statistics will show that the most popular plays of the decade were comedies, with tragedies tending more towards political appropriation. I shall thus examine a similar number of tragedies and of comedies, examining not only compositions which were either statistically popular or politically important, but also works which satisfy both categories. This will ensure that I have as broad and representative cross-section of case studies as possible. I shall now begin by presenting the two tragedies that will be used as case studies, before outlining my selection of comedies.

*Voltaire:* Brutus

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\(^{10}\) See Chapter 8, ‘Bibliography’. 
Despite the dominance of comedy at this time, Voltaire (noted for his tragedies) is the sixteenth most popular playwright of the Revolution. Indeed, a number of his plays enjoyed a considerable upswing in fortunes from 1789 onwards, with eight of his dramas being performed at least 50 times or more during the Revolution, as the following table demonstrates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pièce</th>
<th>1721 - 1730</th>
<th>1731</th>
<th>1741</th>
<th>1751</th>
<th>1761</th>
<th>1771</th>
<th>1781 - 1789</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Revolution</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nanine (1749)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>178</td>
<td></td>
<td>192</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brutus (1730)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>107</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mahomet (1742)</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>145</td>
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<td>L’Enfant prodigue (1736)</td>
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<td>59</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>Mérope (1743)</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>192</td>
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<td>58</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Mort de César (1735)</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tancrède (1760)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alzire ou Les Américains (1736)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Evidently, Voltaire's reputation as one of the most popular dramatists of the Revolution was largely dependent on three plays: *Nanine*, *Brutus* and *Mahomet*. *Nanine* and *Mahomet* are less statistically significant than *Brutus* as far as appropriation is concerned, with the performance figures of both plays indicating that they were considerably more successful than *Brutus* prior to 1789. Moreover, *Mahomet* had been steadily gaining in popularity from 1761, meaning that its Revolutionary success cannot conclusively be attributed to appropriation. Of Voltaire's other tragedies, only *La Mort*
de César saw a dramatic increase in popularity from 1789; after being performed sporadically for decades, it was staged more often during the Revolution than it had been across the preceding 54 years. Plays such as Mérope and Tancrède, which saw barely any change in their performance statistics, can immediately be discounted. A small increase in performance figures is insignificant in light of the increased numbers of theatres in Paris, so that these works did not enjoy a real leap in popularity.

Revolutionary journals and police reports identify two of Voltaire's tragedies as being 'patriotic': Brutus and La Mort de César. For instance, La Chronique de Paris uses them as examples of the sort of plays which should be staged in France:

C’est Brutus, ce sont les tragédies du grand Corneille, c’est la Mort de César, c’est Barnevelt, c’est Charles IX, en un mot, qu’il faut mettre devant les yeux des citoyens français.11

The same publication later described them as 'Brutus & [...] la Mort de César, ces immortels ouvrages qu'adopte le génie de la liberté'.12 Both are being directly linked to the Revolutionary cause - with the term 'adopter' indicating the deliberate appropriation of these texts by the forces of 'liberté' (that is, the Revolutionaries). A police report from 1796 underlines their status as 'pro-Revolutionary' tragedies. At a performance of La Mort de César at the Théâtre Feydeau, 'Les traits patriotiques y ont été vivement applaudis', whilst audiences at a staging of Brutus enthusiastically applauded the Marseillaise.13 There is thus strong evidence to suggest that both tragedies were appropriated during the Revolution, with both suitable for further examination.

Nevertheless, the many parallels between these two compositions mean that they are too similar - and too closely connected - for both to be used as case studies in this thesis. Apart from their patriotic reputations, they share a Roman setting - with which

11 La Chronique de Paris, 22 July 1790.
12 La Chronique de Paris, 19 October 1792.
the Revolutionaries were, as Simon Schama has put it, 'obsessed'. Moreover, both tragedies have characters named Brutus. Brutus sees Lucius Junius Brutus defending a newly republican Rome against the schemes of the overthrown monarch, whilst La Mort de César features Marcus Brutus's infamous assassination of Julius Caesar. Brutus was the more popular of the two, in spite of the fact that it was staged with much lower frequency in the decade leading up to the Revolution. It is therefore the most statistically significant; moreover, an examination of La Mort de César would be complicated by the earlier creation of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. Shakespearean tragedies, such as Othello and Macbeth (both written/translated by Ducis) also experienced some Revolutionary popularity. An analysis of tragedies translated from, or inspired by, famous foreign plays lies beyond the scope of my thesis, but would make a rich topic for future research. Brutus will therefore be my first case study. The contrast between its Revolutionary and pre-Revolutionary fortunes, as well as its role as a 'patriotic' tragedy during the Revolution, make it ripe for analysis.

Lemierre's Guillaume Tell

In considering the Revolutionary reception of Voltaire’s works, it becomes apparent that another playwright's work was frequently associated with Brutus. Lemierre's tragedy Guillaume Tell was funded and promoted by the government along with Voltaire's Brutus and Chénier's modern tragedy, Caïus Gracchus. In the instance of Guillaume Tell, the association extends beyond the tragedies themselves to the historical figures celebrated in these dramas. Tell and Brutus were a strong presence at the Fête de la Liberté on 17 April 1792. Even before Louis XVI's execution, these

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15 See Chapter 4, 'Revolutionary Brutus: Royalist, Republican, Reject'.
16 For example, lines from Macbeth promoting the ruthless punishment of criminals were particularly popular: 'Au théâtre de la République, dans Macbeth, on applaudit ces deux vers: "Point de grâce aux méchants, point de grâce aux perfides, / Jamais aux assassins, jamais aux parricides."' See: 'Rapport du bureau central, 25 October 1796'. [http://www.cesar.org.uk/cesar2/][1] [accessed 6 April 2012].
17 See Chapter 4, 'Revolutionary Brutus: Royalist, Revolutionary, Reject'.
violent opponents of monarchical rule were being celebrated together: a sign of what was to come. The image of Brutus adorned one side of the chariot, whilst William Tell was depicted on the other.\textsuperscript{18} There is consequently the suggestion of a partnership - of their status as dual exemplars for the Revolution, working side-by-side in the name of Liberté. The characters also gave their names to the Section de Brutus and the Section de Guillaume Tell (see figure 4).

Amongst Lemierre's works, \textit{Guillaume Tell} is the most suitable for further investigation. Whilst \textit{Barneveld} may have been identified by journals as being 'patriotic', it was only performed for the first time during the Revolution, so it is necessarily impossible to compare its pre-Revolutionary performances with those of 1789-99. Meanwhile, though none of Lemierre's plays can boast performance figures to rival the most popular of Voltaire's tragedies during the Revolution, the contrast between the number of \textit{Guillaume Tell}'s Revolutionary and pre-Revolutionary performances makes it statistically relevant. Most importantly, Tell's role as Brutus's fellow Revolutionary spokesperson indicates a link between appropriated dramas. Although \textit{Guillaume Tell} was not Lemierre's most popular play during the Revolution, it was the only one to experience a marked increase in performances, as the following table of Lemierre's most frequently performed works from 1789-99 demonstrates:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Lemierre, Antoine-M.} & \textbf{1750s} & \textbf{1760s} & \textbf{1770s} & \textbf{1780-88} & \textbf{Total} & \textbf{Revolution} \\
\hline
\textit{La Veuve du Malabar, ou L'Empire des Coutumes} (1770) & & & 6 & 80 & 86 & 59 \\
\hline
\textit{Guillaume Tell} (1766) & & 11 & - & 6 & 17 & 50 \\
\hline
\textit{Hypermnestre} (1758) & 26 & 35 & 41 & 33 & 135 & 27 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

Guillaume Tell's success evidently failed to be replicated by Lemierre's other works, indicating that it was something specific to that tragedy which appealed to Revolutionary audiences. Moreover, Guillaume Tell provides convincing evidence that political support did not necessarily translate into general popularity, presenting a counterpoint to Brutus's considerably greater visibility upon the stage. Another point of interest is that unlike many popular tragedies of the Revolution, Guillaume Tell is not set in Rome, but in Switzerland. It therefore has a very different cultural setting, and is separate from the Revolutionaries’ fixation with antiquity and Republican Rome. Its Swiss origins, or character, may have an impact upon its appropriation and popularity, given that the Swiss nation could lay claim to Tell - a figure less distantly removed (temporally) from the French Revolution. Guillaume Tell thus offers a different perspective to Voltaire’s Brutus and the various tragedies inspired by antiquity, such as La Mort de César.

Furthermore, beyond the association between the works of Voltaire and Lemierre (and between Tell and Brutus), an examination of Lemierre's tragedy is necessitated by the fact that Lemierre was alive to see the appropriation of his plays by the Revolution. He even commented upon it, lamenting that Guillaume Tell ‘est une des principales causes de la Révolution’. Unlike Voltaire - and many of the authors of works which significantly pre-dated the Revolution - Lemierre was in a position to witness the transformation of his work. This raises questions of whether a playwright would promote such appropriation, or fight it. New editions emerged of Guillaume Tell during the Revolution, but Lemierre also declared in 1793 that ‘Je me repentirai toute ma vie d’avoir fait Guillaume Tell.’

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20 See Chapter 5 'Guillaume Tell: From Laughing Stock to National Hero'.
Molière’s Comedies

Having selected two tragedies for further investigation, I shall now turn my attention to comedy. When considering the most popular comedies of the Revolution, it is impossible to overlook the extraordinary success enjoyed by Molière at this time. Not only do his plays *L’Ecole des maris*, *Le Dépit amoureux* and *Le Médecin malgré lui* all feature amongst the 50 most frequently staged works of the period, but Molière was ranked as the second most-performed dramatist of the Revolution. The most performed playwright of the decade, Alexandre Beaunoir, is not suitable for study in this thesis as I have drawn a line at 1770 and his works date primarily from the 1770s and 1780s. Consequently, Molière is the most performed playwright who is suitable for inclusion in this thesis. His success from 1789-99 cannot, however, be regarded as the simple dominance of a famous playwright over the theatrical repertoire, as the works of other respected writers (such as Racine and Corneille) do not even feature in the list of the most performed plays (p. 382). Moreover, Molière's prominence on the Revolutionary stage is not due to the high number of plays which can be attributed to him: of the 1,864 performances of his works (p. 383), over half are due to the remarkable success of only a handful of comedies, as the table below demonstrates:

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21 *Theatre, Opera, and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris*, p. 383.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>1680-1690</th>
<th>1691</th>
<th>1701</th>
<th>1711</th>
<th>1721</th>
<th>1731</th>
<th>1741</th>
<th>1751</th>
<th>1761</th>
<th>1771</th>
<th>1781-1789</th>
<th>Ancien Régime Total</th>
<th>1789-1799</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L’Ecole des maris (1661)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Dépit amoureux (1656)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Médecin malgré lui (1666)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>871</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tartuffe (1667)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les Fourberies de Scapin (1671)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’Avare (1668)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les Précieuses ridicules (1659)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’Ecole des femmes (1662)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Misanthrope (1666)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Dandin ou Le Mari confondu (1668)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>626</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What stands out from the above table is that there is no correlation between a play's pre-Revolutionary popularity and its success during the Revolution. Throughout the eighteenth century, *Le Dépit amoureux* had been performed far less frequently than comedies such as *L'Ecole des femmes* and *Tartuffe*; during the Revolution, however, *Le Dépit amoureux* was staged twice as often as *Tartuffe*, and four times more than *L'Ecole des femmes*. Indeed, *L'Ecole des femmes* - like *George Dandin* - saw only a very slight increase in performance figures, whereas comedies such as *Le Médecin malgré lui* and *L'Ecole des maris* saw their performances quadruple. This conclusively rules out the possibility that Molière's repertoire simply received a general boost during the Revolution. Instead, formerly neglected comedies found new favour, whilst the performance figures of many of his most successful works remained relatively untouched. As such, Molière's repertoire can seemingly be divided into two categories: those that found huge Revolutionary popularity (*Le Dépit amoureux*, *L'Ecole des maris*) and those which did not (*L'Ecole des femmes*).

And yet such a division is complicated by the fact that many of Molière's comedies were banned during the Revolution. In 1794, the *Département de l’Instruction Public* was entrusted with the task of monitoring the repertoires of Parisian theatres and banned ‘presque toutes les comédies de Molière’.¹ This is an extraordinary level of censure when it is considered that they only forbade the performance of 27 other plays in total.² In this sense, Molière was the subject of both appropriation and anti-appropriation - that is, the removal of his comedies from the stage indicated an attempt to separate his works from the Revolution. Moreover, both *Tartuffe* and *Le Misanthrope* were heavily censored, with sections of text being removed or altered so as not to contradict the Revolutionary ethos (see chapter 6). Consequently, though their

² See Chapter 6, ‘Resetting the Clock on *Le Misanthrope* and *Le Dépit amoureux*: Positive and Negative Appropriation’.

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respective increases in performance figures are not as great as those experienced by comedies such as *Le Dépit amoureux*, they were nevertheless appropriated. That is, they were actively altered in order to conform to the expectations of the Revolutionary stage. Their appropriation may not have extended to granting them the popularity of *L'Ecole des maris*, but it was nonetheless present.

The appropriation of Molière's repertoire during the Revolution is thus both complex and problematic. Some of his works are extraordinarily successful, whilst others are either banned or censored; previously popular comedies are left untouched, whilst more obscure dramas such as *Le Dépit amoureux* are suddenly amongst the most performed plays of the Revolution. In order to address this issue, I shall consider two of Molière's comedies: one which became highly popular from 1789-99, and one which was either banned or censored. This will enable me to compare and contrast their differing fortunes so as to establish the different modes of appropriation that operated upon Molière's comedies.

Although *L'Ecole des maris* was Molière’s most frequently staged play from 1789-99, it is *Le Dépit amoureux* (which was far less popular before the Revolution) which saw the more statistically significant increase in popularity, and will thus be included in my corpus. As a counterpoint, both *Le Misanthrope* and *Tartuffe* failed to see a rise in their performance figures that was on a comparable scale, but were subjected to numerous, Revolutionary, alterations (see chapter 6). Given that *Le Tartuffe*'s Revolutionary career has already been considered in considerable depth in modern scholarship, it is not suitable for further investigation in this thesis. Instead, I will contribute to knowledge on this subject by examining the appropriation of *Le Misanthrope*. Whilst it may lack the high performance figures of *Le Dépit amoureux*, the Revolutionary characterisation of Alceste as a Jacobin and the publication of ‘new’

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versions of the work from 1789-99 indicate a political interest in the comedy. I shall thus be able to directly compare two very different plays, with each work satisfying one of the criteria for inclusion in my corpus.

The Most Popular Plays and Playwrights of the Revolution: Regnard

Molière was not the only ancien régime playwright to enjoy marked success during the Revolution, with four other names pre-dating 1770 numbering amongst the fifty most popular playwrights of the decade: Regnard, Destouches, Marivaux and Rousseau. Not all of Marivaux’s and Rousseau’s works were performed at the Comédie-Française during the pre-Revolutionary period, meaning that only a portion of their Revolutionary repertoire is suitable for my investigations. The performance figures for their most popular compositions from 1789-1799 (being staged a minimum of 50 times) are presented below, along with those of Regnard and Destouches:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dramatist</th>
<th>Play</th>
<th>1690-1699</th>
<th>1700</th>
<th>1710</th>
<th>1720</th>
<th>1730</th>
<th>1740</th>
<th>1750</th>
<th>1760</th>
<th>1770</th>
<th>1780-1789</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Revolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean-F. Regnard</td>
<td><em>Les Folies Amoureuses</em> (1704)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>280</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Le Légataire Universel</em> (1708)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Le Distrait</em> (1697)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Le Joueur</em> (1696)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippe-Néricault Destouches</td>
<td><em>La Fausse Agnès, ou Le Poète Campagnard</em> (1736/1759)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Le Glorieux</em> (1732)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Le Dissipateur, ou l'Honnête Fripone</em> (1736/1753)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre-C. Marivaux</td>
<td><em>Le Legs</em> (1736)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Jacques Rousseau</td>
<td><em>Pygmalion</em> (1770)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The very high performance figures of works such as *Les Folies amoureuses* and *La Fausse Agnès* indicate that they figured amongst the most popular individual plays of the Revolution. Others, however, enjoyed a more modest success, and are easily eclipsed by the most frequently performed dramas from 1789-99, as demonstrated by the performance figures of ancien régime dramas which were staged on at least 100 occasions during the Revolution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dramatist</th>
<th>Pièce</th>
<th>1730</th>
<th>1740</th>
<th>1750</th>
<th>1760</th>
<th>1770</th>
<th>1780-1789</th>
<th>Revolution (1789-99)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barthe, Nicolas T.</td>
<td><em>Les Fausses infidélités</em> (1768)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boursault, Edmonde.</td>
<td><em>Le Mercure galant, ou la comédie sans titre</em> (1679)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brueys, David-A. de,</td>
<td><em>L’Avocat Patelin</em> (1715)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collé, Charles</td>
<td><em>Dupuis et desronais</em> (1763)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancourt, Florent C</td>
<td><em>Le Mari retrouvé</em> (1698)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diderot, Denis</td>
<td><em>Le Père de famille</em> (1760)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fagan, Barthelemy C.</td>
<td><em>La Pupille</em> (1734)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guyot de Merville, Michel</td>
<td><em>Le Consentement forcé</em> (1738)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hauteroche, Noel de.</td>
<td><em>Crispin Médecin</em> (1673)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piron, Alexis</td>
<td><em>La Métromanie, ou Le poète</em> (1738)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisson, Philippe.</td>
<td><em>L’Impromptu de campagne</em> (1733)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riviere-Dufresny, Charles</td>
<td><em>L’Esprit de contradiction</em> (1700)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is noteworthy that with the exception of Molière, Voltaire and Destouches, no playwright had two compositions pre-dating 1770 which were performed at least 100 times during the Revolution. This suggests that appropriation affected particular works, rather than the overall repertoire of a playwright - that is, appropriation was determined by something specific to a play. Moreover, the dominance of comedy is impossible to ignore: with the exception of Rousseau's *Pygmalion* (an opera), every single composition is a comedy. Only Voltaire's tragedy *Brutus* could rival the popularity of comedies in terms of appropriation, and even then, its 107 performances are easily overshadowed by those of comedies such as *Les Folies amoureuses* (280) and *La Fausse Agnès* (240).

In a further indication that a play's content was more important than the fame or reputation of its playwright, the works of Corneille and Racine could not replicate the success of these comedies. Although their plays were staged with relative frequency from 1789 to 1799, no individual composition was distinguished during the Revolution by an increased level of performances: Corneille’s most popular work was *Le Cid* (49 performances), whilst Racine’s comedy *Les Plaideurs* fared slightly better, at 73 performances. Yet both plays had been staged on a greater number of occasions in earlier decades, as demonstrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Playwright</th>
<th>Pièce</th>
<th>1701-1710</th>
<th>1711</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>31</th>
<th>41</th>
<th>51</th>
<th>61</th>
<th>71</th>
<th>1781-1789</th>
<th>Revolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corneille, Pierre</td>
<td><em>Le Cid</em> (1637)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racine, Jean</td>
<td><em>Les Plaideurs</em> (1668)</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it is my aim to give a representative sample of theatrical appropriation, with an equal emphasis on both those works that saw a sharp increase in performance figures and those which show evidence of political appropriation, my last case study will be a play
which saw a statistically significant increase in performance statistics from 1789-99: with compositions such as Guillaume Tell and Le Misanthrope (with their relatively low performance figures) already included in my corpus, my final case study will redress the balance.

Consequently, works such as Marivaux's Le Legs and Piron's La Métromanie simply did not see a sufficiently dramatic increase in performances. Rousseau's Pygmalion is also unsuitable, for whilst it was indeed performed at the Comédie-Française, the fact that it is an opera means that it does not satisfy my selection criteria. Guyot de Merville's Le Consentement forcé and Barthe's Les Fausses infidélités both achieved a remarkably high level of success during the Revolution that was at odds with their former, dwindling visibility. However, these comedies - and their authors - are so obscure that only a very small amount of material is available for investigation. The challenge of analysing these comedies, with little or no other material to guide that analysis, is possibly insurmountable, and thus these two works must be discounted from my corpus.

The most successful remaining comedies are Diderot's Le Père de famille, Destouches's La Fausse Agnès and Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses. With the performance figures of the latter two comedies being considerably higher than those of Diderot's Le Père de famille (whose popularity had actually been slowly increasing even prior to the Revolution), Regnard’s Les Folies amoureuses and Destouches’s La Fausse Agnès are the most suitable case studies. Both compositions surpassed other works by their respective playwrights which had formerly been more successful, and were performed at least twice as frequently as any other comedy by the same dramatist. This success came in spite of indications that neither Regnard nor Destouches were free from controversy.
Destouches’s *Le Glorieux* and *Le Dissipateur* were actually banned by the *commission de l'instruction public* in 1794. Regnard was even criticised for damaging the art of comedy: in 1797, it was argued that he had diverted the French theatre from its true path: ‘Regnard a fait un grand tort à l’Art dramatique en detournant la Comédie de son but moral, qui est, aux yeux du Philosophe, son apanage le plus beau.’ The same journal also criticised his entire repertoire, stating that ‘les pièces de Regnard sont une école dangereuse pour nos jeunes Ecrivains dramatiques’ (pp. 346-7). At the opposing end of the scale, Destouches was treated as one of the ‘greats’ of literature in 1798, on a par with Corneille and Racine, and his work was even cited as an example of why censorship should not be permitted in the theatre:

Au milieu d’une Nation libre les Comédiens seroient-ils donc les seuls esclaves, et leur Répertoire soumis dans la République à une Inquisition mille fois plus odieuse que celle qu’exerçoit sur eux la Police du tems de la monarchie? Sous le vain pretexte de former l’esprit public, faudra-t-il soumettre Corneille, Racine, Molière, Destouches et Crabillon à la minutieuse censure d’un Commis subalterne, qui mutilera leurs chef-d’œuvres au gré de son ignorant caprice?

Regnard is not included in this list of esteemed playwrights - and yet, in spite of criticism of his work, his comedy *Les Folies amoureuses* was performed more frequently than any works by Corneille, Racine or Destouches, and only marginally less so than Molière's most popular works. *Les Folies amoureuses* is also distinct from plays such as *Brutus, Guillaume Tell* and *Le Dépit amoureux* in that it had maintained a steady level of popularity for almost a century before its Revolutionary appropriation. This is not, therefore, a case of new-found success, but rather of significantly increased success. The implication is that appropriation was not restricted to obscure dramas, or those which had only enjoyed brief popularity prior to 1789; instead, it could extend to those which had been highly

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visible on the French stage for many decades. Few plays which had been performed with sustained frequency in the years before the Revolution have been suitable for further investigation, as the increase in performance figures is rarely sufficiently high to conclusively indicate the presence of appropriation. *Les Folies amoureuses* will thus be my last case study: as an example of a work which was successful prior to the Revolution, it will offer a new perspective on appropriation. Moreover, it is intriguing that *Les Folies amoureuses* was one of the most popular comedies of the Revolution when Regnard not only failed to receive the praise bestowed on dramatists such as Molière, but was also criticised for his style of theatre.

Meanwhile, although Destouches’s *La Fausse Agnès* saw a statistically significant increase in performance figures and could have been a rich, rewarding case study, I shall not examine it in this thesis. The similarities between *La Fausse Agnès* and *Les Folies amoureuses* suggest that including Destouches’s comedy in my corpus would not have provided much new material. Both are three-act comedies revolving around a central female character who excels at role play. Just as Agathe in *Les Folies amoureuses* feigns madness to escape her intended (and hated) groom, so too does Angélique in *La Fausse Agnès*; both women also resent their removal from the wider world, with Agathe the ‘prisoner’ of her tutor, and Angélique consigned to the provinces from Paris. Both comedies also contain references to despotism, which may potentially have been a source of interest to Revolutionary audiences. Due to the higher performance figures of *Les Folies amoureuses*, however, it is Regnard’s comedy which will be investigated.

4 Angélique in *La Fausse Agnès* states: ‘je vois qu’il est de ceux que l’on gouverne despotiquement, pourvu qu’on ait l’art de leur faire croire qu’ils ne sont pas gouvernés’ (I. 3). See Néricault Destouches, ‘La Fausse Agnès ou Le Poete campagnard’, in *Oeuvres de Monsieur Destouches, de l’Académie Française* (Amsterdam and Leipzig: Arkstée et Merkus, 1772), VII, pp. 21-133. For examples of such language in *Les Folies amoureuses*, see Chapter 7, ‘Cross-dressing, Role Play, Knights Errant and Tyrants: Overthrowing the Stereotypes of Power in Regnard’s *Les Folies amoureuses*’.
As with Voltaire's and Lemierre's tragedies, the comedies of Molière and Regnard present quite a contrast: whereas Molière's oeuvre as a whole experienced a general boost in popularity, it was only Regnard's *Les Folies amoureuses* which saw a dramatic increase in performance figures. And yet their Revolutionary careers are linked. *La Vedette, ou journal du departement du Doubs*, reviews performances of both comedies by their regional troupe. *Le Dépit amoureux* was performed alongside *Brutus* on 20 January 1793, whilst *Les Folies amoureuses* accompanied a performance of *La Mort de César* on 3 February 1793.\(^5\) Both comedies were therefore selected for performances of Voltaire's most 'Revolutionary' tragedies around the time of Louis XVI's execution (21 January 1793). Moreover, both performances were characterised as overtly patriotic, with the review of *La Mort de César* and *Les Folies amoureuses* appearing under the heading 'spectacle patriotique'. Praise is then heaped upon the actors involved, as the journal states that 'nous avons dit que leur spectacle seroit très utile pour former l'esprit public, et ils vérifient notre assertion'.\(^6\)

The use of the phrase ‘former l’esprit public’ in so many of the texts referencing the plays and playwrights of the *ancien régime* suggests that appropriation may be inherently linked to propaganda, or influencing spectators to behave in a specific way. The application of this phrase to *Les Folies amoureuses* (as well as the works of Destouches)\(^7\) indicates that even comedies with no obvious link to contemporary events were expected to support the Revolution’s progress by positively influencing spectators. Thus, while plays such as *Le Dépit amoureux* and *Les Folies amoureuses* may not have been funded by the government like *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell*, they were nevertheless connected to the Revolution. This connection may not have been as obvious, and it may

\(^5\) See *La Vedette, ou journal du departement du Doubs*, no. XXV, 22 January 1793; no. XXVIII, 8 February 1793.
\(^6\) See also Chapter 4, 'Revolutionary *Brutus*: Royalist, Republican, Reject'; Chapter 7, 'Cross-dressing, Role Play, Knights Errant and Tyrants: Overthrowing the Stereotypes of Power in Regnard's *Les Folies amoureuses*'.
\(^7\) *Le Censeur dramatique*, 1798, III, p. 13.
have been of a somewhat different nature, but it was present. The politics of the French Revolution were impossible to avoid.

*Performance Statistics from 1789-1799*

The close connection between each play in my corpus and the Revolution means that performance figures from 1789-99 become an essential resource. They give a valuable indication of a play’s changing fortunes across this decade, with their increases and decreases in popularity suggesting more than a mere rise or fall in favour. The French Revolutionary stage was so politicised that the very moments at which a play became most (or least) popular have political relevance. I have collected the performance statistics for each work in my corpus; for the particularly significant and eventful years of Jacobin dominance and of the Terror, I have retained the year divides used by Tissier so that I can analyse each play in its proper political context.8

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8 The division in 1792 marks the abolition of royalty (up to 20 September); the divisions in 1793 and 1794 mark the beginning and end of the Terror (2 June 1793 to 27 July 1794). See Tissier, I, p. 20; II, p. 11.
### a) 1789-1795

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### b) 1795-1799

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<td>Regnard</td>
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* Performance figures only relate to the year 1795 up until 24 October 1795.
It is revealing that each play in my corpus was present on the stage for the vast majority of the Revolution’s duration, but that not one was able to attain a consistent level of popularity. Some peaked in the early years of the Revolution (Voltaire’s Brutus, Regnard’s Les Folies amoureuses) whilst others flourished under the Terror (Lemierre’s Guillaume Tell, Molière's Le Dépit amoureux). The significance of these statistics will be analysed in subsequent chapters when each play will be analysed in depth. Crucially, the dramas in my corpus present contrasting patterns of performance, and thus of appropriation.

The Corpus

I have therefore selected five plays for further analysis. These dramas dominated French theatrical life in Paris: from the government-funded performances of Brutus to the censorship of Le Misanthrope, they were each tied to the Revolutionary cause and were affected accordingly. It is remarkable that these plays should all have been appropriated by the theatre of the French Revolution, as they seemingly have little in common. The tragedies of Brutus and Guillaume Tell, with their republican heroes, provide a sharp contrast to the convoluted action and comedy of Les Folies amoureuses and Le Dépit amoureux. And not only did they all (with the exception of Le Misanthrope) reach new levels of popularity during the Revolution, but they also achieved this popularity in the face of their former obscurity (Guillaume Tell) or limited presence on the stage (Le Dépit amoureux). They are a disparate collection of plays, bearing little resemblance to each other, but they nonetheless found themselves connected to the Revolution.

Scholars such as Tissier have argued that it was ‘facile à une époque où l’on voyait presque partout des rapprochements, de ramener l’ancien à des préoccupations actuelles’ (p. 31, II). The implication is that the power of appropriation is so great that

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10 See also Chapter 1, 'Introduction'.
the object is unimportant; this was clearly not the case. The inclusion of ancien régime plays in the theatrical repertoire at this time was not due to chance - as individual theatres were at pains to emphasise:

Sans doute, il nous arrivera de nous tromper quelquefois, et parmi les anciens Ouvrages dont nous proposons de faire un choix, il s’en pourra [sic] trouver quelques-uns sur lesquels nous avons mal pressenti le goût du Public; mais c’est toujours son bien que nous étalons sous ses yeux, et notre zèle et nos efforts pour le servir à son gré.11

In other words, considerable care was taken to ensure that what was put on stage was 'appropriate' and suitable for a Revolutionary audience. As is demonstrated from the dominance of the plays within my corpus over other works which were better known, or by the same playwright, or on a similar topic, their appropriation was not an accident. For some reason, these tragedies and comedies were particularly suitable for appropriation.

Their claim to Revolutionary interest is not immediately obvious: they are the creations of playwrights of varying success, range from five-act tragedies to three-act comedies, and all enjoyed different levels of success both before, and during, the Revolution. It is therefore within the plays themselves, within their text, that their appeal and importance must lie. And it is to these individual works that I shall now turn my attention. Five plays attained their apogee in terms of popularity during a period far removed from their own in both time and politics; five plays were performed in almost every year of the Revolution, despite the enormous changes wrought on their environment. How did rarely performed works come to the attention of the Revolutionary audience? Is there a common denominator that binds these plays? Why were the formerly less popular plays of dramatists such as Molière chosen above their most famous? Did the appropriation of comedies differ from the appropriation of tragedies? Finally, why was the theatrical repertoire of this era so completely and utterly

11 Répertoire de l’Odeon. Feuille Périodique, 26 May 1797.
transformed? To answer these questions, I shall now turn to Voltaire's *Brutus* as my first case study.
The French Revolution transformed the figure of Lucius Junius Brutus into a national exemplar. A founder of Republican Rome, he was an obvious source of inspiration for the Revolutionaries. The name Brutus even became a byword for the Revolution, to the point of becoming the most popular forename in Paris in the year 1793.\(^2\) The effect of Brutus’s status would extend to literature and the arts, and in particular to the theatre of the Revolution. In 1794, he was featured in two new tragedies, *Le Brutus français, ou le père républicain*, and *Tarquin, ou la royauté abolie*.\(^3\) By far the most popular play, however, was Voltaire’s *Brutus* (1730), which details Brutus’s decision to execute his two sons for betraying the Republic by supporting the exiled king, Tarquin.\(^4\) In spite of the fact that it had failed to achieve any lasting success in the decades prior to the Revolution, it easily eclipsed its modern rivals, becoming one of the most frequently performed tragedies of the Revolutionary period.\(^5\)

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3. Leblanc de Guillet, *Tarquin, ou la Royauté abolie* (reviewed in *L’Esprit des journaux*, November 1794, XI); Anon, *Le Brutus français, ou le père républicain* (performance listed in *Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel*, 15 April 1794). *Tarquin* was performed on 4 occasions at Le Théâtre de la République in 1794, and *Le Brutus français* was staged 3 times in the same year at the Théâtre des sans-culottes (formerly de Molière). See André Tissier, *Les Spectacles à Paris pendant la Révolution* (Geneva : Droz, 2002). Neither play was published.
5. For other works on this subject, see Herbert; John Renwick, ‘Brutus, tragédie: critical edition: Introduction’, in *Les Œuvres Complètes de Voltaire*, ed. by Ulla Kölöv (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation), V, pp. 5-113; H. J. Lüsebrink, ‘Réécritures et Formes de Réception du Brutus de Voltaire au Dix-Huitième Siècle’, *SPEC* 305 (1992), pp. 1871-74; Antoinette Ehrard and Jean Ehrard, ‘Brutus et les Lecteurs’ in *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 27, no. 85 (1989), 103-113. These have been invaluable sources, although their scope differs considerably from my own, as they focus on either the figure of Brutus or the play’s career in its entirety. An examination of *Brutus* restricted to its revolutionary fortunes has already been conducted, see Kenneth McKee, *Brutus during the French...*
Its newfound success was thus bound to the Revolution and the increased importance of Lucius Junius Brutus. What makes Brutus a particularly intriguing example of Revolutionary appropriation, however, is that this appropriation produced three very different plays. Towards the beginning of the Revolution, Brutus was a moderate piece which encouraged in its audience a deep (and very vocal) love for Louis XVI, with both Revolutionaries and ‘aristocratic’ royalists attempting to lay claim to the work. It then swung to the other end of the political spectrum entirely, and became the representation of the evil of the monarchy, whilst also condoning both violence and regicide. Finally, in its third incarnation, it not only lost its extraordinary popularity, but was accused of being counter-Revolutionary. In the space of only a decade, it experienced three distinct, successive afterlives, taking on a set of meanings that Voltaire could not possibly have anticipated.

In my investigation into Brutus, I shall commence by establishing its pre-Revolutionary fortunes to ascertain whether there were any early ‘signs’ of its Revolutionary career and to demonstrate the contrast between the tragedy’s pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary popularity. I shall then briefly outline the role of Lucius Junius Brutus as a national exemplar in order to gain an insight into the relationship between the play and the historical figure. The rest of this chapter will then be dedicated to tracing Brutus’s three successive afterlives (in chronological order). It seems extraordinary that one play could be linked to such opposing ideas. Brutus must have been susceptible to conflicting interpretations, but how? What was it about the text that made it suitable for different appropriations? Why was it necessary to appropriate and alter Brutus across the years of Revolution? And how did a tragedy from 1730 come to be so closely connected to the events of 1789?

Revolution’, Modern Language Notes, 56, no.2 (1941), 100-106. McKee downplays the tragedy’s revolutionary popularity and importance, arguing that ‘it was constantly associated with circumstances and propaganda which kept it before the public eye and gave it the appearance of success’ (p. 105). I shall argue the exact opposite.
In terms of perception, *Brutus* had been largely absent from the stage prior to the Revolution, with an edition of the text from 1791 declaring confidently that it was ‘de toutes les pièces de l’auteur celle qui eut en France le moins de succès aux représentations; elle ne fut jouée que seize fois’. The reason given for the tragedy’s limited presence on the stage was its supposed ‘Englishness’ – with Voltaire himself conceding that ‘la tragédie de *Brutus* est née en Angleterre’. The political ramifications of this foreign ‘flavour’ caused concern, even outrage. In 1730, it was noted that ‘Voltaire a retiré sa tragédie de *Brutus* des mains des comédiens; il y avait là des traits républicains comme s’il avoit encore été à Londres’. The term *républicain* would appear again in 1731, as an anonymous writer vented his disgust at the play’s suggestion that any power could replace that of a prince; something which would be a violation of ‘les droits de la nature pour faire observer les lois de l’état’ (D410).

Regarding the portrayal of these ideas in the text, the anonymous critic ‘ne comprend pas comment un poète français, au lieu de les rendre odieuses & d’en inspirer de l’horreur, a osé les produire sur la scène embellies des plus belles couleurs’ (p. 80), and declared that it was ‘l’esprit républicain qui y règne’ (p. 81). Once more, the play was linked to England, as the same writer argued that Brutus’s belief that ‘le peuple avait droit de déposséder son roi’ echoed the English attitude: ‘Les Anglais disaient la même

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6 For Terence Cave’s use of this term, see his introduction in *Pré-Histoires: textes troublés au seuil de la modernité* (Geneva: Droz, 1999), pp. 11-19. See also Chapter 2, ‘The Theory and Methodology of Revolutionary Appropriation’.

7 Avertissement’ in *Œuvres Complètes de M. de Voltaire*, by Voltaire (Lyon: delamolliere, 1791).


chose, lorsque par une barbarie, qui fera éternellement l’opprobre de leur nation, ils furent mourir Charles I’ (p. 80).

Such distaste for Brutus – and his actions – was not limited to anonymous, disgruntled individuals. In 1776, it was noted in Chamfort’s *Dictionnaire dramatique* that ‘cet Ouvrage, le fruit d’un pinceau mâle & vigoureux, fut ébauché à Londres, & sembloit fait pour y réussir plutôt qu’à Paris. […] Brutus, qui condamne son fils à la mort, est un tableau plus révoltant pour nous’. The connection between Brutus and regicide was thus forged many decades before the French government would seek to emphasize it for their own purposes, and Louis XVI’s fate had already (unknowingly) been foretold. For the present, however, this aspect of the tragedy was repeatedly associated with England, with a safe distance regularly put in place between the play and France:

On jugea que son Brutus était plutôt propre à être représenté sur le théâtre de Londres que celui de Paris, parce qu’en France un père qui, de sang froid, condamne son fils à la mort, est envisagé comme un barbare, & qu’en Angleterre, un consul qui sacrifie son propre sang à la liberté de sa patrie est regardé comme un dieu. Brutus might be a heroic figure in England, but he was a villain in France. The play’s future Revolutionary (or republican) interpretation may already have been noted by select individuals, but the tragedy’s career was hampered by the negative perception of its hero. But if Voltaire’s tragedy could be weakened, or damaged, from the reputation of its hero, it could also benefit from Brutus’s later fame as a Revolutionary exemplar. It was thus only natural that as Brutus’s fortunes changed, so too would those of Voltaire’s tragedy. Finally, the epic scope and grandeur of Brutus – identified by Grimm in 1763 - would be recognized:

Si la nation avait décerné un monument à la gloire du poète après la première représentation de Brutus, la nation, en honorant la génie, se serait immortalisée; car voilà des ouvrages dont les auteurs méritent des statues.13

His words would come true. With Brutus’s star about to rise, the play’s unfulfilled potential was about to be realised.

The Birth of a National Exemplar

With the outbreak of the Revolution, Brutus became an inescapable presence in Paris, dominating culture and politics – in a very literal sense, ‘la statue de Brutus est dans toutes les rues, son nom dans toutes les bouches’.14 This is hardly surprising, given the Revolution’s obsession with antiquity, with the Gazette Nationale claiming in 1791 that ‘L’histoire moderne n’est que l’histoire ancienne sous d’autres noms’.15 There were obvious parallels between Brutus, who had defended a newly republican Rome against the tyrant Tarquin, and a France which had now overthrown the concentrated power of absolute monarchy.16 The heroic Brutus’s example was therefore pressed upon the Revolutionaries, with the objective of inciting them to republican action – a process which, according to Timothy Hampton, is typically associated with the role of exemplar: ‘Heroism is a rhetoric – a deliberative rhetoric intended to provoke action. The image of the exemplary figure exhorts the reader.’17 A connection was thus forged between those in eighteenth-century Paris and ancient Rome, as the ‘allusion to the virtuous or heroic model sets up an implicit moral comparison between modern reader and ancient examplar’ (p. 3). The heroic Brutus’s example was therefore pressed upon

13 Grimm and Diderot, Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique, ed by Maurice Tourneux (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1882; repr. Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1968), V, p. 257. See also Renwick, p. 89.
15 Gazette Nationale, ou le Moniteur Universel, 16 August 1791.
the Revolutionaries, with the objective of inciting them to republican action. Suddenly, the man whose actions had been deemed ‘révoltant’ in 1776, became a national and Revolutionary exemplar.

Allusions to Brutus were little short of omnipresent. In 1794, an image of Brutus was used to adorn playing cards, with an open scroll proudly displaying the words ‘République Romaine’ in his left hand (see figure 2).18 In the same year, he was not only celebrated in a ‘chanson patriotique’, but was openly described as the model to imitate: ‘En chassant les Tarquins, Brutus ne vit que Rome; / Pour reformer le monde, imitons ce grand homme.’19 Such imitation meant that the divide between Romans and Revolutionaries became somewhat blurred:

The imitation of an examplar involves what hermeneutic theory calls application, the application of a text to action in the world [...] The assumption of application is that past words and deeds embody a value which the modern reader can appropriate to guide practical action.20

This is a pattern than can certainly be seen in the French Revolution, with many Revolutionaries openly basing their actions around Brutus’s deeds.

A particularly striking example of this took place in 1792. As the Jacobins resolved to abolish the French monarchy, they turned to Brutus to remind them of their duty and to guide their hand: ‘regardez Brutus, Messieurs, il vous rappellera sans cesse, que pour être de bons citoyens, vous devez toujours être prêts à sacrifier ce que vous avez de plus cher, même vos enfans, au bien de votre pays’.21 This was seemingly taken literally according to some reports, with a published account appearing in 1794 of a man arriving at the Club des Jacobins with ‘une grande cassette’ that contained the heads of his mother and father, which he had removed and then proceeded to place beneath a

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18 See Herbert, p.106.
19 Chansonnier de la République, pour l’an 3e. Dédié aux amis de la liberté, orne des portraits du Brutus Mutius Scevola, Guillaume Tell et Rousseau, enrichi d’himmes patriotiques chantes aux fêtes nationales avec les aires notés (Bordeaux : Chapuy, 1794), p. 130.
20 Hampton, Writing from History, p. 10.
bust of Brutus. In killing his parents, he was only carrying out his duty, for ‘tout Jacobin
doit se defaire de ses amis, de ses proches parens, s’ils ne pensent pas en Patriotes’.22 In
a very real way, the figure of Brutus helped to ‘guide’ (or justify) Revolutionary
politics, with severe measures being deemed appropriate in the circumstances: ‘Le
temps de la révolution est celui de la justice severe: le fondement des républiques
commence par la vertu inflexible de Brutus’.23

Yet more than simply applying the tale of Brutus to late eighteenth-century
Paris, the Revolutionaries believed that they were each Brutus reincarnate, with a
banner celebrating the overthrow of Louis XVI in a ‘fête commémorative’ proclaiming
that ‘Un autre Tarquin abuse de l’autorité que lui avait laissée le Peuple: de nouveaux
Brutus fondent la République’.24 An increasingly anti-monarchist proportion of the
populace identified themselves with their exemplar: ‘Les propagateurs de la Révolution
du 10 Août se croyaient descendus des anciens Romains; et pour constater leur
affiliation, ils achèterent tous un buste de Brutus.’25 Yet it was not only the rabid
republicans who laid claim to Brutus as exemplar. Even in the early days of the
Revolution, when Louis XVI’s position remained relatively secure, Brutus was a
constant cultural point of reference – with Mirabeau, at a performance of Voltaire’s
Brutus, linked to the Roman hero in 1790: “‘Le peuple français, lui dit quelqu’un,
demande son Brutus’”.26 His presence was not merely one that was imposed upon
Parisians through fétes and political discourse: it could be evoked by individuals, too.
And whilst Lucius Junius Brutus may have been associated with the Revolutionary
cause, his identity was constantly evolving according to his environment and audience –

23 ‘Suite du rapport fait au nom du comité de salut public, dans la séance du 1er août 1793’ in Gazette
Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel, 9 August 1793.
24 Ministère de l’Intérieur, *Recueil des lettres circulaires, instructions, programmes, discours et autres
and this would necessarily affect the appropriation of Voltaire’s tragedy. In November of 1790, the appropriation of Brutus extended from the Roman exemplar to Voltaire’s tragedy, and the play was performed at the Théâtre de la Nation.

_Brutus in November 1790: Royalist_

The play was resurrected by popular demand: the Chronique de Paris referred to it as ‘cette représentation […] si désirée, que nous n’avons cessé de demander’. Le Moniteur also highlighted the pressure put on the Comédie-Française to perform it: ‘On demandait depuis longtemps à MM. les comédiens français la remise de Brutus’. In discussing the reported reluctance of the Comédie to perform the play, the potential anti-royalist interpretation of the piece was highlighted:

> Ils n’ont pas, dit-on, joué Brutus. D’abord, il faut savoir si la pièce, qui n’a pas été jouée depuis long-temps, étoit sue, & encore demander [sic] […] aux véritables amis de la liberté, à ces bons esprits qui sont pénétrés de la reconnaissance qu’ils doivent au plus bienfaisant des monarques, si c’étoit au moment qu’il se déclaroit le chef de la révolution qu’on devoit le mettre en parallèle avec l’odieux Tarquin? 

The connection between Louis XVI and Tarquin - the basis of the tragedy’s interpretation during the Terror - had thus been made some time before such a link would become desirable. For now, any cautionary warning was ignored, and the resurrection of Brutus could not be impeded.

Its return to the stage on 17 November, 1790, was not the performance of a forgotten play, but a political event. And according to Grimm, the tragedy’s reprise caused considerable anxiety:

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27 Chronique de Paris, 18 November 1790.
28 Le Moniteur, 19 November 1790.
29 Anon, Justification des comédiens français (Potier, 1790), pp. 5-6.
Le jour de la première représentation de la reprise de *Brutus* a été encore un grand jour d’angoisse et de sollicitude pour toute la municipalité. On avait triplé, quadruplé la garde ordinaire. Its presence on the stage was closely tied to the Revolution, and the Revolutionaries regarded it as central to their continued success in France. On 16 November, the moderate but pro-Revolutionary *Chronique de Paris* urged its readers to attend the performance, declaring that ‘tous les patriotes doivent s’y rendre pour applaudir au triomphe de la liberté sur l’aristocratie’. It was also essential that the play was understood correctly, and that the audience knew which characters were to be distrusted or admired. To this end, the *Chronique de Paris* published a list of the most inspiring – and most odious – lines of dialogue a week before the work’s ‘premiere’. Judging from contemporary accounts of its performances in November 1790, they did not disappoint.

The ‘premiere’ itself was certainly well attended: ‘jamais assemblée au théâtre n’a été, en France, plus nombreuse ni plus auguste’. The audience was also decidedly passionate: Brutus ‘a été accueilli des patriotes avec ivresse’, many lines of dialogue were applauded enthusiastically, and the first act lasted over an hour since ‘à chaque applaudissement qui n’était pas dans le sens de la Révolution il s’élevait des cris et des hurlements si horribles, que ce n’était qu’après un assez long intervalle que les acteurs pouvaient parvenir à se faire entendre’. Whatever boundary would normally separate a play from its audience disappeared, with the *Chronique de Paris* commenting: ‘Jamais l’illusion n’a été plus complète: les spectateurs étoient autant de Romains; tous

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31 *La Chronique de Paris*, 16 November 1790.
32 *La Chronique de Paris*, 7 November 1790.
33 *Le Moniteur*, 19 November 1790.
34 *Revolutions de Paris*, November 1790.
croient avoir part à l’action’. The same publication gave a ‘key’ to the characters, declaring that Messala was comparable to Charles Alexandre de Calonne, a minister who had retreated into exile in July 1789. The similarities between the play and contemporary Paris were also outlined (more generally) in *Le Journal de Paris*: ‘La représentation de Brutus a été hier très bruyante. Les traits nombreux qui ont un rapport direct à la situation actuelle de la France ont produit sur les esprits des effets très variés’.

More than simply representing France, however, the tragedy was also portrayed as being patriotic - with *La Chronique de Paris* arguing that the success of *Brutus*’s première was proof of the very existence of patriotic drama:

> que l’on ose répéter, comme nous l’avons entendu dire à des hommes publics, qu’il n’y a point de pièces plus patriotiques que les autres. Pour toute réponse nous citerons la représentation de Brutus.

The same journal also stated that such a play - which encouraged ‘le saint amour de la liberté’ - was so important that it deserved to be performed and celebrated beyond Paris:

> Cette représentation est à jamais mémorable. Il faut que Brutus soit représenté dans les provinces, que ce spectacle soit regardé comme une des fêtes de la liberté’. It was a tragedy of national importance, and from the very day of its return to the stage it was associated with encouraging the Revolutionary spirit of its audiences. But, whilst the *Chronique de Paris* presented the composition as being patriotic, other journals considered it more as a weapon against the enemies of the Revolution.

The *Révolutions de Paris*, which was far less moderate in its stance than *La Chronique de Paris*, joked about the work’s effect on the aristocracy, claiming that they could not understand why the work was not suppressed in 1730: ‘*Eh mais! Mon Dieu!*

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37 *La Chronique de Paris*, 18 November 1790. See also Herbert, p. 77.
38 *La Chronique de Paris*, 7 November 1790.
39 *Le Journal de Paris*, 18 November 1790.
40 *La Chronique de Paris*, 18 November 1790.
41 *La Chronique de Paris*, 19 November 1790.
C’est INQUOYABLE, en VERITE, c’est inimazinable … Mais il n’y avoit donc pas de YEUTENANT GENEAL de POICE dans ce temps-là ?

The accuracy of this report is, of course, questionable, as the imitation of an aristocratic accent makes the subjectivity of the author clear, but the appropriation of the play by the Revolutionaries is obvious. Moreover, the reference to the play’s origins in the ancien régime (and the aristocracy’s supposed shock at this) recalls the similarly pro-Revolutionary La Vedette’s glee at surprising aristocratic spectators of La Mort de César by replacing the expected ‘royalist’ speech with a new Revolutionary one.

There was, it appears, a particularly pro-Revolutionary camp that saw the use of ancien régime tragedy as Revolutionary vehicles to be another method of provoking, or doing battle with, more aristocratic audiences. There was no need to write ‘new’ works to support the Revolution; those already available to them would fulfil the same role.

Audience reaction to the play was clearly politically charged: support for Brutus meant being in favour of the Revolution, whilst support for the royalist characters of Arons and Messala implied hostility towards the developments of 1789. And the presence of sympathetic characters amongst both the royalist and republican figures on stage meant that politically-opposed sections of the audience both had cause to applaud the tragedy:

L’oeuvre offrait des allusions de diverses sortes. Non seulement les républicains devaient applaudir aux vers énergiques ou Brutus tonne contre le pouvoir monarchique qu’il a brisé; mais les monarchistes trouvaient, eux aussi, l’occasion de claquer des mains lorsque Arons vante les douceurs de la monarchie absolue et parle avec mépris du peuple et du Sénat.

Moreover, the tragedy makes no mention of Tarquin’s precise crimes: he is not seen on stage, and little detail is given of his actions. It was thus entirely possible for royalists to

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42 Revolutions de Paris, November 1790. All italics in original.
43 See Chapter 1, ‘Introduction’.
support his ‘faction’ within the play – a party which is seeking to return Rome to its previous, royalist, state. It was therefore all the more important for Revolutionaries to dominate the play’s appropriation, and to suppress those whose applause for Arons could be read as demanding the return of the absolute monarchy.

It was with considerable delight that Le Moniteur described the way in which the ‘aristocrats’ were overpowered in the audience:

En vain quelques zélateurs de l’ancien régime ont-ils voulu applaudir les principes de l’ambassadeur Arons et du pérfide Messala; la voix tenante du public, en majorité, a étouffé leurs projets, et, si quelquefois des marques d’approbation ont encore été données à des traits tendant à l’amour du pouvoir absolu, c’a été d’une manière si rare, si faible, qu’elle prouvait la plus entière impuissance.45

The ‘aristocrats’ were ‘réduite forcément au silence pendant plus de deux actes’,46 and attempts by some audience members to support the monarch put them at very real risk.

According to a personal account of the play by the German literary figure Augustus von Kotzebue, one spectator clapped at the line: ‘Rome a changé de fers; et sous le joug des grands, / Pour un roi qu’elle avait, a trouvé cent tyrans’ (I. 4. 273-74).47 In response, the Revolutionaries went wild ‘with menaces, execrations, knocking and stamping [...] Happy was it for him that none of his neighbours betrayed him, since if discovered, he had doubtless expiated his folly’.48 Another visitor to Paris, Gerhard von Halem, described the Revolutionaries’ determination to suppress, or overshadow, royalist support for Arons in the second performance of the tragedy:

A cet endroit des applaudissements s’élevèrent des premières loges et de l’orchestre où j’étais et dont les places valent le même prix que les premières loges. Les révolutionnaires du parquet avaient soigneusement noté les applaudissements, et firent aussitôt un tapage qui interrompit la représentation dix minutes durant.49

45 Le Moniteur, 19 November 1790.
46 Grimm and Diderot, correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique, XVI, p. 116.
47 Augustus von Kotzebue, Sketch of the Life and Literary Career of Augustus von Kotzebue; with the Journal of his Tour to Paris, at the Close of the Year 1790, translated from the German by Anne Plumptre (London: 1800), p. 240. Kotzebue (1761-1819) was a German literary figure.
48 Kotzebue, p.241.
49 von Halem, p. 311.
The struggle between royalists and republicans on stage was thus reproduced in the audience, with the presence of two opposing (yet sympathetic) camps perhaps accounting for Brutus’s extraordinary audience reaction: according to Halem, it was this play which elicited the most vocal, violent reaction in spectators that he had yet seen (p. 308).

Placing Brutus in the context of Revolutionary theatre, Halem argues that it is Voltaire’s tragedy that has caused the greatest sensation: ‘il n’y a pas un passage sur la loi, le roi et les droits du peuple qui ne provoque les applaudissements de l’un ou de l’autre parti [...] mais c’est à la représentation du Brutus que j’ai vu les plus fortes manifestations de cet esprit de liberté qui règne aujourd’hui’ (p. 308). As a (foreign) visitor to Paris, Halem is obviously writing from the perspective of a bystander rather than a participant, but his account is useful as an indication of how the play (and its audiences) appeared to those not immediately involved in the events unfolding in Paris. In spite of the divided - and passionate - audience, it was the Revolutionary interpretation of the tragedy that dominated journals, with pro-Revolutionary newspapers marvelling at Voltaire’s ability to ‘tracer en 1730 des maximes de droit politique avec une énergie digne du 14 juillet 1789’. And the reason this inspiring political masterpiece had been ignored for so long? The very fact of its appropriation in the Revolution was proof of its greatness: ‘nous sommes devenus des hommes, et nous reprenons enfin ce que nous laissions autrefois parce que nous ne savions pas aimer les objets à la hauteur desquels nous n’étions pas encore.’

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50 Révolutions de Paris, November 1790.
51 Le Moniteur, 19 November 1790.
Many lines of the play were singled out by audiences as being particularly important. According to *Le Moniteur*, the spectators at Brutus’s premiere began to applaud ‘dès les premiers vers de la première scène’.\(^5^2\) This would be Brutus’s cry of:

\begin{quote}
Destructeurs des tyrans, vous qui n’avez pour rois  
Que les dieux de Numa, vos vertus et nos lois (I. 3. 1-2)
\end{quote}

The violence inherent in Brutus’ proclamation is evident from the first word. This lexis of violence is also present in the first lines that the *Chronique de Paris* had identified as being worthy of applause a week before the play’s resurrection – lines which are also spoken by Brutus:

\begin{quote}
Sur son autel sacré, Mars, reçois nos sentiments,  
Pour ce sénat, pour moi, pour tes dignes enfants.  
Si dans le sein de Rome il se trouvait un traître,  
Qui regrettât les rois, et qui voulut un maître,  
Que le perfide meure au milieu des tourments:  
Que sa cendre coupable, abandonnée aux vents,  
Ne laisse ici qu’un nom, plus odieux encore  
Que le nom des tyrans, que Rome entière abhorre (I. 2. 165-172)
\end{quote}

This dialogue supposedly offers ‘les patriotes’ the ‘occasion de témoigner leur haine pour les tyrans, en applaudissant les discours énergétiques de Brutus’, which is ‘l’expression de leurs propres sentiments’.\(^5^3\) The speech is characterised by extreme lexis: ‘le perfide’, ‘odieux’, ‘abhorre’. Within the play, such sentiments are directed towards the royalists – those who ‘regrett[èrent] les rois’. After appropriation, however, this outpouring was applied squarely to the aristocrats. In a speech delivered in the theatre before a performance of *Brutus* later that month, they were openly described as ‘ces citoyens malveillans & pervers, connus sous le nom d’aristocrates.’\(^5^4\) Even during the performance of the work, those designated as ‘aristocrats’ were not safe from attack,

\(^{52}\) *Le Moniteur*, 19 November 1790. Their popularity is confirmed by Kotzebue’s account of the play (p. 239).

\(^{53}\) *La Chronique de Paris*, 7 November 1790.

with the parterre at one point crying ‘A bas les aristocrates! A la porte les aristocrates! A la lanterne les aristocrates!’  

Other sections of Brutus which were particularly appreciated were those of a subjugated people rising up to assert their rights: ‘Sous un sceptre de fer, ce peuple abattu, /A force de malheurs, a repris sa vertu’ (I. 2. 157-8). This revolt, or triumph, was legitimate, as ‘Nous avons fait, Arons, en lui rendant hommage, / Serment d’obéissance, et non point d’esclavage’ (Brutus, I. 2. 107-8). These two excerpts ring with the triumph of the everyman casting off his chains, ready to take control of his world. And yet there were limits to this ‘liberation’; the French populace had asserted their rights, but, unlike Brutus, at this early stage of the Revolution, they did not want to overthrow the king. This meant that not all of Brutus’s arguments could be easily appropriated in this highly specific context, and particularly strong denouncements of the king had to be corrected, such as when Brutus declared:

… Je mourrai comme toi,
Vengeur du nom romain, libre encore, et sans roi (IV. 6. 191-92)

This rejection of the king was met by shouts of ‘vive le roi!’ from the audience.  

Moreover, Grimm believed that these two lines constituted ‘le plus grand effet qu’ait produit cette première représentation de Brutus’. Explicitly anti-monarchist sentiments were therefore not desirable at this time, so that even Brutus had to be contradicted. This was not, however, serious enough to separate Brutus from the Revolution.  

Significantly, whilst it was recognised that Brutus’s unseen enemy, Tarquin, had the potential to be compared with Louis XVI, audiences were keen to reject such a standpoint - as Le Moniteur made clear:

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55 All italics in original. Cited in Georges Duval, Souvenirs de la Terreur (Paris: 1844), I, p. 240. According to contemporary dictionaries, this cry of ‘a la lanterne’ was a ‘sorte de supplice que le Peuple, au commencement de la Révolution, fit souffrir à quelques hommes qu'on lui désignoit comme ses ennemis et comme trai tres’. See Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française, 1798.
56 La Chronique de Paris, 18 November 1790.
57 Grimm and Diderot, correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique, XVI, p. 116.
Comme le pouvoir monarchique est quelquefois présenté dans la pièce sous un aspect défavorable à la cause des bons rois, et que le peuple français n’a pas voulu être accusé de confondre Tarquin avec le petit-fils de Henri IV, on a saisi un des vers qui marquent le plus, dans la bouche de Brutus, la haine de la royauté, pour crier: *Vive le roi!*\(^{58}\)

The reference to Henri IV highlights Louis’s legal, legitimate claim to the throne: he is no tyrant, but the rightful king of France and is consequently Tarquin’s polar opposite. Such a pro-monarchist reading of the play was further facilitated by its plot: it is not the king who is executed, but Brutus’s son, Titus – a former hero who would betray the Republic. Death and retribution were thus not associated with the monarchy, but with rebels and traitors. This meant that the audience of 1790 could cheer Brutus’s love of liberty and law but they could not tolerate his anti-monarchical tendencies.

Rather than being perceived as a denouncement of the monarchy, then, the play was about liberty, law and a hatred of tyrants - for a Frenchman ‘aime son prince comme ses lois’.\(^{59}\) Hence only those sections that promoted the absolute power of a dictator were singled out as being worthy of disdain, such as Arons’s argument:

\[
\text{Ah! quand il serait vrai, que l’absolu pouvoir} \\
\text{Eût entrainé Tarquin par-delà son devoir,} \\
\text{Qu’il en eut trop suivi l’amorce enchantée;} \\
\text{Quel homme est sans erreur? et quel roi sans faiblesses?} \\
\text{Est-ce à vous de prétendre au droit de le punir?} \\
\text{Vous nés tous sujets; vous faits pour obéir! (I. 2. 117-122)}
\]

The *Chronique* described these sentiments as ‘condamnables’,\(^{60}\) though they were wildly cheered by audience members in the *loges*.\(^{61}\) It is easy to see why the Revolutionaries would disapprove of these ideas: they promote a blind, hierarchy-based obedience that the Revolution had, for the moment, overturned. The audience could therefore use vocal disapproval to reinforce their expectations and values as regards the progress of the Revolution, and the theatre became a platform for the populace to make

\[^{58}\text{Le Moniteur, 19 November 1790. Italics in original.}\]
\[^{59}\text{Chronique de Paris, 18 November 1790.}\]
\[^{60}\text{Chronique de Paris, 7 November 1790.}\]
\[^{61}\text{Souvenirs de la Terreur, p.240.}\]
their presence felt, whilst silencing their opponents in the audience. Consequently, the now dominant interpretation of the play came from the Revolutionaries in the audience – and not from those who nominally controlled the state.

Indeed, some regarded the theatre as a means to influence those who governed them. Members of the audience demanded that the lines ‘Arrêter un romain sur de simples soupçons, / C’est agir en tyrans, nous qui les punissons’ (IV. 6. 211-2) were repeated ‘pour l’instruction municipale’ – the audience being an ‘excellent professeur et correcteur tout ensemble’. The spectators actively, even creatively, shaped both play and performance, and transformed Voltaire’s tragedy into a faithful portrayal of the Revolution as they perceived it. Brutus was thus not only the target of Revolutionary ardour, but was expected to actively influence the audience – strengthening their resolve, providing an exemplar and, perhaps more importantly, playing the role of educator. Before Brutus’s fourth performance that month, a speech calling for the Comédie-Française to be transformed into the Théâtre de la Nation referred to the stage as the most effective of schools, with Brutus as its most important composition:

Messieurs, qu’on dise maintenant s’il existe dans le monde un spectacle aussi beau, aussi important que celui-ci ? Qu’on dise s’il est à Paris, s’il est en France une école où l’on puisse, comme ici, publiquement & avec le même succès, se pénétrer, se nourrir du feu sacré de la liberté?63

And, of course, Brutus fulfilled the role of teacher, as he gave ‘cette belle & terrible leçon: Que tout doit être subordonné, que tout est soumis au respect & à l’observance des loix’ (p. 7). Strikingly, however, Brutus would not be the school’s only lesson – and the intention of exploiting other dramatic works for their educational value was expressed (p. 7):

Un théâtre qui n’aurait qu’un seul ouvrage, tel que Brutus, aurait sans doute des droits à la protection & à la reconnaissance publiques; & personne d’entre vous, Messieurs, n’ignore que les Comédiens français pourroient en nommer d’autres encore qui depuis quelque temps sont à l’étude.

62 Révolutions de Paris, November 1790.
63 Speech reproduced in Faux Patriotisme de la Chronique de Paris, p. 6.
The appropriation of *Brutus* was only the beginning, and this appropriation would, in theory, extend to other dramas – all for the good of the nation.

Yet whilst the opposition between ‘aristocrat’ and ‘patriot’ was openly acknowledged, the Revolutionaries were also divided. The *Chronique de Paris* criticized the orator of the speech highlighting the play’s educational value as possessing ‘royalisme pur’, and proclaimed that ‘sans doute on doit aimer le roi, parce qu’il est bon & juste, mais non pas pour sa royauté’. 64 The response, a few days later, was an article entitled ‘le faux patriotisme de la Chronique de Paris’. This quarrel amongst *Brutus’s* admirers indicates that there were thus at least three distinct camps in the theatre of November 1790: the outright royalists, the devoted imitators of Brutus, and, finally, those who were more reserved in their approval of the work:

Admirons ces fiers Romains, mais en citoyens qui sentent la force & la dignité du nom francois; comme Brutus, ayons en horreur les tyrans, mais ne le soyons pas nous-mêmes de ceux qui diffèrent d’opinion; ne dégradons pas le caractère majestueux de notre liberté, par des excès indignes d’elle.65

The presence of both royalist (Arons) and republican (Brutus) within the play meant it had the potential to appeal to both parties in the audience; this possibly also enabled it to be appreciated by the more moderate spectator, who would not have supported a composition that was the exclusive mouthpiece of only one party. The play could thus lend itself to varied – and conflicting – interpretations, which would explain the Revolutionaries’ obsession with gaining control of the audience. The battle between Brutus and Tarquin was taking place in the theatre itself, and the stage was the focus for Revolutionary hostility. Once again, the line between audience and performance blurred.

*Guillotine and Regicide: Republican Brutus*

64 *La Chronique de Paris*, 26 November 1790.
65 Speech reproduced in *Faux Patriotisme de la Chronique de Paris*, p. 3.
Brutus’s role as a work promoting the rule of both law and king did not last long beyond
November 1790. Only a few months later, spectator reception of the tragedy had
become far less vocal, indicating that any attempts at giving the play a royalist
interpretation had been abandoned. A clearly pro-Revolutionary spectator described a
more unified, reverent audience for a performance of Brutus in March 1791:

Si les acteurs avoient débité ces trivialités sales & dégoutantes que le peuple
étoit condamné à entendre sous l'ancien régime, de peur que de plus mâles
leçons ne lui donnassent l'énergie qui lui convient, je n'aurais pu cependant y
demeurer un quart d'heure; mais quand j'eus entendu quelques uns des sublimes
vers de Voltaire, cette incantation magique me retint [...] ce qui attira surtout
mon admiration, ce fut le peuple. Il écoutoit avec une attention que rien ne
pouvoit détourner; il saisissait avec un sentiment vraiment remarquable tous
les beaux endroits de la pièce: souvent on voyoit qu'il se privoit d'applaudir
un vers, de peur de perdre celui qui devoit le suivre. Le plus grand silence & la
décence la plus parfaite régnoit dans la salle.66

The Revolutionaries had successfully appropriated the tragedy to their cause; the battle
between Brutus and his royalist foes on stage had been replicated in the audience, and,
like Brutus, they had been victorious. Having suppressed royalist ‘support’ for the work,
perhaps it was inevitable that the play’s interpretation would slowly become more anti-
monarchical. Following Louis’s flight to Varennes in the summer of 1791, a poster was
distributed by the Cordeliers which explicitly compared Tarquin, Brutus’s foe, with
Louis XVI. They cited one of Brutus’ speeches from Act I, Scene 2 (111-14) and
inserted Louis’s name to ensure that the link was not left to chance.67

Not content with this denouncement of the king, however, they added a later
section of dialogue (I. 2. 167-72) and removed any reference to Rome so that Brutus’s
words could be better applied to Paris. The result was a ‘new’ speech which,
nevertheless, exerted the full influence of both play and playwright, with no historical
references to weaken its connection to the French Revolution:

66 La Chronique de Paris, 12 March 1791.
67 See Herbert, p. 81.
Louis XVI was no longer the legal, lawful king of France, but a traitor - and there was no longer any need to ‘correct’ Brutus’s speeches. Now, Brutus was openly condemning not just any king, but specifically France’s king. Brutus’s portrayal of the monarchy had thus changed completely in the space of only a few months. The tragedy was even performed ‘aux deux grands théâtres français’ at the time of his arrest at Varennes, with La Chronique de Paris claiming that ‘les allusions ont été vivement saisies’ at these performances. Whilst no indication is given as to the precise nature of these ‘allusions’, in the circumstances it is highly improbable that they were in support of the king. Brutus’s afterlife as a play promoting the rule of both king and law had lasted less than a year.

By 1792 - the year in which the tragedy was performed most frequently - the composition had become a method of displaying Revolutionary power and dominance:

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69 La Chronique de Paris, 26 June 1791.
‘on a joué Brutus au théâtre de la rue de Richelieu. Les aristocrates, s’il y en avoit, ont dû s’apercevoir que les hommes du 14 juillet sont encore à Paris’. Evoked in conjunction with Voltaire’s La Mort de César, the two tragedies were referred to as ‘ces immortels ouvrages qu’adopte le génie de la liberté’ in October 1792. Yet Brutus’s presence was not limited to the stage; by December of the same year, his name, his reputation and his actions were dominating political discourse. The figures of antiquity had become highly influential as models, with Simon Schama arguing that ‘it was the active citizenship that was believed to have existed in certain periods of antiquity that the Revolutionary generation sought to revive through the power of oratory’. More than simply modelling themselves on these figures, however, some Revolutionaries claimed that they were acting as Brutus’s mouthpiece.

In December 1792, Revolutionaries began to play the role - or act as - Brutus: not only were they doing his work, they were also using his very words:

Français, je jure que c’est Brutus qui parle; je ne suis que son interprète fidèle, écoutez attentivement Brutus. Quoi qu’il n’y ait rien à craindre actuellement pour la liberté, on ne saurait prendre trop de précautions afin de l’assurer.

As an article proposing the exile of the royal family (excepting the king and queen) was discussed, it was Brutus’s example which urged the necessity of such measures.

Demonstrating the power of Brutus’s exemplarity, it was argued that:

Quand on a vous proposé à cette tribune l’exemple de Brutus pour vous déterminer à une grande mesure, on a vous jugés dignes des vertus

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70 Les Annales patriotiques et littéraires, 28 February 1792.
71 La Chronique de Paris, 19 October 1792.
73 Citation of Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Couvray, a member of the Convention. Reproduced in Le Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel, 18 December 1792.
74 The (accepted) article was as follows: ‘La Convention nationale ordonne, à tous les individus de la famille des Bourbons, à l’exception de la femme, de la sœur et des enfants de Louis Capet, sur le sort desquels elle se réserve de prononcer, de quitter le territoire de la république et celui qu’occupent ses armées, vingt-quatre heures après le jugement du ci-devant roi’. Reproduced in Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel, 18 December 1792.
républicaines. L’exemple et le discours de ce grand homme doivent être notre leçon.\textsuperscript{75}

Far from his role as supporter of Louis XVI in 1790, the figure of Brutus was now urging more radical action, with the exile of the Bourbons having been proposed ‘d’après la motion de Brutus’.\textsuperscript{76}

It was thus not the French Revolutionaries who were deciding the course of the Revolution - it was Brutus himself, and the example of Rome. The events surrounding Brutus’s actions (and his own behaviour) were now - according to the *Révolutions de Paris* - predicting what would take place in France. They argued that:

dans tous les temps, dans tous les lieux, les révolutions des empires sont presque les mêmes. La République de Rome pensa être détruite dans son origine. Dès son origine, on voulut détruire la république de France. Il se forma dans Rome un parti en faveur de Tarquin; il s’en est formé un dans Paris en faveur de Louis XVI.\textsuperscript{77}

The history of republican Rome was therefore representative of the French Revolution. The power of Rome and Brutus the exemplar was also tied to Voltaire’s tragedy, with evocations of Brutus the exemplar in politics sometimes shaped, or influenced, by *Brutus* the play. In December 1792, a key line of dialogue from *Brutus* was woven into the political argument to invoke the image of the republican hero, and to exploit the influence that he evidently wielded over the populace in general:

Ici, il faudrait séduire treize millions de Français; et ceux-là qui ont proposé le bannissement des Bourbons, savent bien que la chose est impossible. Les Français seront toujours républicains; ils ont juré le maintien de leur souveraineté, et la mort plutôt que l’esclavage.\textsuperscript{78}

The use of the term ‘séduire’ indicates a degree of cunning, or manipulation, in any act contrary to the freedoms of a republic. It also forms a contrast to Brutus’s declaration ‘donnez-nous la mort plutôt que l’esclavage’ (IV. 7. 218). Perhaps surprisingly, there

\textsuperscript{75} Meeting of 16 December 1792. Reproduced in *Le Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel*, 18 December 1792.

\textsuperscript{76} *Le Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel*, 18 December 1792.

\textsuperscript{77} *Révolutions de Paris*, 2-9 June 1792.

\textsuperscript{78} ‘séance du mercredi 19 décembre’, in *Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel*, 20 December 1792, p. 787.
are very few accounts of performances of the tragedy available from 1792, but judging from the frequency with which Brutus and the play were mentioned in a strictly political context as demonstrating the necessity of Revolutionary action, it is probable that Voltaire’s composition was playing a very fixed role. It was arguing for the necessity of extreme measures and of safeguarding the Revolution at all costs, and 1792 - the year preceding the king’s execution - was the time when Brutus’s services would be needed most.

The primary target of Brutus’s politically-charged presence on the stage was undoubtedly Louis XVI. The tragedy was performed at the Théâtre de la Nation immediately after the king’s execution, thus strengthening the connection between Louis and Tarquin:

Les spectacles n’ont point été fermés le jour de l’exécution, il s’est même rendu assez de monde au Théâtre de la Nation, où l’on jouoit Brutus. Les maximes républicaines renfermées dans cette pièce ont été vivement applaudies, surtout ce vers: Dieux! Donnez-nous la mort plutôt que l’esclavage (IV. 7. 218)79

Like Brutus himself, then, the Revolutionaries had driven out the king, and they had successfully imitated the actions of their exemplar. They had triumphed. The close association between play and execution indicates the extent of the transformation that Brutus had experienced: in 1790, it promoted the rule of both law and monarch (‘la liberté n’a pas triomphé seule; la loi et le roi ont partagé sa victoire’).80 Yet in 1793, it was connected in the Revolutionaries’ minds with regicide. Remarkably, Tarquin is not executed in the play – it is in fact the failed republican, Titus, who must face the ultimate punishment for having betrayed Rome. By now, Brutus was the representation of what the Revolution should be, and Paris required the execution of a notable figure to serve as a grand example to the populace in the same way that Titus’s death served as

80 Le Moniteur, 19 November 1790. See also Renwick, p. 97.
an example to the Romans. It remains doubtful, however, as to whether the Revolutionaries noted the discrepancy between the two executions:

Les Rois cimentèrent le despotisme par l’effusion injuste du sang des peuples; il est temps que la liberté des peuples soit consolidée par l’effusion légale du sang impur des Rois. L’Angleterre ne balança pas de conduire Charles Stouart à l’échafaud. Rome frappa de la hache des consuls les fils même de Brutus. 81

Whilst Brutus’s model is given equal weight to that of England and Charles I, Brutus’s sons are not actually kings, despite their inclusion in this tirade against all that is royal. The play’s action had been subsumed by Revolutionary ideology.

Brutus’s role as a weapon of the Revolution was only beginning. A speaker addressing the section de Marseille in 1793 argued that everybody had to contribute to the fight to protect France’s newfound liberty, with performances of Brutus being one suggested method: ‘la souveraineté du Peuple doit-être respectée, et nous en sommes tous les défenseurs comme partie du souverain. Ne laissons donc jouer sur le théâtre de la nation que Brutus, la mort de César, Guillaume Tell’. 82 But whereas here Brutus’s presence on the stage is linked to the general populace’s duty towards the Revolution, it was largely the government that assumed ownership of the tragedy. The power behind Brutus’s appropriation had changed: whereas formerly the press had taken control of it, the government now resolved to take advantage of Brutus’s popularity to propagate their ideals, as the following decree from 1793 makes clear:

A compter du 4 de ce mois, et jusqu’au 1er septembre prochain, seront représentées trois fois la semaine, sur les théâtres de Paris qui seront désignés par la municipalité, les tragédies de Brutus, Guillaume Tell, Caius Gracchus, et autres pièces dramatiques qui retracent les glorieux événements de la

Révolution, et les vertus des défenseurs de la liberté. Une de ces représentations sera donnée chaque semaine aux frais de la République.  

The political appropriation of Brutus thus became official, and the play’s importance to the government was further cemented. They even took control of the educational value which had already been associated with the play in November 1790. Determined to tutor the populace in Brutus’s brand of republicanism, they accepted Delacroix’s proposal in 1793 that only works such as Brutus should be performed on the stage:

Il n’est personne, qui, en sortant d’une représentation de Brutus […] ne soit disposé à poignarder le scélérat qui tenterait d’asservir son pays. Je demande que le comité de salut public prenne des mesures pour qu’on ne joue que des pièces républicaines.  

Voltaire’s tragedy could evidently inflame the populace; but the sheer depth of the connection felt between some spectators and the play was perhaps most clearly illustrated in Le Journal de Spectacles’ review of a performance from November 1793.

Just as had been the case in 1791, the unity of the audience was described at some length:

Qu’on se représente quatre mille citoyens se tenant tous par la main, ne formant qu’un seul tout, et exprimant par leurs chants et par leurs danses, qu’ils n’ont qu’une même âme, qu’ils ne forment qu’un même voeu, celui du salut de la patrie, et l’on aura une faible idée de ce spectacle mémorable, qui ne finit qu’au moment où commença la représentation de Brutus.  

This was a far cry from November 1790 (just three years earlier), when weapons had to be banned from the theatre. Spectator response was also far less vocal and violent: ‘On applaudit dans cette pièce tous les traits de l’héroïsme républicain des Romains; et l’on entendit dans le plus profond silence tout ce qui dit Arons en faveur des despotes ou de la royauté’ (p. 30). But why, when the royalists had been so roundly denounced in 1790,  

84 Reproduced in Renwick, p. 108.  
were they now being tolerated? The answer is simple: they were no longer a threat. Three years earlier, *Brutus* had been a moderate piece, able to appeal to both royalists and Revolutionaries. Now, it was a strictly republican, anti-monarchist play, and Arons could be allowed his say, because it was nothing more than a token gesture. There was no one in the audience to applaud his support for the absolute monarchy, and the anti-monarchist, Revolutionary appropriation of *Brutus* could go unchallenged. As though to underline the shift that had taken place in the interpretation of the play, the former cries of ‘vive le roi!’ (1790) had been replaced by shouts in support of the Republic: ‘La représentation de *Brutus* fut souvent interrompue par les cris de *Vive la République!*’ (p. 30).

*Brutus* was now widely regarded as a Revolutionary play; but in spite of its enormous popularity, and its close connection to the execution of Louis XVI as well as the government, it still had the potential to be dangerous. Lucius Junius Brutus’ role as an exemplar, exhorting the populace to action, meant that the character posed a threat if any of his statements in Voltaire’s play seemed to contradict the course that the Revolution was taking. In Tours, *Brutus* was only permitted upon the stage if certain (unidentified) verses were removed from the play. The cause of this censorship was not that that the tragedy itself was in error, or undesirable, but that its sentiments could be dangerous in the present climate: ‘La maxime qu’ils expriment, quoique vraie dans un état asservi, serait de la plus dangereuse conséquence dans des circonstances révolutionnaires’.*86 As a consequence of this change to the play, the theatre became ‘patriotique et moral’ (p. 107). The work’s purpose - like that of the theatre - was to support the Revolution, and any alterations were justified by the need to be patriotic.

One aspect of the play that proved problematic was Brutus’s insistence upon the need for moderation. The Terror’s climate of violence was condemned by his claim that

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'Arrêter un Romain sur de simples soupcons, / C’est agir en tyrans, nous qui les punissons’ (IV. 6. 211-2) – a line that had been enthusiastically applauded in 1790. With the force shaping the play’s appropriation now coming squarely from the government, this verse was sufficient to have the work temporarily banned from the stage. Soon, Brutus was being performed at the Théâtre de la République with the altered line: ‘Arrêter un Romain sur de simples soupcons, / Ne peut être permis qu’en révolution’. Political appropriation could not be clearer – and Brutus was now a method of justifying the violent progress of the Revolution. It was the ultimate Revolutionary tragedy.

Apart from the play’s role in shaping, and being shaped by, the Revolution, Brutus was now Revolutionary in quite a different sense. By 1793, the accepted interpretation of ‘Revolutionary’ had, like Brutus itself, undergone a metamorphosis, and become decidedly extreme, as Condorcet’s definition demonstrates:

On dit qu’un homme est révolutionnaire, c'est-à-dire, qu’il est attaché aux principes de la révolution, qu’il agit pour elle, qu’il est disposé à se sacrifier pour le soutenir. Un esprit révolutionnaire est un esprit propre à produire, à diriger une révolution faite en faveur de la liberté.

Brutus’s willingness to execute Titus, his own son, thus became ‘Revolutionary’ – forming a sharp contrast to the interpretation of this deed in 1776, when it was termed ‘révoltant’. From the second performance of Brutus in 1790 onwards, Titus’s body had been presented on stage after Brutus’ closing words. Such an action shifted the final focus on the play from the continuation of life / the Roman Republic (‘Rome est

88 M. V illemain, Cours de littérature française (Brussels: Meline, Cans et Compagnie, 1840), p. 74. Whilst Moland has cast some doubt on the validity of this alteration (p. 307), the fact that these lines were problematic during the Revolution makes it highly probable that they were changed. See also note 16 in Ridgway, p. 77.
91 See: Souvenirs de la Terreur, p. 242.
libre ... Il suffit’) to the execution of Titus – a clear example of Brutus’s willingness to sacrifice all that is dear to him for the Revolution.

Moreover, Brutus became propagandist, as the definition of propagande also underwent a transformation in the late eighteenth century; it became an ‘Espèce d’association, ayant pour but de Propager les principes et les mouvements révolutionnaires’. In other words, being propagandist and Revolutionary were one and the same; and the theatre’s unique position – being, as it was, open to a large audience – meant that Brutus was perfect Revolutionary propaganda. It even became a key component of the Revolutionary psyche. A slightly altered form of the line ‘donnez nous la mort plutôt que l’esclavage’ was incorporated into a song, which was regarded with almost religious reverence by some:

While going to execution, he sung in a triumphant tone a very popular patriotic song which he had himself composed, and of which the chorus was “plutôt la mort que l’esclavage”. That cherished sentiment he fondly repeated even to his last moment, and death left the half-finished sentence on his lips.

Brutus’s influence may therefore have been most obvious on the stage, but it was also present in politics and culture. His dominance would soon, however, be shaken.

The Death of Brutus

The extraordinary popularity of Brutus from 1791 to 1794 was not a permanent state of affairs, as the number of performances given to Voltaire’s tragedy suffered a steep decline following the Terror. According to La Harpe, the reason for this abrupt drop was both simple and remarkable - the play had become counter-Revolutionary:

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93 Helen Maria Williams, Letters containing a sketch of the politics of France, from the thirty-first of May, 1793, till the twenty-eighth of July, 1794, and of the scenes which have passed in the prisons of Paris (London: G. G. And J. Robinson, 1795), I, p. 222.
N’oublions pas, en finissant cet article de Brutus, de rappeler que cette tragédie a été depuis écartée du théâtre, comme étant contre-révolutionnaire […] tout ce qui est moral et légal est éminemment contre-révolutionnaire.94

There is little evidence to support this statement: the continued staging of the play in every successive year of the Revolution would even appear to contradict it. What is clear, however, is that Brutus began to lose its grip on the Revolutionary imagination. And yet whilst the arrival of Brutus on the Revolutionary stage was explosive and sudden, there is no specific moment which can be conclusively identified as the point of its downfall. In direct contrast to its resurrection, its fall was gradual.

The fact that certain verses had to be censored or adapted to suit the Revolution in 1794 was probably the first sign of this shift. It was in this same year that La Harpe criticised political (Jacobin) interference in the theatre, and claimed that Brutus numbered amongst those plays which had fallen out of favour with the government:

Vainement tous les théâtres retentissaient des accens de la liberté et des maximes républicaines; le temps était passé où les MONSTRES feignaient encore de respecter ce langage, et alors ils professèrent ouvertement que tout ce qui parlait d’ordre, de loi, de justice, d’humanité, de vertu, de nature, était contre-révolutionnaire; et c’est le titre que donnait tout haut un des plus stupides d’entre eux à la tragédie de Brutus.95

This is obviously a highly subjective account, but with reports of censorship of the play dating from this year, it is probable that Brutus was, indeed, in danger of becoming ‘counter-Revolutionary’. However, given that the tragedy continued to be performed (with new dialogue), Brutus remained (favorably) connected with Revolutionary politics. Moreover, whilst a police report dating from 1796 indicates that Brutus no longer had the power to whip its audience into a frenzy, it was still strongly identified with the idea of patriotism, as the enthusiasm shown for the Marseillaise demonstrates:

94Jean François de La Harpe (1799), Lycée ou Cours de Littérature Ancienne et Moderne (Paris: Costes, 1813), VIII, p. 304. See also Renwick, p. 109.
[…] on a joué la tragédie de Brutus, mais nous n’avons reçu aucun rapport sur ce spectacle, si ce n’est pas que nous avons été témoins des applaudissements qui ont été donnés à l’hymne des Marseillais, qui s’est chanté entre les deux pièces.96

In the same year, another report clearly indicated that spectators of Brutus were largely identified as ‘patriots’, with their response to one individual’s support for the line ‘Et qui sait conspirer sait se taire et mourir’ (V. 1. 24) described thus: ‘il n’a pas eu d’imitateurs; les patriotes présents ont tourné sur lui des regards d’indignation’.97

The offending line, whilst spoken by Brutus, was in reference to the traitor Messala’s words before he committed suicide in order to protect his secrets (and thus those of the royalist cause). Consequently, whilst this ‘clash’ between a royalist and the Revolutionaries in the audience lacks the violence and enthusiasm of similar ‘disagreements’ in 1790, it confirms that Brutus was still being controlled by the Revolutionaries. In terms of perception, it was also identified with republican cause.

The conservative Courrier des Spectacles, whilst criticising in 1797 the constant changes that were being made to the plays of deceased authors, named Brutus as an example of a work which was anti-monarchist in its stance: ‘nous observons aux acteurs du Théâtre-Français que, quand il y avait un roi en France, on y jouait Brutus, Guillaume Tell, La Mort de César, et qu’il n’y a pas plus de raison pour que l’on ne joue pas dans une République une pièce où l’on ne parle pas de massacrer les rois’.98

Brutus does not advocate the massacre of the monarchy, nor does he harm Tarquin or the royal family - but was that recognised at this time? It would appear that, in spite of accusations of counter-revolutionarism, Brutus remained associated with regicide.

Brutus the exemplar continued to be celebrated in Revolutionary festivals - still accompanied by verses from Voltaire’s tragedy. On December 20 1798, the Ministre de l’Intérieur - addressing the Administrations centrales and municipales - urged the necessity of marking the impending anniversary of the king’s execution, and again highlighted Brutus’s role as a symbol of liberty:

Administrateurs, imprimez à cette solennité, par tous les moyens qui seront en votre pouvoir, un caractère religieux; déployez les couleurs et les emblèmes de la liberté; relevez les bustes des philosophes, et des martyrs du despotisme; faites porter devant vous les images de Brutus, de Guillaume-Tell, de Sidney, de Voltaire et de Rousseau.

Brutus’s association with the execution of the king was made absolutely clear in January 1799, when verses from the play were used to mark the anniversary of Louis XVI’s death. Replacing Brutus’s reference to Rome with the more general ‘République’, the tragedy was evidently still interpreted as taking place in France:

Si dans la République il se trouvait un traître
Qui regrettât les rois et qui voulût un maître,
Que le perfide meure au milieu des tourmens! (I. 2. 167-169)

Play and exemplar thus continued their cross-fertilisation, and continued to be strictly ‘Revolutionary’ in nature.

With the Revolution rapidly approaching its conclusion in 1799, the tragedy’s performance figures increased slightly. It was even greeted with some enthusiasm in April of that year: ‘Toutes les applications patriotiques qu’au même théâtre [théâtre de la République] et à l’Odéon présentait la tragédie de Brutus one été saisies avec avidité’. An account of the play from a few months later, however, suggests that its

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99 Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel, 26 July 1798.
101 François de Neufchâteau, Ministre de l’Intérieur, Recueil des lettres circulaires, instructions, programmes, discours et autres actes publics (Paris, 1799-1830), II, pp. 7-12 (p. 10).
popularity was restricted to select spectators, and that it could no longer attract the enormous audiences it had once known:

Il n’y avait pas beaucoup de spectateurs à la représentation de Brutus au Théâtre de la République; mais tous, animés du même esprit, applaudirent avec enthousiasme chaque passage patriotique de cette tragédie.103

In spite of its decreasing performance figures, then, Brutus was still a Revolutionary play. Its time, however, was coming to an end. Whilst it might still be connected with regicide, Louis XVI was long dead, and the play was not needed to persuade spectators of the necessity of such an action, or to justify it. The tragedy could be used to commemorate the execution, but otherwise it was becoming surplus to requirements.

Significantly, there had been indications that after the Terror, Brutus was not viewed with the same blind adoration and celebration. A review of Voltaire’s play from 1795 had to state that ‘Brutus n’est pas un homme féroce et barbare, comme trop de gens ont malheureusement affecté de le croire’.104 This attitude was repeated in 1796, with the writer describing Brutus as having provided ‘un grand exemple de cette inflexible sévérité républicaine’ whilst conceding that the Roman’s decision to execute his own sons could be interpreted negatively: ‘aux yeux de nos républicains modernes, [cette action] ne passe que pour un acte de féroceité.’105 The descent of play and exemplar from their Revolutionary zenith was thus slow and gradual. The appropriation of Voltaire’s Brutus came to a definitive end when Napoleon banned Brutus from being performed following his coup.106 Intriguingly, then, appropriation could operate in reverse; as a banned composition, it was wilfully excluded from the French cultural/political landscape. In other words, it was an object of anti-appropriation. Extraordinarily, then, Brutus had managed to swing from one end of the political

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104 Journal des théâtres et des fêtes nationales, 2 March 1795, p. 49.
106 McKee, pp. 105-6.
spectrum to the other in the space of ten years. It had been monarchist and moderate, it had been Revolutionary and republican, and now it was in opposition to the state. It was a play of extremes in almost every aspect of its career.

Conclusion: the Political Afterlife

Brutus’s fame during the Revolution contrasted so sharply with its earlier career that multiple contemporary sources sought to explain this phenomenon. In France, it was suggested that original audiences had simply been unable to fully comprehend the work: ‘sa reprise en 1790 en a fait mieux sentir les beautés. Elle a prouvé qu’il faut aussi le concours des circonstances pour développer tout le mérite de certains ouvrages qu’on est ensuite surpris d’avoir pu négliger’.107 In other words, the political potential that had been spotted by a handful of persons decades earlier had not only become more obvious, but also more acceptable – France having decided that the monarch was not an unassailable power after all. A slightly different analysis was forwarded by the German translator of the tragedy, who argued that Brutus had taken on an entirely new meaning that had not been present in 1730, and had certainly not been envisaged by Voltaire:

Many passages of the drama were interpreted with specific connections, and obtained a whole new interest, of which Voltaire himself would certainly not have thought at the moment of composition108

In essence, however, the tragedy’s republican setting and hero had always had the potential to be political dynamite. This potential may have been rejected in 1730, but from 1790 it was realized – and exploited – to the utmost.

Yet how could one play be subjected to such different – and contrasting – interpretations, and why was it chosen for appropriation at all? The combination of

107 ‘Avertissement’ in Brutus, tragédie (Paris: Jacob Sion, 1792-3).
Lucius Junius Brutus’s role as Revolutionary exemplar and Voltaire’s elevated status were undoubtedly a potent – and tempting – mixture. The government’s official support for Brutus in 1793 was also probably based in large part on the play’s extraordinary success and appeal to a large portion of the populace. These ‘merits’, however, do not allow a text to become vulnerable to such conflicting interpretations; that is, Brutus must have been open to varying analyses in the first place, because otherwise its appropriation (no matter how desired) would not have been possible. Perhaps the prominence of both royalists and republicans in the action of the play meant that the battle between the two camps could be construed in a variety of ways; perhaps the final defeat of the royalists gave spectators the opportunity to associate their enemy with that party, and to alter their interpretation according to the strength of their hostility towards the ‘opposition’ during the Revolution.

The event around which the tragedy is based, however, is the execution of Brutus’s son, Titus. Tarquin, the hated tyrant, is not only never seen on stage, but also survives the action. It seems incongruous that the play should have been so closely associated with the execution of Louis XVI, when Brutus’s king is not put to death. Yet the execution of a traitor, rather than a monarch, does account for how audiences in 1790 perceived Brutus to be pro-monarchy. The fact that a ‘traitor’, and not a monarch or a republican leader, is executed enabled the play to be appropriated by different camps. The execution of a king could not have been applauded in 1790, but in 1793, the death of Titus was still an execution – and a deeply painful one for Brutus, the wronged father. If he could execute his own son, the French could execute their king, their erstwhile father and master. The identity of the executed man was thus unimportant during the Terror. Any sacrifice would do. I therefore propose that it is the curious position of Titus (neither royal nor peasant) that enabled Brutus to be appropriated and transformed into such contrasting plays. He was a prominent enough figure for his death
to be gratifying to the radical republicans. He was also distant enough from the king to
be allowed to die before the eyes of the king’s loyal subjects. And once his death no
longer served a political purpose, *Brutus* was abandoned by its appropriators –
abandoned to sink, once more, into the relative obscurity whence it came.
5: GUILLAUME TELL: FROM LAUGHING STOCK TO NATIONAL HERO

“Je me repenirai toute ma vie d’avoir fait Guillaume Tell; cette pièce est une des principales causes de la révolution; j’en mourrai de chagrin” (Lemierre in 1793, the year of his death).

Lemierre’s Guillaume Tell is another historical tragedy which returned to the stage in 1790, the same year as Brutus's revival. Both are based around the heroic exploits of the central, eponymous character, with William Tell becoming a national exemplar comparable to Lucius Junius Brutus. Both tragedies also failed to achieve a sustained level of popularity prior to 1790, but unlike Brutus, Lemierre's Guillaume Tell was largely connected to one specific stage of the Revolution: the Terror. Not only was it entirely absent from the stage in 1797 and 1798, but its performance statistics for the two years of 1793 and 1794 are higher than those covering the years from 1767 to 1792. In contrast to Brutus's broad Revolutionary appeal and swift, successive afterlives, Guillaume Tell had only a brief, limited window of appeal - appeal that was more specific to and dependent on one particular set of historical and political circumstances than Brutus. These, then, are two tragedies with entirely opposing patterns of appropriation: the long-term, Revolutionary appropriation of Brutus, against the Terror-based appropriation of Guillaume Tell.

2 For all performance figures see Chapter 3, ‘Defining the Corpus: Performance, Statistics and Political Appropriation’.
3 Tell's importance during the Revolution has already been examined, see Jacques Proust, 'Sans-Culotte malgré lui ... Contribution à la mythographie de Guillaume Tell', in Essays on Diderot and the Enlightenment in Honor of Otis Fellows, ed. by John Pappas (Geneva: Droz, 1974), pp. 268-285. As the title of this work indicates, Proust's focus is not on Lemierre's tragedy, but on the general figure of Tell: my investigations will thus be very different. Tell's reputation has also been considered in contemporary German culture, see Joseph Jurt, 'Wilhelm Tell vor Schiller', Pandaemonium Germanicum, 9 (2005), 23-46; Ricco Labhardt, 'Tells revolutionäre und patriotische Maskaraden', in Tell. Werden und Wandern eines Mythos, ed. by Lilly Stunzi (Bern and Stuttgart: Hallwag, 1973). Again, neither of these works concentrate on Lemierre's tragedy, and whilst Labhardt does briefly consider the politicisation of the play,
My point of departure for ascertaining the basis for the tragedy's very specific appeal is the text itself. The critical edition of *Guillaume Tell* (edited by Renaud Bret-Vitoz) contains all the published variants that appeared of the text, including those dating from the Revolution. It is therefore an invaluable resource - particularly as not all the changes made to the text can be attributed to Lemierre, with the edition from 'An II' (1793) stating: 'Les vers imprimés en petit caractère, au bas des pages, ont été ajoutés après la mort de l'Auteur' (p. 69). This is a clear indication of the play's appropriation, with that appropriation being so strong that in 1794, after Lemierre's death, it was given the subtitle 'les Sans-Culottes Suisses'. Whilst Lemierre may have been alive for the first years of the Revolution, his tragedy very quickly took on a life beyond him, with the death of the author in this instance being both figurative and literal. Lemierre had altered the text dramatically between the two editions of 1767 and 1793, but the tragedy's metamorphosis would continue without him, as the creative potential of appropriation was shown in full force.

In the first part of this chapter, I shall consider the connection between Tell and Brutus - two characters united by their appropriation. My attention will then turn to the tragedy's pre-Revolutionary career and interpretation, which can be set against its Revolutionary reception to establish how attitudes towards the work changed following its return to the stage in 1790. Having considered the nature of its revival, I shall then investigate the changes that had been made to the text - both by Lemierre and by persons unknown. What were the alterations made to this composition, and how did they impact on the tragedy? Why was *Guillaume Tell* performed so infrequently his conclusions are false. He argues that 'in the twenty years before the Revolution, Lemierre's drama played an important role in the cultural life of the French capital / Lemierre's Stück spielte im kulturellen Leben der französischen Hauptstadt in den letzten zwanzig Jahren vor der Revolution eine bedeutende Rolle' (p. 95, my translation). This contradicts the evidence available, and is at odds with my own findings; consequently, my conclusions will be very different.


throughout the Revolution, only to become successful from 1793-1794? And why did the Revolutionary fortunes of Brutus and Guillaume Tell differ so wildly, when they were both returned to prominence due to their respective exemplars and their 'relevance' to the Revolution?

Tell as Brutus's Brother-in-Arms

The association between William Tell and Lucius Junius Brutus was such that an account of Tell's life from 1794 opened with the lines 'La Suisse eut son Brutus'. As Brutus's Swiss counterpart, he was shown alongside the Roman in the Fête de la Liberté (1792) as he ‘executoit l’ordre barbare de l’atroce Gresler [sic] & marquoit déjà la place où il devoit percer un jour ce tyran & faire expirer avec lui le despotisme’. This image was accompanied by Tell’s closing line from Act I of Lemierre’s tragedy, ‘Que la Suisse soit libre, & que nos noms périssent’ (I. 1. 152). Brutus's words, meanwhile, were taken from Voltaire’s play, as he ‘sembloit prononcer ces paroles, que Voltaire lui a mises dans la bouche: Rome est libre, il suffit: Rendons grâces aux dieux’ (V. 9. 240, cited p. 246). Both Brutus and Tell use the language of equality, with these citations presenting a collective identity through the use of the first person plural (‘nous’). They are figureheads for an egalitarian community: placing themselves firmly amongst their compatriots, they are not kings, but men leading and speaking in the interests of their countrymen. And, as the use of dialogue from Voltaire’s and Lemierre’s plays demonstrates, it was not only the historical characters of Tell and Brutus who were evoked together, but also their respective tragedies.

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6 Chansonnier de la République pour l’an 3e. Dédie aux amis de la liberté, orne des portraits du Brutus Mutius Scevola, Guillaume Tell et Rousseau, enrichi d’hymnes patriotiques chantés aux fêtes nationales avec les aires notés (Bordeaux: Chapuy, 1794), p. 7.
Unsurprisingly, Tell became a national and Revolutionary exemplar alongside Brutus - to the point that the Jacobins desired their busts to be displayed alongside each other in 1794:

Je pense que l’admission du buste de Guillaume Tell dans le sein de la Société présente un grand objet d’utilité publique [...] Il sera beau de voir ce grand homme placé à côté de Brutus et des autres grands hommes dont la mémoire nous est toujours présente, et que nous devons toujours nous proposer pour modèles.⁹

In another parallel to Brutus, verses from Lemierre’s tragedy were used in political discourse, with the same line that had been reproduced in the Fête de la Liberté being used to urge the populace against the ‘enemies’ of the Revolution in 1793:

Qu’ils sont insensés eux qui ont espéré d’attacher leur nom à cette époque par tant de calomnies, par tant de résistances combinés, par tant de divisions, tant d’intrigues déjouées et par tant de talents stériles ou dangereux! Donnons-leur un grand exemple; nous qui avons proclamé sans eux cette déclaration des droits et cette constitution qui font le désespoir des fédéralistes et des despotes, des aristocrates et des ambitieux. Disons comme Guillaume Tell: Que la France soit libre, et que nos noms périsissent!¹⁰

The substitution of ‘Suisse’ by ‘France’ echoes the alterations that were made to certain verses contained in Voltaire’s tragedy,¹¹ whilst also making it clear that Tell and Lemierre’s tragedy were now closely associated with the Revolution, and therefore France. The Revolution itself was perceived as comparable to Switzerland’s situation several centuries earlier, with it being stated at another meeting of the Jacobins that ‘Depuis la victoire que Guillaume Tell remportera sur le despotisme de l’Autriche, jamais le courage n’eut à servir une aussi belle cause que celle de la liberté française’.¹²

Other journals also emphasised the connection between Switzerland and contemporary

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¹⁰Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel, 3 July 1793. All italics in original.

¹¹See Chapter 4, ‘Revolutionary Brutus: Royalist, Republican, Reject’.

¹²Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel, 26 May 1794.
France, with *L’Esprit des journaux* arguing in 1794 that ‘Tell a combattu avec intrépidité dans des circonstances pareilles où les François se sont trouvés’.  

Tell's reputation, however, was only one part of the fame granted to the myth surrounding Switzerland's liberation. Indeed, the Swiss nation itself was frequently regarded as an example of how France should conduct itself: ‘Il n’est point d’histoire plus fertile en prodigues produits par l’amour de la liberté, que celle des Suisses’ (1793). Tell's refusal to bow to the tyrant Gessler’s hat, which was attached to a pole in the town square, was even discussed in Revolutionary journals. Some sources argued that the blood-soaked hat of the fallen Gessler inspired the *bonnet rouge* worn by many Revolutionaries:

> Le tyran est mort! Vive la liberté! Ses compatriotes accourent autour de lui. Mes amis, leur dit Guillaume Tell, vous voyez bien ce bonnet qui couvre un tyrannicide. Descendons sur la route, pour le teindre dans le sang de notre ennemi frappé à mort, et promenons-le dans tous nos cantons, au haut d’une pique, en criant: que tous ceux qui veulent s’affranchir du joug de la maison d’Autriche, se ralien autour de ce bonnet rougi du sang d’un traitre et d’un despote. [...] Voilà l’histoire de la liberté suisse, et l’origine du bonnet rouge que nous portons avec orgueil, en foulant aux pieds le diadème des rois.

The origins and associations of the *bonnet rouge* are, of course, more complex than this explanation allows, but it is revealing that the Tell mythology was so closely linked with symbols that were especially associated with the Terror and the *sans-culottes*. Both Lemierre’s tragedy and Tell the exemplar reached their Revolutionary apogee in 1793-94.

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13 *L’Esprit des Journaux*, September 1794, IX.
15 *La Chronique de Paris* outlined how ‘Grissler [sic], le tyran de la Suisse, voulut que le signe de la liberté devint celui de la servitude. Il fit placer son chapeau sur une pique au milieu d’une place publique, & quiconque passoit devant, était obligé de le saluer’. See *La Chronique de Paris*, 8 August 1790.
In a ‘humorous’ account from Sylvain Maréchal in 1793, he was elevated to the status of a semi-religious figure, to be celebrated on a similar level to Jesus Christ:

Aujourd’hui à Rome, et encore ailleurs […] on fête la cérémonie de la circoncision; c’est-à-dire, à pareil jour dans Jerusalem on coupoit le petit bout du prépuce de Jésus nouveau-né. Eh bien! Aujourd’hui, à pareil jour ainsi, Guillaume Tell, en Suisse, coupoit bien autre chose à un faquin aristocrate.18

He furthermore encourages the reader to ‘suivez Guillaume Tell qui ne veut d’autre récompense que de mériter le titre de premier fondateur de la liberté des Suisses’ (p. 5).19 And yet there was considerable cross-fertilisation between Lemierre's tragedy and other cultural representations of Tell. Apart from the use of Lemierre's text for Tell's 'appearance' in the Fête de la Liberté, the play also inspired artworks, with a painting exhibited in 1795 by Vincent openly acknowledging its debt to Lemierre: ‘L’artiste nous avertit dans la notice imprimée des ouvrages exposés, qu’il a été inspiré par les vers […] de Guillaume Tell de Lemière’ (see figure 3).20 The artwork shows a fierce, aggressive Tell towering above the helpless figure of Gessler as he forces his enemy into the waters of the lake - a scene that is integral to the action of the play. The influence of Lemierre's Guillaume Tell did not suddenly end, then, following the Terror; but the connection between individual elements of the story (such as Gessler's hat) and the radical Revolutionaries meant that the tragedy would suffer accordingly once the Revolution became more moderate.

Ancien Régime Reception: Guillaume Tell as a Political Laughing Stock

19This may be a reference to Lemierre’s tragedy, in which Tell famously rejects any reward other than Switzerland’s freedom. However, Lemierre’s Tell actually tries to distance himself from such a title (‘[… ] que nos noms périssent’ (I. 1. 152)).
20La Décade Philosophique, Littéraire et Politique, par une Société de Républicains, 1795, VII, p. 205.
The tragedy that was first performed in 1767 was a very different composition to the one that would be staged during the Revolution. Tell and his allies (Melchtał, Furst and Werner) swear an oath to free Switzerland in Act I, although their hatred is directed towards Gesler, the Austrian governor. Their attitude towards the monarchy and their ruler, Albert I (King of the Romans and the Duke of Austria) is far more temperate - Albert’s father, Rodolph (Rudolph I), is even referred to as ‘son vertueux père’ (Tell, I. 2. 184). Gesler himself reveals that the cruelty of his tyranny is quite separate from Albert, as he states that ‘pour réprimer ce peuple & son audace extrême, / J’irois plus loin qu’Albert n’iroit lui-même’ (II. 1. 434-35). He furthermore criticises Rodolph for his generosity towards the Swiss (II. 1). To ensure that the Swiss people remain completely subservient to his will, Gesler resolves to create ‘pointless’ laws. He commands that his hat be attached to a pole in the town square, with peasants forced to bow to it as they would to Gesler himself. Tell is arrested for disobedience, and is forced to shoot an arrow at an apple on his son’s head. The ‘apple shooting’ scene is not seen on stage, with the outcome related to Tell’s wife by Furst (IV. 2). Gesler then attempts to transport Tell and Melchtał to his castle, which entails crossing a lake. A violent storm disrupts their journey, with Gesler forced to free Tell from his chains and give control of the boat over to him. Tell and Melchtał deposit their captors in the waters. All of these events are related to Tell’s wife Cléofé by Melchtał, rather than performed on stage. Returning to the lake, Cléofé and Melchtał are able to see Gesler be shot and killed by Tell’s arrow, as he - and his countrymen - emerge from the rocks by the lake to celebrate their victory.

The initial reception of Guillaume Tell was one of almost open derision, with Grimm brutally suggesting that its sole redeeming feature was its short length:

‘heureusement il est si court qu’il n’a pas eu le temps d’impatienter le public, et c’est ce

21 Although the traditional spelling of Tell’s enemy is ‘Gessler’, the spelling used in the play (‘Gesler’) will be used when referring to the character in Lemierre’s tragedy, and not the mythic figure.
qui l’a sauvé de sa ruine le jour de sa première apparition’ (1767). He found the play so wanting, that he decided against giving a detailed analysis of its faults: ‘Il serait aussi superflu qu’ennuyeux de relever tous les défauts de ce drame informe’ (p. 273). Other sources reinforce this attitude: the *Journal Encyclopédique ou Universel* highlighted ‘la faiblesses & du peu d’intérêt de cette pièce’. Meanwhile, it was referred to by the *Mémoires Secrets* as ‘cette tragédie pitoyable’. The *Mémoires* also suggested that the composition failed to make an emotional connection with spectators: ‘L’attention est soutenue par l’interêt de curiosité, mais le coeur est rarement ému par l’intérêt du sentiment’ (p. 115). The tragedy's initial appearance on the French stage was, in short, disastrous. And yet there were suggestions that it was the dangerous nature of the subject matter that was behind *Guillaume Tell*'s distinct lack of success.

Grimm highlighted the role of the 'peasants' within the tragedy, pointing out that ‘s’il [Lemierre] avait mis dans leur bouche le sentiment énergétique et généreux de la liberté, la police l’aurait prié degarder son ouvrage dans son porte-feuille’. His conclusion was that Lemierre had endeavoured to create ‘un chef d’oeuvre de prudence’, since ‘il n’y avait un mot désobligeant pour la maison d’Autriche, et j’ai trouvé cela bien poli de la part de Melchthal, de Werner et de Furst’ (p. 271). La Harpe - writing some years later - repeated Grimm’s assessment, arguing that the tragedy’s poor reception was not ‘tout-à-fait la faute de l’auteur’. Given the difficulty of staging ‘les pièces républicaines’, Lemierre had simply been forced to take drastic measures to ensure that his play could be performed: ‘Ce n’était pas assez pour la vaincre, que

23 *Journal Encyclopédique ou Universel*, May 1767, IV, part 1, p. 110.
l’extrême simplicité d’une pièce sans amour et presque sans intrigue’ (p. 256). The composition had thus been hindered by its political potential, and been weakened accordingly.

Grimm’s report of the play indicates that the explosive nature of the Tell legend had been identified twenty years before it would reach its potential in the French Revolution, and whilst it was Grimm who outlined the political ramifications of the play most overtly, *Le Mercure de France* also hinted at the perils involved. Conceding that the tragedy had not met with particular success, the journal acknowledged the risks that Lemierre had taken: ‘on ne pourroit au moins lui refuser le mérite d’une entreprise hazardeuse pour lui’ (January 1767). The status of the play’s main characters was not elevated enough for a tragedy, with several reviews admitting that ‘il faut convenir qu’il étoit très-difficile de mettre sur le théâtre, des paysans conspirateurs’. 26 Perhaps the issue lay, however, not with their status, but their role as 'conspirateurs': peasants were in revolt on the French stage, and it was not a comfortable sight. Their connection to national revolution was also obvious - and, in this case, the results of that revolution were not only dangerously close to home, but also still visible, as the *Mercure de France* (January 1767) made clear:

> Est-ce un sujet peu digne du cothurne, que celui où il s’agit de délivrer tout un pays de la tyrannie, sur-tout lorsqu’il s’ensuit une révolution dont l’effet subsiste depuis plus de quatre cens ans?27

*Guillaume Tell* thus differed noticeably from *Brutus* in that it presented a scenario that was still connected to the present day; closer to France in terms of time and culture, its political potential was instantly grasped.

Was it for this reason that Lemierre's tragedy was treated so harshly at this time? Those elements of the play which met with the greatest derision were those which

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26 *Journal Encyclopédique ou Universel*, May 1767, IV, p. 98.
27 *Mercure de France*, January 1767.
would be grasped most enthusiastically during the Revolution. In particular, the
*Mercure de France* from January 1770 mocked the symbolism of Gesler's hat, noting
that ‘il est vrai qu’on est un peu étonné de voir donner le nom de tragédie à un ouvrage
où, pendant trois actes, il s’agit de savoir si on saluera un chapeau.’ They also poured
scorn on Gesler for his use of such a symbol: ‘il se peut qu’il y ait eu un tyran assez
absurde pour imaginer un ordre aussi ridicule.’ They consequently rejected the *chapeau*
as a meaningful symbol of liberty, whilst also denying the existence of a tyrant such as
Gesler. The strong mocking note in this review suggests that humour, or laughter, was
being used in an effort to defuse the tragedy's political potential. *Guillaume Tell’s*
future as a Revolutionary play was thus obvious in its pre-history; but, as with *Brutus*, its
potential would only be realised with the Revolution.

*Revolutionary Resurrection*

The version of *Guillaume Tell* that was performed in the years immediately preceding
the Revolution differed considerably from the tragedy that premiered in 1767. The apple
shooting scene was performed ‘en action’, even if no printed edition bearing this scene
would appear before the Revolution, whilst the crowd scenes (formerly suppressed due
to practical reasons) could now be realised on the stage.28 As with *Brutus*, however, it
was the advent of the Revolution which caused a sudden demand for the tragedy's return
to the stage. Criticisms of the Comédie Française’s reluctance to perform *Brutus* in
1790 were swiftly strengthened by anger at their refusal to stage *Guillaume Tell* in its
stead: ‘on leur a fait encore un crime de n’avoir pas donné plutôt Guillaume-Tell’.29

Like Voltaire’s tragedy, Lemierre’s work revolved around a republican state as it struggled to establish itself. Moreover, *Guillaume Tell* could be seen as being even more desirable than *Brutus*, as the example set by Switzerland would be more easily recognisable to France than other (more removed) republics, such as Rome. This ‘advantage’ was even pointed out by Lemierre: ‘Qu’on me permette au reste de me féliciter d’avoir choisi mes sujets dans des Républiques plus modernes que celles de Rome & d’Athènes, dont les exemples peuvent paraître suspects d’exagération’. A further point of appeal was that *Guillaume Tell* presented a concrete victory to the audience; according to Lemierre, this was the reason why it was more successful than his other tragedy, *Barnevelt*. For while he considered that the subject of both *Barnevelt* and *Guillaume Tell* was liberty, he also outlined how ‘Dans *Barnevelt* c’est la Liberté attaquée: dans *Guillaume Tell*, c’est la liberté conquise. Dans *Barnevelt* c’est le patriotisme qui succombe: dans *Guillaume Tell* il triomphe’ (p. ix).  

In a further parallel to Voltaire’s *Brutus*, *Guillaume Tell’s* contemporary ‘relevance’ during the Revolution was perceived as a sign that Lemierre had anticipated the events of 1789 - *Guillaume Tell* having ‘su prévoir la révolution de la France’. Lemierre was prepared to support this viewpoint. Writing in 1791, he congratulated himself on his power of ‘foresight', and attributed it to 'l'esprit public':

qu’on me permette encore de me savoir gré d’avoir traité des sujets patriotiques si long-temps avant la révolution, & lorsqu’il etoit impossible de prévoir le grand changement qui devoit arriver dans notre Monarchie; c’est un hommage prophétique que je rendois d’avance à l’esprit public.

His words indicate the extent to which the play's Revolutionary appropriation had impacted on even Lemierre's perception of the play. Not only had his subject only

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31 For a brief discussion of *Barnevelt*, see Chapter 3, ‘Defining the Corpus: Performance, Statistics and Political Appropriation’.
become 'patriotic' with the advent of the Revolution, but spectators had soundly - even cruelly - rejected his tragedy when it was first performed. In short, it was not merely the play as it was being performed during the Revolution that was being appropriated. Author and Revolutionaries alike re-read the play from the perspective of the future, presenting it as a work which had successfully predicted the Revolution. In reality, it had been mocked and ridiculed owing to its dangerous political undertones, but with its return to the stage in 1790, such details would be forgotten.

Although performances of Guillaume Tell were most numerous during the Terror, accounts of the tragedy from 1790 indicate that it appealed to Revolutionary audiences from the moment of its return to the stage. Moreover, the evidence available suggests that Guillaume Tell was instantly subjected to Revolutionary appropriation. In December 1790 the Courier de Lyon described how ‘Guillaume Tell a fait retentir dans toutes les ames les véritables accents de la liberté’, with the tragedy’s action now having become ‘grande, généreuse, & sublime’. 34 Back in Paris, La Chronique de Paris not only outlines how audience reaction to the piece had changed completely, but also how the spectators were immersed in the ‘events’ they were watching on the stage:

> on jouoit Guillaume Tell. Cette pièce fut applaudie d’un bout à l’autre; & au moment où l’on cria liberté, le parterre & toutes les loges furent debout, chapeau sur les cannes, & toutes les voix se réunirent à celle de Guillaume Tell. 35

Just as with Brutus, the line between reality and the world of the theatre was either blurred or simply non-existent, with the same article directly linking this ‘enthusiastic’ response to the play to the events and concerns of the Revolution: ‘c’était un chorus bien agréable pour des patriotes’. This entire episode was presented as evidence ‘que les aristocrates n’ont pas toujours le dessus à la comédie’. Suddenly, the presence of des paysans conspirateurs on the stage could be used as a weapon against the aristocracy.

34 Courier de Lyon, 19 December 1790.
35 La Chronique de Paris, 6 December 1790.
(and the enemies of the Revolution). Those very factors that had restricted its former success were now the basis of its appeal: the paysans conspirateurs were representative of the Revolutionaries, and Gesler/Austria were synonymous with the aristocracy. The tragedy was no longer set in Switzerland, but in France, at the very heart of the Revolution.

A letter dated 31 December 1790, and sent to the Comédie Française following a performance of Guillaume Tell emphasises how Tell's victory over Gesler was now synonymous with the republicans' triumph over their enemies in France. A person identifying himself as Kolly outlines the perceived association between the staging of the tragedy, and the fall of despotism:

Ce n'est pas sans la plus vive emotion que mes Compatriotes ont vu l'ame de Guillaume se déployer dans toute sa sublimité sur un Théâtre dont tous les ressorts étoient enchaînés naguère par les agens du Despotisme; dans une Ville où l'ombre de la Bastille glacoit les esprits et étouffoit dans les Coeurs tout élan vers la Liberté.36

Once again, the history of Lemierre's tragedy had been rewritten - for the fact that it had already been performed under the Absolute Monarchy had seemingly been forgotten. Like Brutus, Tell had become a leader of the Revolution, showing his 'descendants' the necessity of rebellion: 'Guillaume a laissé son esprit à ses descendans; il leur a légué sa haine pour tous les genres d'oppression'. More than this, the tragedy was clearly capable of evoking very strong, emotional reactions in spectators, as Kolly closes his letter by declaring 'pardon, Messieurs et Mesdames, de la longeur de mon Epitre; mais mon Coeur a parlé'.

In this torrent of praise for Tell - and the Comédie Française - Lemierre's tragedy itself is almost of secondary importance, and is presented as a vehicle for the Tell legend. Paying tribute to the actors' skill, Kolly refers to 'la manière pleine de force

36 'Lettre de Kolly, membre de la Société des Palisots Suisses, aux Comédiens Français, à la suite d'une représentations de Guillaume Tell', from the Dossier on Lemierre, Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie-Française (vu 2001 RL).
et d'énergie dont vous mettez en scène le plus beau jour de sa vie, celui où il a fait renaitre l'Helvétie à la Libérté, et que M. Le Mierre a peint avec tant de fierté dans sa Tragédie'. As was the case with Voltaire's Brutus, the success of Lemierre's tragedy was connected to William Tell's role as an exemplar, with the tragedy characterising and promoting the exemplar, and the exemplar ensuring Revolutionary interest in the tragedy. Although Lemierre's reputation as a playwright did improve during the Revolution, his achievement was to have placed Tell upon the stage: ‘Le Mierre n'avait obtenu, d'une cour prodigue, que la plus modique des pensions. Mais il reçut, de la République naissante, la seule récompense qui fut digne de lui. Le peuple, devenu souverain, voulut que l’image du libérateur de la Suisse fut placée dans le sanctuaire de la liberté, & que la tragédie de Guillaume Tell fut représentée dans ses têtes sommelles’.37

With the theatre now playing the role of ‘une école véritablement nationale’, 38 Tell’s behaviour (and vows) provided the model which was to be imitated by spectators and Revolutionaries. Tell's triumph was their triumph, and the Revolutionaries were prepared for battle – just as Tell was:

Albert va nous poursuivre et venger son trépas;
Mais nés Républicains, nous sommes tous Soldats (V. 5. 1381-1382)

To be a Republican was to be a warrior. Just as Brutus preferred death to slavery ('Dieux! Donnez-nous la mort plutôt que l'esclavage' (IV. 7. 218)), Tell was ready to fight for his freedom - ready to take on the might of Albert and Austria. His words echo a rallying cry, a triumphant call to battle - and his meaning is clear. All Republicans are soldiers, and they must all ('tous') be ready to fight. Indeed, the Swiss people's initial

37 L'Esprit des Journaux, July and August 1796, p. 269.
38 La Chronique de Paris, 26 December 1790.
willingness to acknowledge Gesler's hat (which he is using as a symbol of his authority) causes Tell considerable embarrassment:

Le peuple à son aspect fléchissant les genoux,  
Quelle audace à Gesler! mais quelle honte à nous!  
Baiser si lâchement la main qui nous insulte (II. 7. 642-644)

Brutus is similarly unimpressed by lack of action against figures of authority ('Pardonnez-nous, grands dieux! si le peuple Romain / A tardé si long-temps à condamner Tarquin' (I. 2. 153-4)). Indeed, Tell (like Brutus), speaks on many subjects which suddenly became pertinent to France during the Revolution.

In Act I, Scene 2 alone Tell touches on the topics of liberty and the people’s rights (183-187), as well as that of equality: ‘Comment souffrir un homme ambitieux et vain, / Qui n’est que créature & se fait souverain’ (I. 2. 201-202). He furthermore speaks negatively of the ‘pouvoir arbitraire’ (200) being exercised in Switzerland. Whilst Tell’s primary object of hatred is still Gesler, (‘Mais si nous haissions ce Prince imperieux, / Combien son Emissaire est-il plus odieux?’ (197-198)) his arguments against hierarchy and tyranny were well suited to Revolutionary France. The work’s lexis also had much in common with that of Brutus, as Tell rails against ‘esclavage’ and tyranny:

Esclave intéressé de l’Autriche qu’il sert,  
Le tyran des cantons, et le flatteur d’Albert?  
Il est tems, mes amis, de sortir d’esclavage:  
Ensemble il faut venger notre commun outrage (I. 2. 205-208)

There was thus a 'language of appropriation': that is, themes and vocabulary that were common to appropriated Revolutionary tragedy. More than sharing a hatred of 'esclavage' and 'le tyran', Guillaume Tell and Brutus both contain a lexis of extreme

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39 For a consideration of the vocabulary clusters and coded language used in Guillaume Tell and Brutus, see Emmet Kennedy, 'Old Regime Tragedy and the Terror' in Theatre, Opera and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris (London: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 51-8. However, Kennedy refers to an early edition (1776) of Guillaume Tell in his brief look at the tragedy, which differs considerably from what was seen on the revolutionary stage.
violence. In Act V, scene 5, Tell announces Gesler's death by including graphic details such as the 'rocher sanglant' from the 'victime étendue':

Liberté! Liberté!
Regardez, peuple, amis, le coup que j’ai porté,
Sur ce rocher sanglant ma victime étendue;
Voyez la tyrannie avec elle abattue (V. 5. 1369-1372)

Such violence was well received; according to *La Chronique de Paris*, this verse was met with loud applause, as ‘on n’entendit, pendant une demi-heure, que vive la liberté, la nation, la loi & le roi’ (6 December 1790).

Given that the tragedy’s greatest success was during the Terror, it is surprising that the play was met by cries of ‘vive le roi’. However, the version of the work performed in the early years of the Revolution retained the ‘polite’ references to Albert that had been mentioned by Grimm in 1767, as demonstrated by an edition of the tragedy that was ‘conforme à la représentation’ from 1790.40 There was thus no open assault on the monarchy, as there would be in later editions. Moreover, the relatively few performances granted to *Guillaume Tell* in moderate phases of the Revolution indicate that it did not lend itself so well to a ‘royalist’ interpretation as Voltaire’s *Brutus* did. In spite of the numerous ties between the two tragedies, Lemierre’s play was not reviewed as frequently (or in equal depth) as Voltaire’s *Brutus* in these early years of the Revolution. Attempts were clearly made to appropriate it to support both the Revolution and Louis XVI, but it appears that - unlike *Brutus* - *Guillaume Tell* did not lend itself with comparable success to different stages of the Revolution. It was better suited to the extreme, anti-monarchist appropriation of the Terror.

A possible explanation for this relative lack of success during the moderate phase of the Revolution is that Tell's enemy, Gesler, is not moderate in his

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schemes or behaviour. In 1767, Grimm had expressed his surprise at the sheer evil of this character, noting ‘ce qui a plus choqué, c’est le rôle de Gessler. Il est absurde à force d’être méchant’ (p. 273). His exaggerated wickedness was still present in 1790, as the following verses indicate:

Tiens: de la liberté tel fut jadis l’emblème,  
J’en veux faire un trophée au despotisme même (II. 2. 478-479)

His role is limited to threatening innocent characters, and forcing everyone to submit to his will:

Citoyens de la Suisse, êtes-vous des rebelles,  
Tremblez, je punirois vos trames criminelles,  
Un de vous est déjà par mon ordre arrêté,  
Malheur à qui résiste à mon autorité (II. 6. 632-635)

It was blatantly impossible for the aristocracy – or counter-Revolutionaries – to support Gesler in the way that some spectators attempted to applaud the royalist figures in *Brutus*. There was thus no question of Revolutionaries needing to gain control of the audience in order to direct the play’s appropriation. On the French Revolutionary stage, the tragedy portrayed the Revolutionaries and the enemies of the Revolution; it was valuable propaganda in the sense that it demonstrated how the Revolutionaries should behave, but its simplistic portrayal of the two opposing groups meant that the work did not lend itself to appropriation by numerous different sections of society.

*Tell and the Terror*

Having scarcely been performed at all in pre-Revolutionary Paris, *Guillaume Tell* reached its peak of popularity from 1793-94: on 25 June 1794, two performances were announced for the same day, at the Théâtre de l’Opéra-Comique National and the
Théâtre de la République. The play's dominance on the Revolutionary stage from 1793 was made clear in August 1793 by Les Spectacles de Paris. The play was deemed to be ‘le triomphe de la liberté’, as ‘depuis la règne de l’Egalité […] Guillaume Tell est devenu un ouvrage national: il semble fait pour retracer aux Français leur courage, et on le joue partout’. A year later, the Gazette Nationale highlighted its importance to Revolutionary France, arguing that it ‘ne pouvait qu’être vu avec intérêt par des spectateurs qui ont brisé le joug, comme les Suisses, qui combattent comme eux pour n’être point asservis, et qui comme eux, resteront vainqueurs et libres’. Guillaume Tell’s usages as a vehicle for Revolutionary propaganda were openly acknowledged, with the same journal praising the tragedy as ‘le meilleur ouvrage d’un auteur qui avait un talent réel et original. C’est là qu’on trouve ces vers faits pour devenir proverbes chez des républicains’ (17 September 1794). These verses were Tell’s infamous ‘Que la Suisse soit libre ou que nos noms périssent’ (I. 1. 152); another line from the same speech, ‘On a trop préféré la gloire à la vertu’ (I. 1. 145), and the closing lines of the tragedy, ‘Qui veut vaincre ou mourir est vaincu trop souvent; / Jurons d’être vainqueurs, nous tiendrons le serment’ (V. 5. 1405-6).

These are verses that demonstrate how Tell (much like Brutus) is prepared to subjugate everything, even his life, to Switzerland. Even his willingness to shoot an arrow at a target on his son’s head was presented as proof of his dedication to liberating the nation, with L’Esprit des journaux arguing that this was not recognised widely enough:

ce qu’elle n’a pas remarqué, c’est que Tell pouvait tuer le tyran, avant d’essayer d’atteindre la pomme fatale, & délivrer ainsi son pays d’un odieux oppresseur. Mais dans ce cas, ce trop malheureux père auroit paru venger sa propre cause; il avoit de plus grandes vues; il voulloit affranchir son pays, & cette idée guide son

41 La Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel, 25 June 1794. The announcement of these performances specify that, in both cases, it is the tragedy (and not the opera) that is being performed.
43 Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel, 17 September 1794.
bras & son courage. Il fait réflexion que s’il décache sa flèche sur la pomme placée sur le sommet de la tête de son fils, le peuple assemblé frémira de la barbarie du despote, que chaque mère croira voir son propre enfant exposé à la mort dans la personne de son fils, & que tous ses concitoyens se révolteront contre ce nouvel acte de tyrannie atroce.\textsuperscript{44}

Possible ‘flaws’ in the tragedy’s plot (Tell could have simply shot Gesler rather than the apple on the child’s head) were thus re-interpreted to support Tell’s role as a Revolutionary hero. Moreover, Tell’s willingness to endanger his child’s life became synonymous with his patriotism, rather than the sign of weakness it had been considered prior to the Revolution. In earlier versions of the play, Tell had refused Gesler’s command to shoot an arrow at the child, with pre-Revolutionary sources claiming it would have been a sign of weakness in Tell if he had obeyed such a ridiculous order: ‘Du moins, que Guillaume Tell refuse de lui obéir; qu’en bon père, il n’expose pas la vie de son fils au hazard; qu’en brave républicain, il ne donne pas l’exemple d’une soumission bizarre et aveugle’.\textsuperscript{45}

The expected behaviour of a ‘brave républicain’ had now changed completely, however: it was no longer important if Tell was a good father, it only mattered that he behaved like a republican (or Revolutionary) leader. Alongside changes to the play’s action, therefore, the implications of Tell’s decisions, behaviour and values had also been completely transformed. The play’s appropriation during the Terror actually ‘shifted’ the action to resemble that of Voltaire’s \textit{Brutus}: just like Brutus had his son publically executed to serve as an example to Rome, Tell endangers his only child to draw the populace to his cause. During a period of increasing violence, both Tell and Brutus acted as evidence of the necessity of such extreme measures, with their willingness to risk (or end) the lives of those closest to them acting as proof of their

\textsuperscript{44} L’\textit{Esprit des journaux}, September 1794, IX (p. 334).
absolute dedication to their respective nations. And these nations now stood for, or represented, Revolutionary France.

The various elements of Tell’s story that had been dismissed as ridiculous or unbelievable prior to the Revolution were no longer the subject of criticism: it was the political theme that mattered. This was outlined in the Gazette Nationale ou Le Moniteur Universel on 3 August 1794:

Il importe peu qu’il soit vrai et prouvé qu’un bailli ou gouverneur du canton d’Ory, nommé Gysler ou Grisler, ait fait placer un bonnet au haut d’un perche, dans une place publique, avec ordre de le saluer, sous peine de la vie. Il n’importe pas davantage de prouver que ce gouverneur condamna Guillaume Tell à être pendu, pour n’avoir point salué son bonnet, et lui fait grâce de la vie, à condition qu’il abattrait, d’un coup de flèche, une pomme placée sur la tête de son fils. De ces deux faits, l’un est absurde, l’autre invraisemblable. [...] Ce qui importe, pour l’honneur et l’humanité, c’est de savoir que l’amour de la liberté vit encore, que les exemples des peuples qui l’ont recouverée par leur courage et leur constance, ne sont pas perdus pour les hommes qui sont venus après eux, et que le despotisme n’est qu’un mal, un fléau passager.

It was a work that could only be appreciated, and only come to prominence, with the Revolution - as the same article outlined at length: ‘Guillaume Tell, tragédie de M. Le Mierre, avait eu peu de succès jusqu’à ce jour. Paris n’était pas mûr pour le fond de cette tragédie [...] Tout a changé. Cette liberté, qui rapproche tous les hommes et tous les peuples, a donné à Guillaume Tell un intérêt dont on ne le croyait pas susceptible, et cette tragédie a eu le plus grand succès’. Finally, the political undertones that had been detected (and feared) in 1767 came to fruition and, rather than being scorned, were embraced and emphasised.

And yet whilst Guillaume Tell had been transformed through appropriation, it was also - physically - a very different work to the one that had appeared in theatres in 1767. The last edition of the text, published in 1793 (the year of Lemierre's death) had been revised considerably from earlier versions of the play. Many of these alterations were made by Lemierre, who had already made significant changes to his composition.
in editions dating from 1776 and 1787.\textsuperscript{46} Not all, however were of his creation - with some sections of the tragedy not being performed, and with other minor alterations having been made after Lemierre's death.\textsuperscript{47} Moreover, another edition, dating from 1794 (after Lemierre's death), contains a scene consisting of entirely new verses.\textsuperscript{48} It is unclear whether or not Lemierre was behind this essentially 'rewritten' scene, although the fact that it only appeared a year after Lemierre's death would suggest an answer in the negative.

The circumstances of these final changes were obviously extraordinary, and it is highly probable that the Revolution would have had an impact on most of these alterations. To a greater extent than Voltaire's \textit{Brutus}, the very text of Lemierre's tragedy was changed by the Revolution; it appeared on the stage in 1793 as a 'new' work, if one with a precedent. In order to ensure that only those changes which were linked to the Revolution are the subject of investigation, I shall concentrate on variations between the editions of 1787 and 1793. As only a very few years had elapsed between the two, it is likely that any significant changes were the direct consequence of Revolutionary upheavals. I shall also briefly examine some of the new material included in the 1794 edition, although as a result of the uncertainty surrounding its origins and validity, I shall concentrate my attention on the 1793 edition, which contains Lemierre's final revisions of the tragedy as well as some additions made after his death.

One of the most obvious alterations to this text is in its attitude towards monarchs, or rather towards a hierarchical system of government. In 1787, Melchtal’s rueful ‘Albert ne connoit pas le sort de nos provinces, / Albert ne voit pas tout, c’est le malheur des princes’ (II. 4. 548-549) did not constitute any direct, or open, criticism of

\textsuperscript{47} See \textit{Guillaume Tell}, ed. by Renaud Bret-Vitoz, footnote 3, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{48} 'Annexe II: une version apocryphe de 1794', in \textit{Guillaume Tell}, ed. by Renaud Bret-Vitoz, pp. 165-167.
the monarchy; the suggestion is that Albert would have intervened, had he known the fate of his subjects. He may be an absent protector, but he is still a potential protector, and the only fault inherent in kings is that they cannot be omnipresent. Whilst these verses remain in the Revolutionary edition of the play, a note indicates that they had been replaced by the following lines: ‘La plainte aux coeurs des rois est toujours importune, / Et leur oreille est sourde aux cris de l’infortune’ (p. 100).49

This is consequently not Lemierre's work, and can thus be considered an example of how the tragedy ceased to 'belong' to Lemierre - that is, it was appropriated to the point that new creators could change the text to suit their own ends. In this instance, Melchtal's reference to Albert has been broadened to refer to all kings so that his criticism would not be restricted to Albert or the characters in the play, but would instead be easily translatable to contemporary France. His words break with the plot of the tragedy - for whilst Melchtal the character is preoccupied with the plight of Switzerland and Albert's rule over it, he has now redirected his attentions away from Switzerland and to the evils of monarchy in general. As was the case in Brutus, characters within Guillaume Tell are being used to emphasise the necessity of breaking free from the monarchy; yet whilst existing lines within Brutus could be re-interpreted to convey this meaning, the text of Guillaume Tell had to be changed to serve its purpose.

Some verses undermining the idea of hereditary power had, however, been altered by Lemierre himself. Melchtal's criticism of such authority in the very opening scene of the play had been revised several times, so that there are three distinct versions:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{La vengeance nous mène à l’immortalité} \\
\text{Et sans rien emprunter de la gloire étrangère} \\
\text{Que l’on reçoit d’un nom qui n’est qu’héréditaire (1767)}
\end{align*}
\]

49 All references to revolutionary notes / comments on the text are taken from the 1793 edition of the play. See Lemierre, Guillaume Tell. Tragédie, ed. by Renaud Bret-Vitoz (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005).
La vengeance nous mène à l’immortalité
Et sans rien emprunter d’une naissance illustre,
Etrangère au mortel qui n’a point d’autre lustre,
Nés de nous, annoblis par de généreux coups (1787)

La vengeance nous mène à l’immortalité,
Et sans rien emprunter d’un titre héréditaire
Sans former nos honneurs d’une gloire étrangère
Annoblis par nos mains et par d’illustres coups (1793)\

These three variants demonstrate a gradual increase in the work’s ‘Revolutionary’ tone, with the dialogue of 1787 having been strengthened considerably. The phrase ‘gloire étrangère’ (which could connect the speech with the injustice of foreign rule) has been removed, whilst the addition of ‘Nés de nous’ places the monarch on the same level as the general populace. The tragedy’s transformation had thus begun before the Revolution, as it was gradually altered to realise the political potential that had been so carefully suppressed in 1767. By 1793, this process had reached its conclusion, with the Revolutionary version of this speech undermining the power of the monarchy more strongly than ever before. In both pre-Revolutionary versions of the work those of high birth are in their privileged positions owing to some external influence - be it that of a hereditary name (1767) or general fortune (1787). Yet during the Revolution such figures have been made noble by the power of the general populace ('Annoblis par nos mains') - and if the power of authority figures emanates from the public, then the public can remove that authority. Intriguingly, however, the term 'annoblis' was replaced after Lemierre's death by 'affranchir' (p. 78). According to the Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française (1798), 'anoblir' could mean to 'acquérir de la réputation, de la gloire'. Any association (even accidental) between the aristocracy and positive merit had to be avoided at all costs - and in spite of having been revised so recently, Guillaume Tell still had to be changed to be performed during the Terror. The author's own alterations were

50 I. 1. 138-141.
not enough to satisfy Revolutionary appropriation, so that his work had to be modified by other hands.

Indeed, some of these alterations made by someone other than Lemierre echo those which had an impact on Brutus during the Revolution. Tell’s argument that they must control themselves and not imitate their tormentors in 1787 encourages both moderation and peace: ‘Bornons-là nos exploits; sachons être assez grands, / Pour ne pas nous souiller du sang de nos tyrans’ (II. 8. 690-691). His sentiments in the later edition, however, could not be more different, with a note from the Revolution containing the following alteration: ‘Poursuivons nos exploits, terribles aux méchans / Sans pitié proscrivons esclaves et tyrans’ (p. 111). This addition is thematically identical to one of the changes made to Brutus during the Terror, when the eponymous hero’s warning against the groundless or hasty punishment of his enemies was replaced by the claim that such activities were acceptable during a Revolution: ‘Arrêter un Romain sur de simples soupçons, / Ne peut être permis qu’en révolution’. The political appropriation of Guillaume Tell is thus impossible to miss in this instance. In the same way that Brutus was used to justify regicide, Tell directly condones extreme violence against the Jacobins’ enemies – for Tell is not referring to one specific tyrant, but to many (‘tyrans’). This is overt political appropriation, with Tell being transformed into a mouthpiece for the Revolutionary regime.

Yet even Guillaume Tell, with its Revolutionary alterations, was subjected to censorship, with that censorship acting as another facet of appropriation - assisting to transform the tragedy into a strictly Revolutionary play. One particularly long section which was suppressed and removed from performances can be found in the very first scene of the tragedy:

TELL L’ambition sans frein, l’orgueil, la violence,

52 See Chapter 4, ‘Voltaire's Brutus: Royalist, Republican, Reject’.
Pour nous persécuter, armes de la puissance,
Le fardeau des impôts, les emprisonnements,
Le pillage, le meurtre et les enlèvements;
Sur les moindres soupçons, les peines les plus dures,
La mort multipliée au milieu des tortures;
Plus l’ordre, plus de loix, nos privilèges vains,
Le mépris ou l’oubli de tous les droits humains (I. 1. 79-86)

Whilst in the context of the play this is a denouncement of tyranny – the very enemy of the Revolution – the ‘crimes’ it lists were also those of the Terror. It is particularly striking that Tell’s denunciation of ‘sur les moindres soupçons, les peines les plus dures’ went against the Revolutionary ethos of the Terror. Clearly, ‘les peines les plus dures’ were permissible under - and justified by - the Revolution, and Tell could not be allowed to offer any contradiction. Furthermore, the final line of this section of the text could be interpreted as a direct criticism of the Revolution, with the rule of law undermining man’s freedom instead of ensuring it. Although Tell’s speech is aimed squarely at the rule of tyrants (or kings), and could therefore be seen as supporting the Revolutionaries, these verses became dangerous due to the lack of boundary between Guillaume Tell and its environment. If Tell was a political mouthpiece and exemplar, there was the risk that spectators would apply Tell’s words to the government rather than the fallen monarch. Consequently, the very appropriation of Guillaume Tell which ensured its success was also the trigger for its censorship. The tragedy’s value as propaganda meant that it had to be tightly controlled.

Finally, some consideration must be given to the three 'new' scenes which appeared in an edition of Guillaume Tell from 1794. These scenes deal with Gesler forcing Tell to shoot an arrow at an apple on his son's head, and thus the dialogue is largely used to set up this momentous event - an event that was not part of the original play.53 Tell is given a speech in which he rails against Gesler's tyranny, and whilst the origin of this version of the text is unknown, it is worth noting that Tell's verses are

53For a discussion of this scene, and the gradual changes made to Guillaume Tell, see Pierre Frantz, ‘Introduction’. 
characterised by typical Revolutionary terms such as 'patrie', as he swears to the heavens that he will have vengeance:

Hé bien! tu me réduis par ta loi arbitraire
Au plus horrible état où fut jamais un père;
Je ne puis éviter ton funeste courroux
Et même en te cédant je reste sous tes coups,
Mais j'atteste à tes yeux, j'atteste ma patrie,
Témoin de ma douleur et de ta barbarie,
Que si mon fils périt dans un si grand danger,
Ce sang qui m'est si cher ... le ciel doit le venger.
Et sur toi seul barbare, épuiser sa colère,
Délivrer ma patrie d'un tyran sanguinaire (III. 7)\(^5^4\)

In the same way that Brutus swears on the altar of Mars that he would defend Rome from the tyrant Tarquin, Tell vows to his 'patrie' and to the heavens that if his son is hurt, he will not rest until he has avenged himself and rid Switzerland of this 'tyran'. His ire is just - provoked by the unendurable evil of a tyrant, and blessed by a higher power ('le ciel doit le venger').

The Guillaume Tell of the Terror was very different to the play of previous years. Having been criticised by figures such as Grimm in 1767 for not being radical enough and being ‘un chef d’oeuvre de prudence’, it had now swung to the other end of the spectrum entirely and was openly inciting revolt against the monarchy and arbitrary power. The transformation had begun even before 1789, with some verses from 1787 fore-shadowing the sentiments that would dominate the Revolution. It was during the Terror, however, that the tragedy became political dynamite. Through additions to the text and careful censorship, the play was appropriated until it became a Revolutionary mouthpiece. Lemierre may have deemed his composition to be ‘une des principales

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\(^5^4\) Lemierre, Guillaume Tell. Nouvelle édition conforme à la représentation (Paris: Neuchâtel, 1794). Scene reproduced in ‘Annexe II’ in Guillaume Tell. Tragédie, ed. by Renaud Bret-Vitoz (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005), pp. 165-7. Bret-Vitoz expresses his reservations as to its validity and origins, noting that ‘elle ne figure dans aucune édition des Œuvres complètes de Lemierre’ (p. 165). Given the myriad of changes that were made to plays at this time, however, there is no reason to doubt that this variant was not used at some point, however briefly.
causes de la révolution’, but he had misunderstood the relationship between the two.\(^{55}\)

*Guillaume Tell* was the effect, not the cause. It came to prominence due to Revolutionary appropriation - came to prominence because the play could be re-interpreted and altered in the light of contemporary events until it became a representation of France. Its afterlife was, like that of Voltaire’s *Brutus*, dependent on the Revolution.

**Conclusion: Revolutionary Tragedy**

As the Terror drew to a close, there is some evidence to suggest that a more moderate interpretation of *Guillaume Tell* was coming to light. Instead of promoting regicide and the evil of monarchy, it was (according to the *Gazette Française*) a play that encouraged a love of equality:

La chute de Robespierre retentit encore dans toutes les âmes. Dans toutes les assemblées publiques on se livre à toutes les démonstrations de la joie au sujet de la dernière victoire que le peuple a remportée sur la tyrannie. Avant-hier, Larive, qui gémissait depuis six mois dans les cachots, a reparu sur la scène. Il a joué *Guillaume Tell* au théâtre de l’Egalité, ci-devant théâtre de la Nation. Le public, qui s’est porté en foule à cette représentation, a montré par ses applaudissements combien il était sensible au plaisir de voir les Arts, devenus libres, se mêler au triomphe de la liberté publique, et proclamer, avec toute la France, les maximes de l’indépendance et de l’égalité.\(^{56}\)

The publication’s stance regarding Robespierre is obvious, but even so, it is astonishing that a tragedy connected so closely to the Terror would be presented as supporting a victory over his *tyrannie*. A police report from the same month also presented the play’s theme as being that of liberty: ‘Le citoyen Larive, ressuscité de Port-Libre, avait joué

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\(^{55}\) See Fayolle, ‘Notice sur la Vie et les Ouvrages de Lemierre’, p. xviii.

Guillaume Tell, et les gens de goût n’avaient pas méconnu en lui le héros qui hissa l’étendard de la liberté’.57

With both these reports highlighting the newfound freedom of the actor Larive, it is likely that he was key to the tragedy’s more moderate interpretation.58 The imprisonment of Larive was not unusual, with almost the entire troupe of the Théâtre de la Nation having been arrested in September 1793 for supposedly opposing the Revolution.59 The release of the actors from prison following Robespierre’s fall thus presented the opportunity for audiences to celebrate the end of the Terror, and criticise it; as François Gendron has made clear in modern scholarship, ‘Audiences were soon applauding the passages that recalled the fall of the tyrants’, with the tyrants now being those of the Terror.60 And remarkably, Guillaume Tell - one of the very plays which had urged the necessity of extreme measures, and enjoyed its greatest popularity during the Terror - was now being used to celebrate the arrival of a more moderate era. It is probable, however, that the drama’s new, less violent appropriation was due almost entirely to the actor Larive.

Guillaume Tell did, however, have the potential to be applied to Robespierre’s fall from power: with Gesler being a governor, not a monarch, Robespierre might even appear to be a more natural ‘fit’ for this character than Louis XVI. Moreover, the play now had an added bonus: with the French Revolutionaries at war with - amongst others - Austria,61 Tell’s execution of Gesler and determination to defeat the nation’s armies

61 The wars and battles of the French Revolution have been discussed in detail in modern scholarship. France was generally victorious, with Eric Hobsbawm stating that ‘the relative monotony of French success makes it unnecessary to discuss the military operations of the war on land’ - see Eric Hobsbawm, ‘War’, in The Age of Revolution 1789-1848 (London: Folio, 2005), pp. 85-109 (p. 95).
gave the tragedy the potential for a ‘new’ meaning. Rather than being a representation of the evil of the monarchy, or tyranny, was it now predicting France’s victory over its many foreign enemies? The news of a victory in battle over Austria certainly received an appreciative audience at a performance of Guillaume Tell in September 1794: ‘La tragédie de Guillaume Tell, et les talents des artistes les plus distingués, avaient attiré une foule immense au théâtre de l’Egalité. La nouvelle d’une victoire remportée sur les Autrichiens avait électrisé toutes les âmes, et la tragédie a excité le plus vif enthousiasme.’62 Tell, meanwhile, was further connected to the Revolutionary wars through the decision to name a warship - the Guillaume Tell - after him in 1796 (see figure 5).

There were thus signs that Guillaume Tell was becoming a different play following the end of the Terror and was now being used to denounce the tyranny of the Jacobins and predict the success of the French armies. This success would not last, however: although Guillaume Tell’s performance figures only fell slightly following Robespierre’s demise, they diminished significantly in 1795 and the tragedy was barely performed again. Just as Lemierre’s play had struggled to maintain a high level of performances in the early (moderate) years of the Revolution, it could not retain its popularity following the Terror. Without the added appeal provided by an actor newly released from imprisonment or news of victory over the Austrians, Guillaume Tell soon disappeared from the stage. In spite of its portrayal of a nation at war, it lacked the ability to appeal to numerous sections of the audience across different phases of the Revolution. Its popularity had largely been based on its appropriation by the sans-culottes, and its role as political propaganda during the Terror.

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62 Gazette nationale ou le moniteur universel, 25 September 1794.
It is unsurprising that *Guillaume Tell*’s fortunes were so dependent on political developments. The appropriation of Lemierre’s tragedy was overtly political in nature from its first reappearance on the French stage: every single review of the play was fixated on its political importance, with contemporary journals taking great care to interpret its action in a way that supported the Revolution. The tragedy was, in many ways, ideally suited to the Revolution in its basic components. Peasants rebelling against arbitrary law, a senseless tyrant and the abuse of a hat resembling *le bonnet rouge* were all identified in 1767 as problematic, only to be the foundation of the tragedy’s popularity during the Terror. As was the case with *Brutus*, the signs of its future were in evidence at a time when nobody could predict that the play would become political (and radically republican) propaganda. The question, therefore, is why was *Guillaume Tell* only granted a brief, single afterlife during the Terror, whereas *Brutus* enjoyed successive Revolutionary afterlives? Was it because the text of *Guillaume Tell* had been changed by the Revolution to a greater extent than that of *Brutus*, thus becoming specific to one phase of the Revolution? Was it because a rival nation could lay claim to Tell in a way that was not the case with Brutus? Or was it due to the villain of the piece, Gesler.

The exaggerated wickedness of Gesler had been criticised in 1767; and subsequent additions and alterations to the play had not moderated his crimes. He was a villain without redemption, ambiguity or virtue - and in that sense, provided a sharp contrast to *Brutus*. Whereas Tarquin’s crimes are never detailed or made clear in Voltaire’s tragedy - thus allowing his crimes to be associated with those of Louis XVI or the aristocracy as required - Gesler’s tyranny is at the forefront of *Guillaume Tell*. Even in August 1794, the *Gazette National* conceded that his behaviour was ‘absurde’.

During the Terror, when the Revolutionaries’ hatred of the monarchy was at its most violent and radical, Gesler was a permissable villain; but he made the play difficult to
appropriate in more moderate years. *Guillaume Tell* was, indeed, a tragedy that catered perfectly to the Terror - but in being so closely bound to it, in featuring so many symbols associated with the *sans-culottes* and in having a villain whose evil was stressed throughout the play, it became unsuitable for further Revolutionary appropriation.

It is remarkable that a play dating from 1767 could be so closely bound to the Terror that its very title was altered to reflect its ‘new’ political affiliations. What the examples of *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell* demonstrate very clearly is that the action of *ancien régime* plays was subordinate to appropriation. Both tragedies close with their respective monarchs (Tarquin and Albert) alive and unharmed, but that was no barrier to becoming Revolutionary propaganda urging the necessity of regicide and extreme measures. These plays were so closely linked with their environment, or with contemporary politics, that they came to signify and represent what the Revolution wanted them to represent. They demonstrate the full power and potential of appropriation to transform drama. Appropriation transformed *Guillaume Tell* from an obscure, derided play into one of the most politically prominent works of the Terror. More than experiencing a Revolutionary afterlife, however, *Guillaume Tell* still bears the marks of its Revolutionary career thanks to extensive changes to the play’s text. In that sense, *Guillaume Tell* is a lasting reminder, or symbol, of the French Revolution.
ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1

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‘Les beautés de Brutus aujourd’hui mieux senties,
Trouvent enfin leur place au théâtre français.
Par un peuple nouveau tu les vois applaudies;
La seule liberté manquoit à leur succès.’¹

¹ Verses dedicated to Voltaire’s bust after the first revolutionary performance of Brutus. See La Chronique de Paris, 21 November 1790.
Figure 2

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According to Vincent, the painting was inspired by verses from Lemierre’s tragedy detailing Tell’s escape from Gesler:

... Il s’efforce, il approche,  
Prend son carquois, s’élança avec moi sur la roche  
D’où renversant du pied la barque et nos tyrans,  
Nous les avons plongés dans les flors écumans (Melchtal, V. 3. 1347-50)\(^1\)

\(^1\) *La Décade Philosophique*, 1795, VII, p. 205.
Figure 4

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Left: ‘Guillaume Tell, dédié à la Section du même nom.’
   ‘O ma patrie, reprends ta liberté. Le tyran n’est plus’
Centre: ‘G. Tell délivre son pays de la tyrannie’
Right: ‘G. Tell. Suisse. L’un des premiers vengeurs de la liberté de son pays’

The works of Voltaire and Lemierre benefitted very obviously from the Revolution, but appropriation was in no way restricted to tragedies. Ancien régime comedies also dominated the Revolutionary canon, and the works of Molière were no exception to this rule. The way in which appropriation affected his comedies, however, varied greatly: whereas Le Dépit amoureux's appropriation is demonstrated by the enormous increase in its popularity, Le Misanthrope’s performance figures remained largely unchanged. Instead, its importance within the theatre of the French Revolution is indicated by the number of 'new' works it inspired, such as Le Philinte de Molière (Fabre d'Eglantine, 1790) and Alceste à la campagne, ou le Misanthrope corrigé (Demoustier, 1790). It was even 'translated' into vers patois in 1797. Re-writing, or even translation, is in itself a form of appropriation: it entails taking possession of the text, and then altering it according to a particular objective. Le Misanthrope was thus actively appropriated

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1. Journal des théâtres et des fêtes nationales, 4 February 1795, XXIII, p. 368.
2. For all performance statistics pertaining to Molière, see Chapter 3, 'Defining the Corpus: Performance, Statistics, and Political Appropriation'.
3. Philippe François Nazaire Fabre d'Eglantine, Le Philinte de Molière, ou la suite du Misanthrope (Paris: Prault, 1791); Charles Albert Demoustier, Alceste à la campagne, ou le Misanthrope corrigé (Paris: Barba, 1798). The comedies inspired by Le Misanthrope have already been examined in some detail, see especially Susan Maslan, 'The Comic Revolution: Molière, Rousseau, Fabre d'Eglantine, and Revolutionant Antitheatricalism' in Revolutionary Acts: Theatre, Democracy and the French Revolution, by Susan Maslan (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 74-124; Mechele Leon, 'Function. Retooling Moliérant Laughter' in Molière, the French Revolution, and the Theatrical Afterlife (University of Iowa Press, 2009), pp. 74-99. Both focus in some depth on the debt of Fabre d'Eglantine's Le Philinte de Molière to Rousseau's ideas. Whilst the existence of these works are important to my argument in that they are evidence of revolutionary appropriation, my focus is on Le Misanthrope itself, and so I will not be covering the ideas already examined in these secondary works.
4. Daubian, Le Misanthrope travesti (Castres: Rodière, 1797).
during the Revolution, but still failed to achieve the general popularity of *Le Dépit amoureux*. Even the plays it had inspired failed to attain such success.\(^5\)

And yet these 'new' versions of the comedy were not the only variants of the play to be seen on stage. As with *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell*, *Le Misanthrope* was affected by Revolutionary censorship, itself a facet of appropriation, whilst *Le Dépit amoureux* was not performed in its entirety as a five-act play, but rather as a one- or two-act comedy.\(^6\) Molière’s Revolutionary ‘afterlife’ has already been the subject of modern scholarship, most notably Mechele Leon’s *Molière, the French Revolution and the Theatrical Afterlife*, in which she examines the way in which the Revolution re-envisioned the figure of Molière and his plays.\(^7\) Rather than using case studies, she draws upon and analyses his comedies as and when they relate to the topic under discussion (such as Chapter 4’s ‘Function: Retooling Molièrean Laughter’, pp. 74-99), which means that she does not examine many plays in great depth. Given that she does not examine *Le Dépit amoureux* at all, I shall be making a new contribution to knowledge on this subject.\(^8\) Her work has, however, been a valuable source of information, and I shall draw on some of her methods in my own investigation, such as consulting Revolutionary police reports and divergent variants of Molière's plays from this period. Thus, whilst my approach will be different in that it is based on directly


\(^6\) Several two-act editions of *Le Dépit amoureux* were published at this time, see for example Molière, *Le Dépit amoureux, comédie en deux actes et en vers, nouvelle édition* (Paris: M. Lecouvreur, 1798).


\(^8\) Leon's main comment on *Le Dépit amoureux* is a brief summary of its plot: 'Le Dépit amoureux, one of Molière's earliest full-length plays, was drawn from a sixteenth-century learned comedy by Nicolo Secchi. The plot involves romantic jealousies and mistaken identities as mirrored in the love interests of a master and his servant'. See *Molière, the French Revolution and the Theatrical Afterlife*, p. 33. She also confirms that *Le Dépit amoureux* was performed in two acts during the Revolution, and not the full five (p. 31).
contrasting two case studies, it is compatible with and contributes to the work that has already been done on this topic.

I shall begin by considering the Revolutionary perception and appropriation of *Le Misanthrope*, before proceeding to examine *Le Dépit amoureux* and then contrasting the fortunes of these two works from 1789-1799. The obvious presence of several varying tools of appropriation in the Revolutionary career of these comedies - such as censorship and rewriting - indicates that appropriation could influence separate texts in very different ways. The question of how these modes of appropriation relate to each other, and to the play they affect, is one that will guide my analysis. In this chapter I shall address important points such as why *Le Dépit amoureux* suddenly became one of the most popular plays in the theatrical repertoire. How did it come to be associated with political events? Why did *Le Misanthrope* fail to replicate *Le Dépit amoureux*’s success? Did the appropriation of comedies differ from the appropriation of tragedies? And does the fact that *Le Misanthrope*’s performance figures failed to benefit from Revolutionary interest indicate that the power of appropriation is limited?

**Le Misanthrope**

*Le Misanthrope*’s lack of popularity in terms of performance statistics during the Revolution is surprising in light of the fact that the comedy was widely recognized as a masterpiece: for instance, *L’Esprit des Journaux* argued in April 1790 that ‘le *Misanthrope* de Molière est la pièce la mieux écrite de son théâtre’ (p. 327). Its low performance figures cannot be due to the government's attempt to ban (almost all of) Molière's comedies in 1794. Not only was it still performed in Paris in every year of the

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9 All act, scene and verse references for *Le Misanthrope* will be taken from the following edition of the play: Molière, *Le Misanthrope* in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Georges Forestier (Paris: Gallimard / Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2010), pp. 646-726. As the published, five-act version of *Le Dépit amoureux* was not performed during from 1789-99, all act and scene references to this play will be to a two-act revolutionary edition of the comedy: Molière, *Le Dépit amoureux*, comédie en deux actes et en vers, nouvelle édition (Paris: Fages, 1798).

10 *L’Esprit des journaux, français et étrangers, par une société de gens-de-lettres*, April 1790, IV.
Revolution, but its performance figures were no lower from 1794 onwards than they had been in the preceding Revolutionary years. In other words, the ban was largely ineffective.\textsuperscript{11} The appearance of Fabre d'Eglantine's \textit{Le Philinte de Molière} in 1791 suggests that there was something within (or about) the original play that stopped it from dominating the Revolutionary stage in its own right. The other plays that would appear later in the Revolution, inspired by \textit{Le Misanthrope}, indicate that whilst it held strong fascination for playwrights and audiences, it remained incapable of appealing to spectators on a broad scale. And yet accounts of its performances were by no means negative.

In 1791, a review of the staging of \textit{Le Misanthrope} at the opening of Le Théâtre de Molière is strongly focused on the ‘patriotic’ nature of both the theatre and the comedy. Even the actor taking on the role of Alceste is described largely in terms of his ‘patriotism’, rather than simply his skill as a performer: ‘M. Malherbe, avantageusement connu par son patriotisme et directeur de ce theatre, a joué le Misantrope avec chaleur et verité’.\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Le Mercure Universel} then goes on to ascribe the success of the production / theatre to questions of Revolutionary fervour:

\begin{quote}
L’emplacement avantageux de cette salle, la scrupuleuse sévérité, que ce directeur éclairé aportera dans le choix des nouveautés, l’obligation que lui impose le titre de \textit{Théâtre de Molière}, de donner des pièces dignes des partisans de ce poète comique; enfin, les sentiments de patriotisme qui dirigeront tous les mouvemens de cette administration, méritent d’intéresser les amateurs du théâtre, et les bons citoyens, sous le double rapport, des progrès de l’art dramatique, et de la propagation des bons principes.
\end{quote}

The use of terms such as ‘patriotisme’ and ‘bons citoyens’ indicates that ‘la propagation des bons principes’ refers to spreading Revolutionary values - and this appears to be the guiding principle of appropriation, and the main characteristic of appropriated plays.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11}Leon states that this ‘interdiction against Molière's plays was not heeded’, and suggests that the drop in the number of performances for Molière's repertoire as a whole 'could be attributed to the closure of the Comédie-Française' at this time. See \textit{Molière, the French Revolution and the Theatrical Afterlife}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Le Mercure Universel}, 13 June 1791.}
The review clearly shows that it was the comedy's supposed ethical and political 'principes' that counted, not its value as theatrical entertainment. Like Brutus and Guillaume Tell, it was the play’s imagined patriotism – rather than any other quality – which was worthy of note.

Although this review seeks to project Revolutionary values onto Le Misanthrope, such a standpoint was by no means universal. Whilst reviewing another comedy, Le Journal Encyclopedique took the opportunity to criticize Molière’s play: ‘il s’agit dans cette comédie [Le Philinte de Molière], d’objets plus importants que ceux sur lesquels roule l’ancien MISANTHOPE, tels que le sonnet d’Oronte, la coquetterie de Celimene, &c’ (April 1790). The perceived frivolity of such concerns even led to demands in 1793 that Molière's works be expelled from the repertoire for the good of the nation:

Brûlons, s'il le faut, les chefs-d'oeuvre des Molière, des Regnard, etc.; les arts y perdront quelque chose, mais à coup sûr les moeurs y gagneront. D'ailleurs, cette disette ne saurait être trop longue; le génie de la Liberté inspirera les muses françaises, et les poètes républicains nous feront bientôt oublier les poètes courtisans.13

The stress placed upon ‘les moeurs’ recalls Le Mercure Universel’s insistence upon Le Misanthrope’s (and the theatre’s) ‘propagation des bons principes’ - but by 1793, Le Misanthrope did not obviously support the Revolution, which had become violently opposed to the monarchy and its associated organisations. This made the play’s content decidedly problematic: for example, the question of Oronte’s sonnet is one that can only be understood within the context of the court. And yet, the attempt to purge the theatre of Molière’s comedies was not only generally unsuccessful, but also failed to remove Le Misanthrope from the stage. Even more extraordinarily, a police report from January

1794 makes it clear that the comedy was popular enough to fill the theatre: ‘Les amateurs du bon genre de la comédie se portent en foule au Theatre National, rue de la Loi, pour voir le citoyen Molé. Il a joué aujourd’hui le Misanthrope. La salle était remplie.’

Later accounts of the play indicate that performances of the comedy remained highly admired. In April 1795, *Le Journal des Théâtres et des Fêtes Nationales* referred to it as ‘ce chef d’œuvre de la scène française, que le public sait toujours apprécier’ (p. 365). Its most detailed review, however, came in 1797, with the *Censeur Dramatique* reproducing many of the comedy’s verses. In spite of Molière’s reputation as a ‘poet of the court’, the verses included in *Le Censeur Dramatique*’s review are comparable to the Revolutionaries’ favourite lines from *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell* – not, perhaps, in terms of their attitude towards the king, but certainly in terms of violence:

> ALCESTE : Je ne suis plus à moi, je suis toute à la rage; Percé du coup mortel dont vous m’assassinez, Mes sens par la raison ne sont plus gouvernés. Je cède aux mouvemens d’une juste colère, Et je ne réponds pas de ce que je puis faire (IV. 3. 1310-14)

Alceste’s metaphorical death now enables him to behave instinctively – that is, free from his former constraints. Like Brutus and Tell, he has seemingly become a man of action, driven by extreme emotion. His transformation from a man of words to action is seemingly emphasized by another verse repeated in *Le Censeur Dramatique*, ‘Ah! Ne plaisantez-point, il n’est pas temps de rire’ (IV. 3. 1286, cited p. 350).

It is almost exclusively the most violent lines within the comedy which were reproduced in this review, with Alceste’s ‘Percé du coup mortel dont vous

15*Le Censeur dramatique, ou journal des principaux théâtres de Paris et des départemens, par une société de gens-de-lettres, 1797, I.
m’assassinez’ containing more than a hint of battle, or warfare (p. 350). The violent lexis typical of appropriation found in the tragedies of Brutus and Guillaume Tell was thus also present and noted in comedies. Act V, scene 4 alone offers considerable parallels to the vocabulary of Voltaire's and Lemierre's tragedies, such as Alceste's 'je cherche à me venger' (1722) and 'traitresse' (1747); more specifically, Alceste's words to Celimène following his discovery of her 'crimes' ('Et qu'après cet éclat, qu'un noble Coeur abhorre'(1767)) echo those used by Brutus in reference to Tarquin's crimes ('Que le nom des tyrans, que Rome entière abhorre' (I. 2. 172)). Even Alceste's final tirade against the hypocrisy and immorality of court society recalls Brutus's love for liberty:

Trahi de toutes parts, accablé d'injustices,  
Je vais sortir d'un gouffre où triomphent les vices,  
Et chercher sur la terre un endroit écarté  
Où d'être homme d'honneur on ait la liberté (1803-06)

The context of these verses within the action of the play is obviously very different to that of Brutus’s tirades: Alceste's passion is dominated by his love for Celimène, and his solution (exile) is extreme. And yet such extreme measures were admired during the Revolution, with Brutus and Tell both participating in brutal violence. It was action which appealed during the Revolution – the process of throwing off the chains of tradition or convention, and taking charge of one’s own destiny. And in that sense, Alceste was comparable to a Revolutionary. He was even described as a Jacobin in 1794 by Camille Desmoulins: 'Molière dans le Misanthrope a peint en traits sublimes le caractère du républicain et du royaliste; Alceste est un jacobin'.

The status of being a Revolutionary was thus not restricted to political leaders such as Tell and Brutus; it extended to every member of society. Desmoulins's 'praise'

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of Alceste does not, however, mean that the play was necessarily as straightforward in its 'Revolutionary' themes as his words first suggest (with his own execution shortly afterwards indicating that his political stance was not sufficiently Revolutionary for survival). If *Le Misanthrope* could indeed be read as depicting the polarity between republican and royalist, this was more likely to hinder the work's Revolutionary popularity than support it. Whilst Alceste may give expression to his violent emotions, he does not triumph over the 'royalists'. Instead, he chooses exile - fleeing the place of his problems. In direct contrast to *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell*, there is no victory: Alceste does not overthrow the political order, but instead exiles himself from it. It is thus unsurprising that the tale was rewritten more sympathetically towards Alceste by contemporary playwrights, with Fabre d'Eglantine's *Le Philinte de Molière* seeing Alceste return to Paris to fight the cause of one his neighbours and becoming a man of action.\(^\text{18}\) The necessity of appropriating and rewriting *Le Misanthrope* was also felt in the provinces. An account of the theatres of Toulouse in 1795 made it clear that, whilst 'le bon choix des pièces de théâtre que l'on a constamment mises sous les yeux des Toulousains, n'a pas peu contribué à contenir le torrent révolutionnaire dans ses limites', *Le Misanthrope* (and other dramas) could only be performed after it had been appropriated and altered accordingly:

> J'ai vu jouer *Miltiade à Marathon* et *Oedipe à Colone*, appropriés aux circonstances, sur le théâtre de l'Egalité, avec autant de plaisir que quelques jours auparavant j'y avois vu représenter *le Joueur* et *le Misanthrope*. Les artistes de ce théâtre méritent des éloges, par les soins qu'ils ont mis a jouer tous les chefs-d'œuvre qu'un de leurs camarades remet très-agréablement à l'ordre du jour.\(^\text{19}\)

No other details are given as to how *Le Misanthrope* was changed. The obsession with rewriting ancien régime plays was obviously not limited to this comedy, but *Le*
Misanthrope does stand out owing to the sheer number of changes wrought upon it. Its censorship, vernacular translation and 'spin-offs' meant that, to a greater extent than most other plays, the Revolution made an enormous effort to rewrite and appropriate Le Misanthrope.

Rewriting Le Misanthrope

The myriad of changes made to Le Misanthrope from 1789 to 1799 allowed it to adopt a greater prominence in French culture than its performance figures would suggest. Furthermore, the appropriation of the comedy enabled it to be staged in tumultuous and violent moments when certain themes and verses in Molière’s Misanthrope could have caused it to be dropped from the repertoire if it remained unchanged. One primary point of contention was the comedy’s close ties to the absolute monarchy, with the Journal des théâtres et des fêtes nationales from 1795 reproducing some of the alterations which had been made to Molière’s text. Alceste’s cry of ‘Allons, ferme; poussez, mes bons Amis de Cour!’ (II. 4. 651) was replaced by ‘Allons, ferme; poussez, mes bons amis du jour!’.

In the same article from 1795, the author protests strongly against such changes, which he includes in a list of ‘fautes’ relating to a performance of the comedy (pp. 366-67):

Il en est une autre moins grave, mais que nous croyons devoir relever aussi, parce qu’elle tient à de pitoyables préjugés, enfantés par le vandalisme barbare qui a failli tout récemment nous replonger dans l’ignorance, et dont il seroit honteux de demeurer plus long-temps esclaves. Nous entendons parler de ces changemens que font impitoyablement les acteurs, dans tout ce qui semble rappeller qu’il a existé un autre ordre de choses. Craindrions-nous donc d’en

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20 Journal des théâtres et des fêtes nationales, 4 February 1795, p. 367.
retracer le souvenir, au point de n’oser prononcer, par exemple, le nom de la
cour, et envisager le tableau de ses monstrueux usages?

The answer to this question must be a resounding ‘yes’: the mere memory of the fallen
monarchy needed to be purged from the theatre – and the state. It was not enough to
remove positive allusions to royalty; rather, any hint of the past had to be erased, so that
even Alceste’s plea to his ‘bons amis de cour’ could not be allowed to remain, in spite
of there being absolutely no positive associations or implications ascribed to these ‘amis
de cour’ (p. 367):

On crain droit entendre cette apostrophe vigoureuse, censure si amère de cet
esprit de médisance qui animoit souvent la conversation de tous les gens de la
cour! Est-ce donc par ménagement pour eux qu’on n’ose attaquer avec franchise
ce vice misérable et bas que Molière a terrassé d’un mot?

Such lexis was thus considered dangerous, regardless of context. This fear of
referencing anything remotely associated with the monarchy might appear at odds with
the popularity of Brutus and Guillaume Tell, whose deposed authority figures became
representative of Louis XVI himself. There is, however, a clear difference between
these works: Le Misanthrope is openly set in France, whereas Brutus and Guillaume
Tell are situated in temporally and culturally distant nations. Showing - or referencing -
a king and his system of government was thus more dangerous (and more culturally
specific) in Le Misanthrope.

Such reminders of the past thus had to be removed from the play. According to
Le Censeur Dramatique from 1797, necessity alone had caused Molière to introduce
sympathetic characters from such an odious social class:

Les femmes de la Cour de notre temps ne ressemblaient point a ce modèle.
Beaucoup plus Catins que les Courtisanes, bien moins jolies, souvent bien moins
aimables, elles n’avoient pour elles que leurs titres, leur impudence et leur
impudicité […] Si Molière eût vécu de nos jours, ce n’est donc point dans cette
classes odiose, digne de tout le mépris des vrais philosophes, qu’il eût été
chercher le caractère de Célimène. Car cette femme, après tout, n’aurait
certainement point captivé Alceste, si elle n’eût joint à beaucoup d’esprit et
d’amabilité une conduite qu’on pouvait croire au moins à l’abri de la censure (pp. 356-57).

Incredibly, then, efforts were made to separate Célimène from the hated aristocracy – in spite of the fact that she not only refuses to retire from such a world with Alceste, but also clearly enjoys her social position. It was evidently incomprehensible that anyone who was not wholly despicable could be a member of the aristocracy, making a re-interpretation of play and playwright necessary. According to Jules Janin, an even more extensively altered (and censored) version of the play was published in 1792, ‘revu et corrigé par les outils de Robespierre’. Edmond Biré, who reproduces Janin’s citations of the text in the form of an eye-witness account of the Revolution, attributes the text to the actor Molé, though in modern scholarship, Frederic Hemmings more cautiously indicates that Molé is merely a potential ‘censor’ (p. 95). Given that Molé performed the role of Alceste in various productions of Le Misanthrope, he is a fairly likely candidate for the task.

In this appropriated Misanthrope, Alceste’s costume had become so Revolutionary - wearing a ‘gilet à la Robespierre’ - that Janin suggests he had become comparable to Brutus: ‘trop heureux Alceste de ne pas s’appeler Brutus’ (p. 275). Some of the alterations made to the text recall those that affected Lemierre’s Guillaume Tell, with even the slightest reference to the aristocracy having to be removed - meaning that Oronte’s ‘un ami chaud et de ma qualité’ (I. 2. 259) had to be replaced by ‘un ami

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21 Jules Janin, Histoire de la littérature dramatique (Paris: Michel-Lévy frères, 1854), IV, pp. 274-5. This edition has been briefly discussed in Frederic William John Hemmings, Theatre and State in France, 1760-1905 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 95-6. The catalogue collectif de France has no entry for any such play, though there is no reason to discount this report of the drama’s censorship - particularly as Janin presents an altered versions of act II, scene 4, which was indeed censored during the Revolution. See Journal des théâtres et des fêtes nationales, 4 February 1795, XXIII, p. 367.

22 Edmond Biré, Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris pendant la Terreur (Paris: Perrin, 1897), IV, pp. 222-32 (p. 223). In presenting this information - which matches exactly with Janin’s account of the play - Biré offers no additional analysis, but instead re-writes it in the form of a diary entry. He does, however, change the new edition’s date to 1794, as opposed to 1792.

23 For instance, Molé’s performance is commented upon in the following sources:
27 thermidor 1797 – Le Censeur dramatique, p. 349.
chaud et de ma rareté’ (p. 277). Similarly, the term l’Etat was substituted by Paris (p. 277), whilst Celimène’s letter (V. 4) had to be altered extensively. ‘Votre grand flandrin de vicomte’ became ‘votre grand flandrin de rêveur’ (p. 280), and even the less specific ‘ces petits messieurs qui n’ont que la cape et l’épée’ had to be changed to ‘ces petits messieurs qui n’ont que l’air de la prétention’ (p. 280). Anything that could be associated with the ancien régime had to be suppressed and removed - but alterations to Le Misanthrope were not restricted to simply removing historically-specific references.

In some instances, the very meaning of the text was altered, with Celimène’s speech from act II, scene 4 providing a particularly striking example. Remarkably, Celimène is actively used to criticize the very class she represents:

(1792) CELIMENE:  Jamais on ne le voit sortir de sa splendeur; Jamais on ne l’entend citer que sa richesse, Ses fermes, ses chevaux, et sa chasse et ses chiens; Ses terres, ses maisons sont tous ses entretiens; Le nom de citoyen est chez lui hors d’usage, Et d’être tutoyé lui paraît un outrage (p. 227)

All vocabulary pertaining to the Absolute Monarchy, the Court and the aristocracy has been removed; and rather than exclusively criticising one individual, she now extends her censure to the trappings of the aristocracy – their ‘maisons’, ‘richesse’ and ‘terres’. Symbols of the aristocracy could thus be permitted in the text when they were the subject of very clear, open criticism; when this censure was not sufficiently strong (as

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24 All italics introduced by Janin.
25 This passage is dominated by language specific to the Court. The Pléiade edition clarifies some of this language: 'Dans la brillant Commerce’ is defined as ‘la fréquentation des personnages éminents de la Cour’, whilst 'la Qualité l'entête' is given as 'la noblesse l'obsède' (p. 675).
was the case with Celimène’s descriptions of *cape* and *épée* in act V, scene 4), then such references had to be removed. Beyond criticizing the aristocracy in this passage, however, Celimène also expresses some Revolutionary enthusiasm in her outrage at his refusal to use the term ‘citoyen’.

Her use of ‘citoyen’ instead of ‘Monsieur’ was, according to Odile Krakovitch, an almost automatic substitution: ‘la suppression la plus fréquente, la plus répétée, la plus notable est celle de “Monsieur”, invariablement remplacé par le mot de “citoyen”’, as the state endeavoured to banish ‘toutes les traces, toutes les restes de l’Ancien Régime’.²⁶ Some theatres did not even wait for direct government interference, but rather directed the censorship themselves, with L’Ambigu-Comique declaring that ‘“dans toutes les pièces anciennes, on substitue à la scène le mot *citoyen* à celui de *monsieur*’’.²⁷ Evidently, *Le Misanthrope* shared its ‘shortcomings’ with many other plays of the ancien régime – as well as with Molière’s other comedies. Leon has analysed in considerable depth the numerous different ‘new’ endings written for *Tartuffe* throughout the Revolution, coming to the conclusion that ‘so much revising of the text over the years had given the ending of *Tartuffe* a life of its own, that audiences sat through the play in suspense, all eyes and ears hyperfocused on the denouement as they anxiously waited to see how the final scene would be treated, what forces would be marshalled, what would become of the Prince’.²⁸ The original ending – where the king comes to the rescue – was obviously unacceptable at this time; the Revolution could not, after all, glorify the figure of a monarch. The danger posed by presenting – even glorifying – a king on the stage is obvious: if the Revolutionaries expected audiences to learn Revolutionary values from plays such as *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell*, they could

²⁸*Molière, the French Revolution, and the Theatrical Afterlife*, p. 69.
not then hope for spectators to separate the action of other works from their political environment.

There was also the suggestion that *Le Misanthrope* was beyond the comprehension of many spectators, resulting in yet another 'rewrite' of the text. In the 'Discours préliminaire' accompanying the 1797 translation of the comedy into patois, Daubian argued that Molière's *Le Misanthrope* was too complex and subtle to be understood properly by the majority of spectators:

> On est généralement convenu que cette Comédie fut le chef-d'oeuvre de l'incomparable Molière. On y voit, en effet, une multitude de tableaux où se trouve représenté ce qui se passe presque habituellement dans la scène du monde. Mais les images s'y trouvent peintes avec tant de finesse, le style en est si sublime et si relevé, qu'on a eu regret à ce que les ravissantes beautés de cette pièce ne pussent être aperçues de la multitude.

Daubian's perspective is obviously subjective, in that he must justify his enterprise, but is not without foundation. In 1797, *Le Censeur dramatique* criticised the habit of re-interpreting jokes within *Le Misanthrope* in order to please the parterre.

Even so, the appropriation of *Le Misanthrope* was not limited to questions of history, class and genre: it also served as 'inspiration' for other Revolutionary plays. One, *Le Philinte de Molière* was only performed from 1791-1793, but was not without influence prior to the Terror. Though the play was written shortly before the Revolution, its author, Fabre-d’Eglantine, was more than ready to endorse a Revolutionary interpretation of his work:

> Ma comédie étoit faite, reçue & distribuée par rôle avant la révolution; depuis, je n’y ai ajouté un vers: cependant jamais pièce de théâtre, à mon sens, ne convint

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29 Daubian, 'Discours préliminaire', in *Le Misanthrope travesti* (Castres: Rodiere, 1797), pp. 3-5 (p. 4).
30 Referring to the number of items that Dubois retrieves from his pocket when he comes to Alceste in act IV, scene 4: 'Le comique de cette Scène doit sortir de l’impatience d’Alceste, et non des charges de Dubois. A la Comedie Francaise, on ne se permettoit que deux ou trois papiers, c’est la tradition: aujourd’hui, pour faire rire les sots du Parterre, on en sort une douzaine. C’est déshonorer, par un jeu des Boulevarts, le second chef-d’œuvre de la Scene Francoise'. See *Le Censeur dramatique*, 1797, I, p. 353. Also partially cited in English in Leon, *Molière, the French Revolution and the Theatrical Afterlife*, p. 44. Leon argues that Molière's plays were subjected to a 'farcical turn', with 'more permeable boundaries [...] emerging between the wit and complexity so lauded in Molière's "high" comedies and the slapstick so deplored in his "low" plays' (pp. 44-45).
mieux aux circonstances actuelles que la suite du Misanthrope, par la raison que j’y présente au siècle l’homme du siècle.  

Its ‘Revolutionary’ flavour extended to the dialogue, with verses which were identified by journals as being particularly striking offering a general indictment of the absolute monarchy:

D’une apparence d’ordre & d’un devoir factice,
Les crimes les plus grands, grossièrement couverts,
Sont le code effronté de ce siècle pervers

Suddenly, Molière’s Misanthrope was being associated with outright condemnation of the century of Louis XIV, and consequently that of the monarchy in general. Like Brutus, he is disgusted by the history and past traditions of his country, in spite of the fact that Molière’s Alceste expresses no hostility towards the king. Le Misanthrope had been so utterly appropriated that Fabre d’Eglantine’s name had to be attached to it, but the use of ‘Molière’ in the title ensured that the original playwright was not excluded from this rewrite, or from such Revolutionary ideas.

The New Star of the Theatrical Repertoire: Le Dépit Amoureux

In light of Le Misanthrope’s ‘limitations’, it is not surprising that it failed to maintain its position as one of Molière’s most frequently staged works. Le Dépit amoureux, however, was apparently far more susceptible to a Revolutionary interpretation, as its performance figures make clear. Indeed, its prevalence on the stage was so great that it would have been difficult to avoid it: the Gazette National lists performances of the play at two of the nine theatres featured on 23 January 1791 (the Théâtre de Mademoiselle Montansier and that of the Comédiens de Beaujolais). Moreover, contemporary responses to the comedy suggest that its importance was not limited to its

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31 Citation of Fabre d’Eglantine, in L’Esprit des journaux, April 1790, IV, p. 319.
32 Journal Universel ou Encyclopédique, 30 March 1791, III, p. 65
33 Gazette National, ou le Moniteur Universel, 23 January 1791.
popularity, but was possibly political in nature, as suggested by the decision to perform *Le Dépit amoureux* alongside *Brutus* on the eve of Louis XVI’s execution.\(^\text{34}\) The review given of these performances in *La Vedette* concentrates largely on naming the actors, although it would seem that the comedy was greeted favourably: ‘Cassard, Boré et Rouillot, qui ont joué les autres roles dans le *Dépit amoureux*, ont infiniment plu au public’.\(^\text{35}\)

The cultural significance of *Le Dépit amoureux* is demonstrated by *La Décade Philosophique*’s response to the news that Cailhava was attempting to re-write the comedy. They characterised the comedy as a sort of faded jewel: ‘c'est un bel edifice qui, comme le Panthéon, peut prendre une nouvelle vie, au moyen de quelques changemens faits a-propos dans les accessoires’.\(^\text{36}\) The comparison of *Le Dépit amoureux* with the Pantheon in Paris is revealing, as it underlines the importance of Molière’s comedy, portraying it as a landmark – or, in the words of *La Decade Philosophique*, ‘un chef d’oeuvre’ (p. 173). Moreover, evoking the Pantheon in conjunction with *Le Dépit amoureux* raises the question of inheritance, or rather, how to address the past: as is well known, the Pantheon, originally built as a church, was transformed during the Revolution into a mausoleum, and would house the remains of such ‘republican’ figures as Voltaire. It had been reborn – or, like *Le Dépit amoureux*, been granted an afterlife.

Cailhava’s ‘re-write’ of *Le Dépit amoureux* was discussed in various journals from 1795 onwards, but was not published during the Revolution.\(^\text{37}\) However, there were still several versions of the play in circulation - although, unlike *Le Misanthrope*, their existence was not the consequence of Revolutionary censorship. *Le Dépit

\(^{34}\) See Chapter 3, 'Defining the Corpus: Performance, Statistics and Political Appropriation'.

\(^{35}\) See *La Vedette, ou journal du departement du Doubs*, no. XXV, 22 January 1793, p. 204.

\(^{36}\) *La Décade Philosophique, Littéraire et Politique*, 1795, VI, p. 173.

\(^{37}\) Cailhava's age and reputation were forwarded as possible causes for this delay during the Revolution. See *Semaines Critiques, ou Gestes de l’An cing*, vol. 1 (Paris: 1797), p. 122. The re-written play was first performed in 1801.
amoureux had been available in five-, two- and one-act versions even before 1789. The full, five-act edition of the comedy was rarely performed in theatres – a state of affairs which comfortably preceded the Revolution, with the announcement of a performance of the play in five acts in the department of Metz in 1779 railing against the tendency to stage Le Dépit amoureux in abridged forms.38 However, the evidence available indicates strongly that it was the two-act, abridged version of the comedy which dominated the Revolutionary stage: two such (identical) shortened editions were published in 1798 alone,39 and Cailhava commented upon this practice in 1795:

Dans les départemens, sur les mille & un théâtres de Paris, on a la barbarie de jouer le Dépit amoureux, en deux actes, ou plutôt en deux scènes isolées, décousues; & personne ne s’élève contre ce vandalisme!40

It is thus highly likely that it is the text of the two-act editions which was so popular amongst theatre audiences; the fact that their content is identical to that of an ‘édition conforme à la représentation’ from 1801 serves as strong confirmation.41

It is highly significant that Le Dépit amoureux was rarely performed in its entirety, as this fact contradicts some modern scholarship on the topic. Emmet Kennedy has proposed that the Revolutionary success of the play was bound to its complex intrigue, which revolves around Ascagne:

A salient component of plays performed during the Revolution is intrigue – a staple of Molièresque comedy that was perhaps seen as newly relevant amid the intrigue of Revolutionary politics on the national, municipal, and neighbourhood levels. [...] In Molière’s Le Dépit amoureux and in Regnard’s Les Folies amoureuses, female transvestites intrigue for love.42

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38 Affiches des Evêchés et Lorraine, 2 September 1779, p. 280.
40 La Décade Philosophique, Littéraire et Politique, 1795, VI, p. 173.
41 Molière, Le Dépit amoureux, comédie en deux actes, en vers, de Molière. Nouvelle édition conforme à la représentation (Paris: Fages, 1801).

This edition differs from the revolutionary editions of 1798 through the omission of a small scene in which Mascarille decides to reveal that he was lying when he told Eraste that Valère and Lucile were married.

42 Emmet Kennedy, ‘The most performed plays of the decade’ in Theatre, Opera and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris, pp. 21-34 (p.25).
Yet such an explanation, convincing as it may appear, cannot be applied to *Dépit amoureux* – for Ascagne, who is at the centre of the comedy’s intrigue, is absent from the two-act edition. It was not a new appreciation for intrigue which caused *le Dépit amoureux* to become popular - otherwise, the five-act edition of the play would have been resurrected. Whatever its appeal, it must be found in the two-act comedy.

A significant aspect of the shortened play is that the focus has shifted – very noticeably – to the figures from the lower social classes. With only four main characters, more prominence is necessarily given to the two servants, Marinette and Gros-René; strikingly, Gros-René is given the final line of the play (‘Allons chez le notaire, et qu’un bon mariage, / S’il en est, soit le fruit de ce repatriage’ (II. 5)). Moreover, whilst the full, five-act comedy ends with the discovery of Ascagne's true identity, it is the scene of Gros-René and Marinette’s reconciliation (in which they alone appear on stage) which closes this version of the work. Their reconciliation is comic due to their attempt to imitate their masters, which (in light of the Revolution's hatred of the nobility) could now be understood as mocking the ridiculous manners of the aristocracy, rather than as showing their inability to reproduce such manners correctly. The position of this scene at the very end of the comedy means that these characters appear to have greater prominence than the more genteel Eraste and Lucile.

It must also be noted that Gros-René and Marinette endeavour to advise their respective masters, with Eraste’s jealousy, in particular, coming in for criticism:

*GROS-RENE:* Pour moi, je ne sais point tant de philosophie:  
Ce que voient mes yeux franchement je m’y fie,  
Et ne suis point de moi si mortel ennemi,  
Que je m’ailле affliger sans sujet ni démi.  
Pourquoi subtiliser, et faire le capable  
A chercher des raisons pour être misérable?  
Sur des soupçons en l’air j’irois m’alarmer? (I. 1.)

Gros-René effectively separates himself from the 'afflictions' of his aristocratic counterpart. His refusal to bow to exterior pressures and strains could also be regarded
as the sign of a 'bon citoyen' - undaunted by difficulties until they are immediately before him. More generally, it is possible that the prominence given to characters from the lower social classes lent the comedy a certain appeal during the Revolution; that audiences desired comedy in which the ‘lower’ characters were as present on the stage as their aristocratic counterparts, and were not merely the victims of their superiors’ wrath, judgement or scorn. Le Dépit amoureux is not unusual in showing servants guiding their masters (Dorine in Tartuffe is another clever servant), but the prominence they enjoy is what sets this abridged comedy apart from its five-act edition.

Another consequence of the removal of several wealthy characters is that all financial motivation for the action has disappeared. Ascagne’s disguise as a boy was the result of Albert’s need of a son to stop a large sum of money from passing to Polidore, the father of Valère; in the original comedy, this problem is overcome by Ascagne’s marriage to Valère. Whilst this match is based on love, the situation necessarily raises questions of inheritance – and therefore recalls the monarchy. The potentially problematic theme of the wealth, power and troubles of the older generation passing to the new has therefore been entirely removed, leaving the remaining characters free to concentrate on the here and now. At a time when the French population had broken free from the absolute monarchy which had served their fathers and forefathers, it is easy to see why the two-act Dépit amoureux would have greater appeal than the original. Whilst the financial theme of the five-act Dépit amoureux did not refer to the king and his court, spectators would have been more than capable of connecting the original comedy to the arranged marriages, financial machinations and questions of inheritance which characterised the gentry.

The general ‘intrigue’, or complexity, of Le Dépit amoureux must also be considered. This aspect of the five-act comedy had been heavily criticized prior to the Revolution: Voltaire conceded that ‘on a trouvé le déguisement d’une fille en garçon
peu vraisemblable’, 43 whilst La Harpe argued that ‘le sujet est absolument incroyable. Toute l’intrigue roule sur une supposition inadmissible’. 44 With Ascagne and her schemes now removed from the action, the two-act play has been extensively simplified. The audience is left in no doubt as to what is taking place on the stage; even Mascarille, after ‘revealing’ Valère and Lucile’s marriage, immediately informs the audience that it was a lie and that he will correct it instantly (I. 6). And yet, the short additions which have been made in an attempt to ‘knit’ the scenes together make little sense. A particularly striking example can be found in Act II, scene 1 of the shortened comedy: Lucile and Marinette have been rejected by Eraste and Gros-René after Mascarille told the men that Lucile and Valère were married; with that lie now exposed, Eraste and Gros-René are seeking their reconciliation. At the end of the scene, before the two sets of lovers are to meet, two lines have been introduced:

Marinette: Il vient; retirons-nous; laissez-le, croyez-moi,
Sans chercher des raisons de leur mauvaise foi.

It seems incredible that Lucile and Marinette should not wish to know why they were treated so harshly earlier, but this addition does mean that no new scenes need to be introduced to deal with this issue. As a result of such an approach, however, the two-act version largely consists of a few comic scenes which have been tied together with little concern for character motivation or even a plot that makes sense. The work has therefore been transformed from a ‘pièce d’intrigue’ into a fairly basic comedy. And yet whilst Le Dépit amoureux may have become a form of light relief, the prominence of characters from the lower social classes and the absence of ‘Revolutionary’ issues such as inheritance, suggests that the play was not without a political aspect. Its simplicity

44 Jean François de La Harpe, Lycée, ou cours de littérature ancienne et moderne (Paris: Costes, 1813), VI, pp. 13-14.
did, however, form a contrast with *Le Misanthrope*, which was deemed to be beyond the appreciation of the average spectator.

**Le Dépit amoureux vs Le Misanthrope**

In fact, *Le Dépit amoureux* is almost the polar opposite of *Le Misanthrope* in terms of both pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary popularity, censorship and literary reputation. Even their brand of humour formed a sharp contrast. Reviews of *Le Misanthrope* revealed resistance towards attempts to alter its comedy into something more akin to farce; no similar efforts were required for *Le Dépit amoureux*. In some ways, it was of a different genre entirely to *Le Misanthrope* – performed as it was in just two acts, it could almost become associated with the farces which, as Leon states, were now so popular:

> The “Molière” of the revolutionary repertory was the Molière of the petites pièces: one- and three-act plays traditionally associated with farce and commedia dell’arte and differentiated from his grandes pièces (five-act verse comedies). ⁴⁵

*Le Dépit amoureux* should, in theory, have been performed as a five-act verse comedy; instead it was performed in only one or two acts, and had been extensively simplified. It had therefore been transformed into the very type of comedy which had wide appeal at this time: as *Le Censeur dramatique* bemoaned in 1797, ‘Il faut plaindre ces tristes ennemis du Dialogue, et les renvoyer à la Pantomime. Puisque les vers de Racine et du Misanthrope leur semblent froids et les ennuient, c’est aux Boulevarts qu’ils doivent aller chercher leurs émotions; ils n’auront là besoin que de leurs yeux’ (II, p. 199).

Whilst *Le Misanthrope* was picked out as a particularly difficult play, *Le Dépit amoureux* had become an action-based comedy, meaning that it lent itself to the audience’s need for immediate gratification.

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⁴⁵ Leon, *Molière, the French Revolution, and the Theatrical Afterlife*, p. 34
If *Le Dépit amoureux* was able to appeal to a broader section of the audience, it was also considerably easier for the theatres to stage. It is noteworthy that, whilst reviews of *Le Misanthrope* went into extraordinary depth regarding the actors’ respective performances, an account of *Le Dépit amoureux* from 1791 stated simply: ‘Guillemet a beaucoup amusé par ses facéties’. There is the suggestion of improvisation in this statement - of playing to the audience, and making them laugh. It was light relief. *Le Misanthrope*, on the other hand, was scrutinised closely in Paris, with Molé, in the role of Alceste subjected to a minute dissection of his every move and word, and was judged against other great actors:

M. Molé, dans Alceste, tantôt sublime, tantôt profond, toujours dans le caractère du rôle, a joué les trois premiers Actes d’une façon qui n’appartient qu’à lui. Mais c’est sur-tout dans la deuxième scène du quatrième Acte qu’il s’est vraiment surpassé; nous osons dire que depuis Grandval, cette scène n’a jamais été rendue comme elle nous a paru l’être dans la Représentation dont nous parlons ici.

The reviewer then goes on to analyse his delivery of certain verses, but little mention is made of whether or not the audience was ‘amused’. Although both comedies were by the hand of the same playwright, they were worlds apart as far as their ‘purpose’ was concerned. *Le Dépit amoureux* was seemingly regarded as a simple comedy, whereas *Le Misanthrope* was being treated as great literature. In spite of its extraordinarily high performance figures, there are no accounts available of *Le Dépit amoureux*’s performances in Paris, whereas several reviews of *Le Misanthrope* were published, even though it was performed with much less regularity. Why? *Le Dépit amoureux*, it seems, had little of the prestige attached to *Le Misanthrope*. It was simple, straightforward and effective in amusing audiences; it was thus unsurprising that it was the more popular choice of the two.

46 *La Vedette*, no. XXV, 22 January 1793, p. 204.
47 *Le Censeur dramatique*, 1797, I, p. 349
The two works also differ in terms of setting. The fact that *Le Misanthrope* was set in the house of Celimène, an aristocrat, and featured various members of the king’s court, meant that the play was unavoidably set in the sphere of the monarchy. The characters’ fears and ambitions largely revolve around the king and who has the best reputation at court, so that simply censoring royalist vocabulary was not sufficient to transform the comedy into a Revolutionary composition. *Le Dépit amoureux*, however, suffered from no such associations or themes. Its setting is uncertain, with only a few vague references to general locations which might be found in any town (for example, a ‘grande place’ (I. 2)). Moreover, with only six characters, its scope is highly constrained, especially as Valère and Mascarille are barely seen on stage and promptly disappear in Act II. Apart from Eraste, Lucile, Gros-René and Marinette, the only other figure to receive a mention is Lucile’s father Albert; the result is that the comedy gives the impression of being set in a ‘bubble’, separate from (and unaffected by) the world beyond it. There is thus nothing in the play’s content that could cause offence, lose Revolutionary favour or be interpreted as pro-monarchist – in fact, the lack of any specific historical or geographical references mean that it could take place in any world the audience wanted. France’s metamorphosis from an absolute monarchy to a republic could therefore be duplicated in the comedy – and, unlike *Le Misanthrope*, no extensive censorship or re-writes were required.

On a similar note, no revisions were needed to remove the historically-specific vocabulary that so blighted *Le Misanthrope*’s Revolutionary afterlife, as no aristocratic or royal titles are used in *Le Dépit amoureux*. The sole exception occurs in Act II, scene 2 of the two-act edition, when Gros-René uses the term ‘princesse’. Yet this royal title is used as a term of endearment, rather than to denote any royal blood; furthermore, its use is intended to be comedic, as Gros-René attempts to ape the manners of the higher classes in addressing Marinette: ‘Et toi donc, ma princesse, / A son exemple aussi feras-
tu la tigresse?’ It is intended to be ridiculous – and so too is the characters’ extravagantly ‘courtly’ mode of address, as the following example demonstrates (l. 2):

MARINETTE: Adieu, Gros-René, mon désir.
GROS-RENE : Adieu, mon astre.
MARINETTE : Adieu, beau tison de ma flamme.
GROS-RENE : Adieu, chère comète, arc-en-ciel de mon âme.

The humour in this exchange lies in the failure of Gros-René and Marinette to successfully reproduce aristocratic courtesy, but within the context of the Revolution, it is possible that the target of ridicule shifted to include the very persons they are mimicking. With the audience’s hatred directed squarely towards the wealthy, privileged spheres of society, such parodies of aristocratic manners could be understood as mocking the aristocrats themselves, and become an example of the flaws, or ridiculousness, of these elevated classes. In short, Le Dépit amoureux and Le Misanthrope were at opposite ends of the scale in terms of the threat they posed to the new, Revolutionary, France.

Le Dépit amoureux was thus apparently harmless – but even this comedy contains some examples of the language most associated with appropriation. In one of the additions made to ‘tie’ the two-act version together, Lucile – having been rejected by Eraste – rails angrily against his treatment of her:

LUCILE: Quoi! Me traiter ainsi? Qui l’eût pu jamais croire, Lorsqu’a le rendre heureux je mets toute ma gloire? C’en est fait; aujourd’hui je prétends me venger;

‘Venger’ and ‘gloire’ hark back to the lexis of Brutus and Guillaume Tell, as well as some of Alceste’s more passionate outbursts in Le Misanthrope. Unlike the patriotic Brutus and Tell, Lucile’s outburst refers to her own self-interest – but that does not mean that it could not be applied to the Revolutionaries. Her determination not to sacrifice herself for the benefit of another may have been perceived sympathetically at a time when Revolutionary citizens were asserting their rights and no longer subjugating
themselves to the king’s will. Even a play as seemingly detached from the events of the French Revolution as *Le Dépit amoureux* offered some opportunity for appropriation - albeit on a smaller scale than *Brutus* or *Guillaume Tell*.

Taken as a whole, however, *Le Dépit amoureux* is remarkably free of any ties to French history or politics. The action is simple, but could feasibly take place in any environment – and that includes a Revolutionary one. None of the ‘disadvantages’ which shackled *Le Misanthrope* affected *Le Dépit amoureux*, which meant that it was free to benefit from the liberation of the theatres and the Revolution in general. It did not have anything specific to offer the audience – it did not have the Revolutionary ‘sound bites’ and republican characters of *Brutus* or *Guillaume Tell*, but, at the same time, it did not offend Revolutionary views. It was a rather unusual comedy to become a Revolutionary sensation, but, at a time when even *Brutus* could be interpreted as being counter-Revolutionary, it is remarkable that there were any comedies at all which could remain ‘harmless’ through the many phases of the French Revolution. As *Le Dépit amoureux* was one of these plays, it very naturally ranks as one of the most successful plays of the entire theatrical repertoire from 1789-1799.

**Conclusion: the Spectrum of Appropriation**

*Le Misanthrope* and *Le Dépit amoureux* are thus polar opposites in almost every sense; but *Le Misanthrope* also presents a contrast to other appropriated works such as *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell*. Unlike these compositions, *Le Misanthrope* had not disappeared from the stage prior to the Revolution, or been characterised by very low performance figures. It was successful before 1789, and was thus familiar to spectators – and a vocal, conservative section of the audience was prepared to defend the drama against attempts to appropriate it. Consequently, it is unsurprising that many of the most popular works of the French Revolutionary stage were those plays which had enjoyed only muted
success prior to 1789. No one was particularly concerned if *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell* were reborn as Revolutionary models: spectators had no reverence for them, or strong memories of watching them being performed under the absolute monarchy. They, like many other *ancien régime* plays, only truly came to life during the Revolution. *Le Misanthrope*, however, was not a blank canvas, waiting to be reworked – for it had already been interpreted. Spectators had no real preconceptions of *Brutus* or *Guillaume Tell*, and so a violent re-visualisation of their content was possible; but how could a Revolutionary reading of the more famous works in French literature ever be accepted? They, unlike obscure compositions, were resistant to appropriation.

*Le Dépit amoureux* is at the other end of the spectrum. Like *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell*, it was suitable for a new, Revolutionary interpretation; but its appropriation was of a very different nature to that of Voltaire’s and Lemierre’s tragedies. There is little evidence that its meaning or interpretation underwent any concrete metamorphosis. The play was the same composition that it had been for years, with the Revolution leaving no obvious mark upon it. And, in some ways, it is for that very reason that it stands out: whilst other compositions fell from favour or were altered by censorship, *Le Dépit amoureux* remained a prominent presence in the theatrical repertoire. It was remarkably untouched by its environment – but perhaps ‘untouched’ is not the right term, since *Le Dépit amoureux*’s sudden and explosive popularity at this time is a very concrete sign that it was greatly affected by the Revolution; it is just that this impact was felt in a very different way. Whereas tragedies such as *Brutus* were enthusiastically adopted and then actively discarded, and comedies such as *Le Misanthrope* were altered in the hope that they would then become a ‘fit’ for the (appropriate) Revolutionary psyche, *Le Dépit amoureux* was immune from such attention.
Why? Always, it seems, the play was distinguished by the faults it did not possess. Its primary advantages were all ‘negative’, in the sense that it did not contain the ‘counter-Revolutionary’ themes and terminology that would limit and restrict the Revolutionary career of other works. It needed to be ‘detachable’ from Molière’s monarchist ties, to be basic enough for easy comprehension, and to amuse spectators who were surrounded by political and social upheavals. The formerly neglected comedy ticked each box, and usually by dint of what was absent from its text. The example of *Le Dépit amoureux* therefore suggests that appropriation could be positive or negative. In other words, there was a spectrum of appropriation, ranging from the positive appropriation of *Brutus*, *Guillaume Tell* and *Le Misanthrope* at one end, to the negative appropriation of *Le Dépit amoureux* at the other. However, the question of whether a play was appropriated for the qualities it possessed or the faults it did not, does not necessarily affect how ‘Revolutionary’ the object was perceived to be. If *Le Dépit amoureux* was subjected to negative appropriation, then it was still a Revolutionary composition. It was, after all, the work of Molière – but the Molière of the Revolution.

Leon has examined the Revolutionary obsession with how ‘revising *Tartuffe* and its resonating biographical associations with Louis XVI worked to dislodge the memory of Molière from monarchical France and resituate him in a republican context’ (p. 74). No such efforts were required with *Dépit amoureux*: it fell into their hands, ready for a more ‘patriotic’ interpretation.

It is possible, however, that *Le Dépit amoureux* may have played a part in the re-writing of history in a rather different way. This is a comedy with no king, no royalty, no political intrigue and, to some extent, no history: with the ‘baby-swapping’ of Ascagne and the financial causes behind it removed from the two-act version, the play has no real ‘past’. That is, nothing has happened before Act I, scene 1, apart from the formation of the two love-triangles - even the events responsible for the lovers’
confusion (Ascagne’s dual identity and secret marriage) are absent from the text, leaving behind a situation where the present is not connected to the past (and where there is an effect without a cause). The past was a painful subject during the Revolution, as demonstrated by attempts to ‘erase’ any vague allusion to it in the theatrical repertoire. Could it therefore be the case that *Le Dépit amoureux* was almost the embodiment of the Revolutionary attitude? That it was disconnected from its history in the way that the Revolution wished to be separated from the *ancien régime* which gave birth to it? More than being insulated against the outside world, it had successfully separated itself from its own history – the objective so purposefully pursued by the French government in 1794.

It is very revealing that *Le Dépit amoureux* was compared during the Revolution to the Panthéon; like the Panthéon, the comedy’s career from 1789 to 1799 is evidence of attempts to re-set the clock at zero. It was no good introducing a new, Revolutionary calendar starting at ‘An I’ if the theatrical repertoire exposed the centuries of royal rule which preceded this ‘new’ world. Unfortunately, not all plays could be remodelled in the manner of the Panthéon, with the very foundations of *Le Misanthrope* belying its royalist origins. Attempts were obviously made to positively appropriate the comedy, but they were doomed to failure: audiences knew the work from when a king ruled France, and so its very existence was a reminder of the lie inherent in the term ‘An I’. It was, in short, proof that the past could not stay buried, just as *Le Dépit amoureux* was an illustration of how history could be detached from the present. They were opposites in almost every sense, even to the very manner of their appropriation. In the end, however, it was *Le Misanthrope*’s Revolutionary career which truly predicted France’s future: history can be suppressed, but never wholly forgotten. *Le Dépit amoureux* was a
spectacular example of how the present could be enjoyed without any recourse to the past which created it, but *Le Misanthrope* was proof that this was only ever an illusion.
The popularity of ancien régime comedy was not restricted to Molière. Regnard's comedy *Les Folies amoureuses* was performed almost as frequently from 1789 to 1799 as *Le Dépit amoureux*, becoming one of the most popular plays of the decade.\(^1\) Molière and Regnard, however, were linked by more than the high performance figures of their comedies. Even before the Revolution, the two playwrights were frequently associated with each other, as famously demonstrated by Voltaire: ‘qui ne se plaît pas à Regnard, n’est pas digne d’admirer Molière’.\(^3\) This connection was highlighted during the Revolution, with their names evoked together as the 'greats' of comedy;\(^4\) a zealous Revolutionary had also wanted to burn Regnard’s works together with those of Molière.\(^5\) Indeed, *Le Dépit amoureux* and *Les Folies amoureuses* were occasionally performed together.\(^6\) And, as with Molière's comedies (as well as Voltaire and Lemierre's tragedies), *Les Folies amoureuses* was linked to Revolutionary developments and figures, with the politician Brissot being compared to the character of Crispin. His self-introduction, ‘J’ai fait tant de métiers d’après le naturel / Que je puis...

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\(^1\) *La Décade Philosophique*, 1796, X, p. 558.
\(^5\) See Section 6: ‘Resetting the Clock on *Le Misanthrope* and *Le Dépit amoureux*: Positive and Negative Appropriation’.
\(^6\) Théâtre de Mademoiselle Montensier. See *Le Mercure Universel*, 15 March 1792, p. 239.
m’appeler un homme universel’ (I. 5) was cited alongside the rather scathing comment that ‘c’est d’un seul trait peindre un véritable intrigant; et nous croyons, de bonne foi, que Brissot n’était pas autre chose’.

Les Folies amoureuses is not the most obvious play to take on contemporary, or political, relevance. A comedy in three acts, the action revolves around the figure of Agathe, as she feigns madness and takes on three separate identities: that of a musician, an old woman, and a warrior. These disguises are used to manipulate her tutor, Albert, culminating in her escape from his power and marriage to her lover, Eraste. Agathe's victory over Albert thus recalls the plots of Molière's L'Ecole des maris and L'Ecole des femmes. L'Ecole des maris was Molière's most performed play of the Revolution with 316 performances, but the success of Les Folies amoureuses and L'Ecole des maris did not extend to L'Ecole des femmes, with its 75 performances. This is an intriguing state of affairs; but the popularity of comedies detailing the machinations of students against their teachers indicates that Les Folies amoureuses's appeal did not lie in negative appropriation. Unlike Le Dépit amoureux, it features a 'warrior' outlining the glory of war, a woman intriguing for her freedom and a 'villain' in the form of the overbearing, totalitarian tutor. These plot points may all be humorous, but they have the potential to appeal to Revolutionary audiences.

In spite of the enormous success of Les Folies amoureuses during the Revolution, there are no published accounts of the play's staging. Its characters and dialogue were not incorporated into political culture, and it was barely mentioned in

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9 Gifford P. Orwen states that 'the situation is essentially that of L'Ecole des femmes'. See Jean-François Regnard (Boston: Twayne, 1982), p. 84.
10 See Chapter 3, 'Defining the Corpus: Performance, Statistics and Political Appropriation'.

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journals. I have found no evidence of censorship, or of new, altered editions of the comedy. Similarly, there is little modern scholarship on Les Folies amoureuses, and almost none on its career from 1789-1799. In order to investigate its appropriation, I will concentrate on a close reading of the work, placing it in the context of the theatre (and society) of the French Revolution. I shall also consider its similarities with the equally successful L'Ecole des maris to ascertain their basis of appeal and compare this with the failure of L'Ecole des femmes to emulate the popularity of Les Folies amoureuses - a comedy with essentially the same plot. Les Folies amoureuses has been described in recent years as 'fanciful froth concocted for the sole purpose of entertaining', but from 1789-1799 it may have been much more than that. How did it manage to remain popular throughout the Revolution, when so many plays were being suppressed or altered? Why did its success differ so markedly from that of L'Ecole des femmes, when they were in essence the same tale? And how did a nondescript comedy from 1704 become one of the most performed plays on the French Revolutionary stage?

Regnard and the Revolution

References to Regnard's oeuvre during the Revolution indicate the extent to which all plays were being actively linked to the political and social changes taking place in France. Whilst Regnard did not compose any tragedies, and none of his comedies emulated the celebrated status of Brutus or Guillaume Tell, they were nevertheless associated with contemporary events. One of Regnard’s comedies, Le Joueur, was used to heap further condemnation on the Church:

11 Les Folies amoureuses is mentioned briefly by Emmet Kennedy, who gives the following summary of its action: ‘The Folies amoureuses of Jean Regnard (the Molière of the eighteenth century) is also about a chaperone who keeps his tutee under lock and key. Her two suitors act as if they were going to war and seize the “fortress” containing Agathe - herself dressed up as a warrior’. See Emmet Kennedy, ‘The Most Performed Plays of the Decade’ in Theatre, Opera and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris (Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 21-34 (p.27).
12 Orwen, Regnard, p. 86.
Le cardinal parle aujourd’hui de paradis, parce qu’il n’a plus d’argent pour acheter l’enfer; à peu près comme le joueur de Regnard est amoureux de sa maîtresse, quand il a perdu son or dans un brelan.13

Even verses which offered no political commentary on the Revolution were associated with the state. Whilst a police report from 1797 remarked that at the theatre 'on y omet les applications injurieuses au gouvernement', it was still verses that offered what could be regarded as a contemporary allusion to society that were particularly well received - including the following ‘joke’: 'on a beaucoup ri et beaucoup applaudi le valet du Distrait, lorsqu'il a dit que le droit de timbre sur les billets doux rapporterait beaucoup à l'État'.14 The connection forged between these plays and contemporary events is surprising given that Regnard himself was often presented as being the creator of compositions that were amusing, but nothing else: ‘les vives et joyeuses comédies de Regnard, le Joueur, le Distrait, Le Légataire Universel, qui n’ont pas d’autre but que de plaire et d’amuser’.15

Yet even if these works had no other purpose than to plaire and amuser, they were not immune from being perceived as dangerous, or from being removed from the stage. Along with Molière's comedies, Regnard's Le Joueur was banned in 1794; of Regnard's plays, it appears to be the one linked most frequently with political events. The verses ‘Vous voyez devant vous un abime s’ouvrir / Et vous ne laissez pas, mes amis, d’y courir’ were used to portray the fear of the bourgeois population in 1792, as the conservative Journal de la Cour et de la Ville lamented that ‘Il n’y a pas un bourgeois de Paris qui, pris à part, ne témoigne hautement son mécontentement et son indignation, des extravagantes atrocités dont nous sommes sans cesse les témoins et les victimes’.16 However, the primary criticism of this comedy - as with Regnard's other

13Joseph Lavallee, Jean Baptiste Joseph Breton de la Martiniere, Louis Brion de la Tour, Voyage dans les departemens de la France (Paris: Brion, 1792), IV, p. 13
16 Journal de la Cour et de la Ville, no. 35, 4 June 1792.
compositions - was the perceived lack of morality, a result of Regnard seeking only to *plaire* or *amuser*. In the same year as it was banned, *La Décade Philosophique* claimed that *Le Joureur* placed spectators in an immoral position: ‘Faire rire, aux dépens d’un vieil oncle avare, passe; mais mettre les spectateurs de moitié avec un neveu sans cœur, sans humanité, sans probité, avec un valet filou et hussaire, cela est un peu trop fort; et il est difficile de mouver là de la moralité’. The same publication deemed another of Regnard's dramas, *Le Légataire Universel*, to be too scandalous to allow on the stage: ‘quelle immoralité! Il est impossible de conserver sur nos théâtres une pièce aussi scandaleuse’ (p. 274).

*Le Censeur Dramatique* also warned of the perils of Regnard's comedies, stating that his ‘Pièces sont une école dangereuse pour les mœurs’. In fact, *Le Censeur Dramatique*’s condemnation stretched to proclaiming that ‘Regnard a fait un grand tort à l’Art dramatique, en détournant la Comédie de son but moral, qui est, aux yeux du Philosophe, son apanage le plus beau’ (p. 345). The repeated references to morality in relation to Regnard’s comedies recalls the emphasis placed upon Molière’s *Misanthrope* encouraging ‘bons principes’. Although *Le Censeur Dramatique* is a very moderate publication, and showed no real Revolutionary fervour, it nevertheless appears that the success of *ancien régime* works was significantly influenced by whether or not they supported contemporary, Revolutionary morality. Those of Regnard’s plays that were accused of being immoral - such as *Le Joueur, Le Légataire Universel* and *Le Distrait* - were not particularly popular during the Revolution. They could be applauded, and linked to specific Revolutionary 'themes', but this was not enough to grant them a

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17 *La Décade Philosophique*, 1794, I, p. 275.
18 *Le Censeur Dramatique*, 1797, I, p. 344.
19 See Chapter 6, ‘Re-Setting the Clock on *Le Misanthrope* and *Le Dépit amoureux*: Positive and Negative Appropriation’.
Revolutionary afterlife. Restricted by their perceived lack of morality, they were not
distinguished by any other quality.

Such, however, was not the case for Les Folies amoureuses. It was included in a
list of highly successful comedies listed in a review of L’intrigue epistolaire in 1791:

Cette comédie rappelle bien souvent l’Ecole des maris, les Folies amoureuses, le
Barbier de Séville, Ruse contre Ruse; mais nous désirons que l’on nous donne
souvent des pièces de ce genre; les réminiscences sont pardonnables, quand on
se ressouvent aussi bien.  

Each of these plays predates the Revolution, and each enjoyed enormous popularity.  
They also share a common link: each of these plays features students and teachers in
some shape or form. In Le Barbier de Seville, the Count dresses as a student in Act I
and as a teacher in Act III; in Les Folies amoureuses, Agathe endeavours to escape from
her tutor’s jealous incarceration; in La guerre ouverte, ou ruse contre ruse, Lucile
assists the Marquis de Dorsan in freeing her from her teacher’s home so that she may
marry the Marquis and not her tutor’s chosen groom; and, finally, in L’Ecole des maris,
Sganarelle’s desire to marry his pupil Isabelle is scuppered as he inadvertently assists
the secret lovers in their schemes.

It cannot therefore be the case that comedies were appropriated at random to
dorer la pilule, or to provide escapism - because, as shown by Molière’s Le Dépit
amoureux, there was no such thing as escapism. Even Regnard's comedies, pre-dating
the Revolution by almost a century and seen as having been created for the sole purpose
of entertaining audiences, could be linked to contemporary events and people.
Moreover, the presence of teachers (and students) in a number of the most popular plays
of the period indicate that works were appropriated for very specific reasons. These are
not like Le Dépit amoureux, distinguished for the faults it did not possess. Certainly, Les

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21 Mercure Universel, 16 June 1791.
22 L’Ecole des maris was staged 316 times; Les Folies amoureuses, 280; Le Barbier de Séville, 313; and
Guerre ouverte ou Ruse contre Ruse, 176. The first three comedies number amongst the ten most
performed plays of the Revolution, with Guerre ouverte ou Ruse contre Ruse appearing in the top forty.
*Folies amoureuses* did not offend Revolutionary ideology - as *Le Mercure Universel* stated, 'les réminiscences sont pardonnables, quand on se *ressouvient aussi bien'* (16 June 1791). Unlike *Le Misanthrope*, it offered no painful reminders of the past, and was not obviously tied to the monarchy. But its success was based on something palpable; it was successful because it appealed to Revolutionary audiences.

**Duped Teachers and Revolutionary Lessons**

The parallels between *Les Folies amoureuses* and other successful comedies of the period are not limited to the presence of teachers and pupils on the stage, but extend to the way in which the teacher (Albert) is tricked and defeated by his pupil (Agathe). This theme was common on the Revolutionary stage, as indicated by a review of *Le Bureau d’adresses de mariages* in 1799:

> C’est le mille et unième tuteur dupé, qui, comme dans l’Ecole des Maris, sert lui-même de commissionnaire pour favoriser, sans s’en douter, les amours de sa pupille avec un amant qu’elle lui préfère.²³

*L’Ecole des maris* was Molière’s most successful comedy from 1789 to 1799, and something of its appeal is hinted at by Bailly in 1790, as he declares that the comedy demonstrates ‘les dangers où l’innocence est exposée dans l’esclavage et dans l’ignorance’.²⁴ He refers to slavery again as he maintains that Sganarelle ‘tient ici Isabelle dans l’esclavage’ (p. 108). This is a theme that runs throughout *Les Folies amoureuses*: Agathe complains of ‘l’esclavage où je me trouve’ (II. 7), whilst Albert endeavours to make her his very real prisoner, by transforming his house into a prison:

ALBERT  
Je veux, du haut en bas, faire attacher des grilles,  
Et que de bons barreaux, larges comme la main,  
Puissent servir d’obstacle à tout effort humain.

²³ *La Décade Philosophique*, 1799, XXII, p. 431.  
In escaping from the control and authority of their tutors, Agathe and Isabelle are reversing the traditional power balance – much as the Revolutionaries, in rebelling against their monarch, had upset the perceived ‘natural’ order of France. Agathe will escape from the cage imposed upon her by her tutor, just as the populace had broken away from their king. Perhaps more importantly, however, tutors and students reinforced the educational purpose of the theatre: as Tarin makes clear, ‘le théâtre ne veut plus être une école de frivolité ou un plaisir mondain. Il prétend instruire, c’est-à-dire informer et former l’opinion.’ With Agathe playing the role of a student in the play, her actions could be viewed and interpreted within an educational sphere. In that sense, Les Folies amoureuses could - like Brutus and Guillaume Tell - be presented for the moral edification of the audience. And instead of Les Folies amoureuses acting as an 'escape' from the Revolution, it contributed to it.

Apart from his authority as a teacher, Albert is also comparable to a monarch in terms of the lexis that his applied to him and his actions. Royalist terminology is used to characterize Albert’s ‘rule’, with Agathe complaining that ‘J’ai trop long-temps languis sous son cruel empire’ (I. 1). This characterization of Albert as a sort of head of state is further emphasized by references to his ‘loix si dures’ (Agathe, I. 1), whilst his château represents his own realm, from which its subjects cannot escape (‘J’ai fait dans mon château, toute la nuit, la ronde’ (Albert, I. 2). The other characters’ view of him is uniformly negative, with Lisette comparing him to an array of negative authority figures:

LISETTE: Ah, par ma foi, Monsieur, vous nous la donnez bonne, De croire qu’en quittant votre triste personne, Le moindre déplaisir puisse saisir mon cœur! Un écolier qui sort d’avec son précepteur; Une fille long-tems au célibat liée, Qui quitte ses parens pour être mariée;

Albert therefore becomes a despotic tyrant. Like Tarquin in *Brutus*, and Gesler in *Guillaume Tell*, he is despised and vehemently opposed by the other characters.

Albert’s pretensions to kingship – or absolute authority – are emphasised by his preoccupation with inheritance. His ultimate goal is to ensure that he can produce an heir: ‘Et je veux achever ce que j’ai commencé, / Faire des héritiers’ (Albert, I. 3). The theme of inheritance, as noted above, was omitted from the abridged version of *Le Dépit amoureux*, but it remains an integral aspect of *Les Folies amoureuses*. Even Agathe’s present situation, as the ward and pupil of Albert, is the result of ‘inheritance’, as it was the wish of her parents (I. 7.). Albert’s intentions, however, will be thwarted: not only is Agathe eventually taken from his care by Eraste, but Lisette states quite clearly that ‘Jamais postérité de vous ne sortira’ (I. 3). His subjects are in revolt; and they ensure that Albert’s line will end with him. The claims of inheritance and succession are shown to be weak, and at the mercy of the general populace. Albert’s abuse of power is responsible for his misfortune, as he is confronted with his culpability following Agathe’s pretence of madness:

**LISETTE**

De ce triste accident vous êtes seul l’auteur;  
Et voilà ce que c’est d’enfermer les filles!

Like *Brutus*, there is no attack on kingship or authority *per se*, but on the failure to use it wisely. And Albert's overwhelmingly negative characterisation ensure that he will be seen as guilty of this crime. He is ‘Défiant, dur, brutal’ (Eraste, I. 7) and completely without redeeming features.

This aspect of the comedy was remarked upon in its Revolutionary *avertissement*, with the suggestion that, had Albert not been so odious, Agathe would
lose spectators' interest (p. 221). To rectify this, Regnard 'a donné à Albert tous les défauts possibles', so that Agathe's revolt would become more palatable: 'plus il rend pesant le joug de la servitude sous laquelle elle gémît, plus il autorise les ressorts qu'elle fait jouer pour s'en affranchir' (pp. 221-22). Strikingly, even the lexis of the play's avertissement stresses (and emphasises) her imprisonment. Moreover, Albert's vices are presented as being in proportion to the hatred he inspires in Agathe, meaning that her rebellion becomes justifiable. In being portrayed as an oppressive tyrant, Albert is a more clear-cut figure of hatred than Arnolphe in L'Ecole des femmes. Both Agnès and Agathe rebel against the male authority figures who have been their guardians since childhood, but it is Albert who is presented as being utterly reprehensible. If the identity of the 'enemy' in Brutus and Guillaume Tell could determine how one could be moderate whilst the other was more extreme, then perhaps the extent of blame, or hatred, attached to the figure of ridicule in Les Folies amoureuses and L'Ecole des femmes allowed one to have greater Revolutionary appeal than the other. There is a clear division in Les Folies amoureuses between the 'tyrant' and his 'prisoner', echoing the divide between characters that was evident in Brutus and Guillaume Tell. These are all plays based around confrontation between two opposing parties: a situation that recalled that of the Revolution.

Les Folies amoureuses being a comedy, Albert is obviously not seriously harmed physically. It is therefore unsurprising that the comedy's popularity waned during the Terror, and that it never again achieved the level of popularity it enjoyed in 1791. This was a time when Louis XVI had lost his absolute authority over his subjects,

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27 Whilst Mechele Leon does not consider L'Ecole des femmes or L'Ecole des maris in any detail, she does hint at the Revolution's need for strong, simple opposition between characters: 'Instead of the subtle and complex depictions of jealousy, desire, and misalliance in L'Ecole des femmes, revolutionary audiences far more frequently attended L'Ecole des maris, an earlier Italianate comedy featuring the stock character Sganarelle as a jealous old pantalone duped in the amorous pursuit of his clever ward Isabelle'. See Molière, the French Revolution and the Theatrical Afterlife (University of Iowa Press, 2009), p. 33.
but when – as audience reaction to *Brutus* during this period demonstrated – the resolution to rid France of its king had yet to be reached. What connects it to other popular comedies of the period, however, is the role-reversal in the student / teacher relationship – or, on a more general level, the humiliation of the authority figure. This plot point was similarly dominant in *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell*, albeit in a more serious context. Perhaps, within the ‘school’ of the Revolutionary theatre, the audience required a target: a figure upon whom they could pin their hatred. Perhaps, however, the capitulation of the authority figure on stage justified the events taking place off stage, and reassured spectators and Revolutionaries alike, that they were only doing what was right.

*The Princess in the Tower*

In a marked departure from *Brutus, Guillaume Tell* and even *Le Dépit amoureux*, the action of the comedy is dominated and controlled by the actions of a woman: Agathe. She alone decides how her escape from Albert’s château is to be effected, as she pretends to be ‘mad’ from Act II, scene 6, onwards: her intended knight in shining armour, meanwhile, must simply resign himself to being informed of her actions in a letter (‘vous serez surprise du parti que je prends’ (II. 10)). Intriguingly, the power of women is a theme that was identified in *L’Ecole des maris*, with verses outlining their potential to destruction being reproduced in journals such as the *Mercure Universel.*

Agathe’s empowerment is therefore two-fold: she not only overcomes the dependency of the student, but rejects the inactivity of women. Albert attempts to enforce female limitations upon her, as he admonishes her that ‘Des filles sans intrigue, & qui sont

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28 *Mercure Universel*, 16 June 1791:
‘Malheureux qui se fie à femme; après cela, / La meilleure est toujours, en malice seconde, / C’est un sexe engendré pour damner tout le monde; Je renonce à jamais à ce sexe trompeur, / Et je donne tout au diable de bon cœur’ (Sganarelle, *L’Ecole des maris*).
retentues, / Sont, à l’heure qu’il est, dans leur lit étendues’ (I. 2). Such an attitude is rejected, and Albert is shown to lack the necessary power to enforce her subservience.

In this sense, Agathe's relationship with Albert is comparable to that between a subject and his king. Albert's attempt to keep Agathe in simple docility echoes Arnolphe's wish to enforce Agnès's obedience and ignorance in *L'Ecole des femmes*, with both Agathe and Agnès showing themselves capable of deceiving their masters without the assistance of their respective lovers. Yet, unlike Agnès, Agathe is not content merely to flee her captor, as she manipulates Albert into (unknowingly) financing her future with Eraste. She also does not require the entry of a guardian figure (Agnès's father, Enrique, in *L'Ecole des femmes*) to ensure that her plans come to fruition. She is, indeed, a more active, determined opponent to her tutor than Agnès. She stands alone - and stands successfully, too. No authority figure comes to her aid, because she is capable of overthrowing authority by herself. And so just as Albert is a more reprehensible figure than Arnolphe, Agathe is a more independent, active rebel than Agnès. The basic plot of both comedies may be very similar, but the heroines' foes, strength of motivation and level of self-sufficiency are decidedly different.

Agathe's schemes also differ from those of Agnès in that they are sustained for some time, as she feigns insanity to adopt the 'personality' of a number of characters, from a musician (II. 7) to an old woman (III. 4), and finally a warrior (III. 10). The entire comedy therefore hinges on the art of disguise, and its success in fooling (and humiliating) Albert. According to Joseph Harris, the act of disguise is, in itself, almost invariably used as a weapon against authority figures:

Unless carried out for purely playful or malicious reasons, disguise of any sort is typically towards a person or persons in a nominal position of authority; no personal profit can be drawn from the deception of social equals or inferiors. Most fictional protagonists adopt disguise as a strategic response to an external
situation, thus opposing or countering other characters’ power with the power of illusion.29

In using disguise and role play, Agathe begins the process of dethroning her hated tormentor – but in something of a twist, this game of illusion is presented as being representative of her true self: ‘Je lève enfin le masque’ (Agathe, I. 1.). It was her earlier docility that was merely an illusion, whereas her machinations now reveal her true power – she is a ‘fille à prendre un parti violent’ (I. 1), who will now take control over her destiny (I. 1):

AGATHE    Je veux, sans nul égard, lui montrer désormais
          Comme je prétends vivre, & combien je le hais

She takes responsibility for her own life by using the lexis of violence so prominent in Brutus and Guillaume Tell. Although Kennedy’s argument that the appeal of Le Dépit amoureux lay in its use of intrigue was false, it remains valid for Les Folies amoureuses.30 Like the Revolutionaries, she will do whatever is necessary to ensure her own survival, and uses complex intrigue to not only escape Albert’s domination, but also take some of his gold with her.

One of Agathe’s disguises, however, is different to the others: for her final costume also involves cross-dressing, as she adopts the power and personality of a male warrior. The act of cross-dressing is, as Harris points out, usually one of rebellion: ‘cross-dressing is [...] almost inevitably an act of transgression’, with transgression being defined as ‘any act of overstepping a boundary, whether literal or metaphorical, or breaking a law, rule or other code of conduct’ (p. 27). Agathe, however, is not content to simply torment her keeper, but resolves to free herself from him completely (I. 1):

AGATHE    Je serais fille à prendre un parti violent,

30 Kennedy, ‘The Most Performed Plays of the Decade’, p. 25. See also Chapter 6, ‘Resetting the Clock on Le Misanthrope and Le Dépit amoureux: Positive and Negative Appropriation’.
In some ways, her disguise is synonymous with the new identity of the Revolutionaries. In donning the garb of war, she rejects her former life, and prepares to face her new life: ‘Morbleu, vive la guerre! / Je ne puis plus rester inutile sur terre’ (Agathe, III. 10). Any consideration other than battle and warfare are soundly rejected, as she hungers after the ‘glory’ of victory: ‘Le beau sexe sur moi ne fit jamais d’effet. / La gloire est mon penchant, cette gloire inhumaine’ (III. 10). With great excitement, she urges her companions to follow her to battle, and to victory:

AGATHE

Qu’il me tarde déjà d’être au champ de la gloire!
D’aller aux ennemis arracher la victoire!
Que de veuves en deuil! Que d’amantes en pleurs!
Enfans, suivez-moi tous; ranimez vos ardeurs.

Like Tell, then, Agathe addresses her audience directly with a rallying cry and urges them to follow her.\textsuperscript{31} The similarities between Agathe and Tell do, however, extend beyond a talent for such speeches. Unlike Brutus, they are not politicians – they are civilians who have, in extraordinary circumstances, risen to new heights. It is striking that Lemierre’s Tell states that ‘nés Républicains, nous sommes tous Soldats\textsuperscript{32}, for the action of \textit{Les Folies amoureuses} would seem to support this statement. Both of the young lovers take their turn to wield the soldier’s sword before effecting their escape from the ‘tyrant’, whilst the majority of the characters make frequent use of military lexis in their dialogue.

This aspect of the play is referred to openly by the character of Eraste, as he notes that Crispin’s expressions all revolve around warfare: ‘Tu te sers à propos de termes militaires’ (I. 7). The idea of doing battle with Albert is one that is common to most of the characters, with Lisette referring to him as ‘un lutin, que l’enfer a vomi sur

\textsuperscript{31} See Chapter 5, 'Guillaume Tell: From Laughing Stock to National Hero'
\textsuperscript{32} V. 5. 1381-1382.
la terre / Pour faire aux gens dormans une éternelle guerre’ (I. 2). Even Albert inadvertently contributes to this theme, as his efforts to keep Agathe ‘safe’ inside his chateau give the situation the appearance of a siege:

CRISPIN Moi comme ingénieur & chef d’artillerie,
Je vais voir où je dois placer ma batterie
Pour battre en brèche Albert, & l’obliger bientôt
A nous rendre la place, ou soutenir l’assaut

This preoccupation with warfare may be exaggerated and ridiculous, but that does not mean that it was necessarily perceived as such during the Revolution. Violence and warfare could intrude upon performances of *Le Mariage de Figaro* with an audience member crying out ‘tout finit par des canons’ – and there is no reason to assume that such zeal did not have an impact other comedies, especially as *Les Folies amoureuses* actually features direct references to canons.\(^{33}\) The play’s language may be exaggerated and comic, but its similarity to that of *Guillaume Tell*, and even *Brutus*, indicates its new relevance to a Revolutionary audience.

The parallels between *Les Folies amoureuses* and the tragedies appropriated politically at this time are therefore numerous: a hated tyrant is defeated; an oppressed subject casts off her chains to taste victory; and warfare is presented positively. This rebellion is also presented as just. In the same way that Brutus swears his oath on an alter and alludes frequently to *les Dieux*, Agathe’s scheme is shown as being almost transcendent: ‘Que le Ciel vous maintienne en ce dessein louable’ (Lisette, I. 1.). Albert, meanwhile, is associated with the satanic (I. 3):

LISETTE [...] Satan, Lucifer,
Et tant d’autres Messieurs habitans de l’enfer,
Sont des objets plus beaux, plus charmans, plus aimables,
Des bourreaux moins cruels & moins insupportables,
Que certains jaloux, tels qu’on voit en ce lieu

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\(^{33}\) Cry from an audience member at a performance of Beaumarchais’s comedy, *La Folle Journée ou Le Mariage de Figaro*, as reported in: *La Chronique de Paris*, 26 December 1789.
This outburst is obviously exaggerated and consequently humorous; it also, however, removes any crime from the act of overthrowing a king. Rather than being God’s chosen ruler, Albert is a creature of Hell, and it is thus the duty of his subjects to oppose him – that is, they are not merely in revolt, but behaving righteously. Their decision to trick and overthrow a figure who inhabits almost every conceivable position of authority (teacher, jailor, father, ruler) is thus shown to be laudable. They are soldiers of the Revolution, casting off their docility, and preparing for battle.

Conclusion: Comedy and Appropriation

Les Folies amoureuses is therefore an intriguing mixture of the elements frequently found in appropriated drama from this period. Regnard’s comedy has more in common with Brutus and Guillaume Tell than with Le Dépit amoureux. Like these tragedies, it possessed a surprising number of the themes and plots which appealed at this time – and this ensured its prominence on the stage. If the theatre was a school, then Les Folies amoureuses was an introductory lecture. None of the themes so cherished by Revolutionaries were explored in any considerable depth, and the tyrant was left alive and largely unharmed, but it was a step in the right direction. Its performance alongside La Mort de César is therefore far from extraordinary: whilst Agathe humiliated her tyrant, Marcus Brutus would kill his.\(^{34}\) It is almost a ‘light’ version of the republican tragedies that dominated the repertoire – a way of teaching the audience without being too obvious about it.

It cannot therefore be the case that ancien régime comedies were simply a way to dorer la pilule. If we look at these texts, almost each one contains a common factor – and that is the use of a target, or enemy. Le Dépit amoureux stands out for not

\(^{34}\) See Chapter 3, ‘Defining the Corpus: Performance, Statistics and Political Appropriation’.
possessing such a character, but the majority of the others follow this trend, from *L’Ecole des maris* to *Le Barbier de Séville*. This is also the case for the most popular tragedies, such as *Brutus*, *Guillaume Tell* and *La Mort de César*. Albert may only be ‘un jaloux’, but he is portrayed as being more reprehensible than any demon – and equally as reprehensible as the likes of Tarquin and Gessler. Is this why *Les Folies amoureuses* was so much more popular than *L’Ecole des femmes*, a comedy with essentially the same plot? Albert is placed in sharp opposition to every single other character within the play, whereas Arnolphe is on good terms with numerous other figures (Chrysalde, Oronte). The 'split' between two opposing camps (as found in *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell*) is more sharply in evidence in *Les Folies amoureuses* than in *L’Ecole des femmes*, or even *Le Misanthrope*.

Seemingly, the need for a clear-cut 'enemy' figure was as pronounced in comedy as it was in tragedy, leading *Les Folies amoureuses* to become one of the most performed plays of the decade. And yet in spite of Albert's role as a 'target', or tyrant, *Les Folies amoureuses* failed to maintain its astonishing success beyond 1792, whereas *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell* positively flourished during the Terror. Could it be the case that the destruction of tyrants became a matter of seriousness, rather than a topic that could be applauded in a comedy? Or could it be that the humiliation of Albert was not sufficiently extreme? As this is a comedy, it was obviously not possible for the villain of the piece to die, even though he is confronted by Eraste wielding Agathe’s sword. His embarrassment is limited to the loss of his absolute authority over Agathe and Lisette – in short, it is the embarrassment of Louis XVI's loss of absolute authority over the French populace. After 1792, therefore, *Les Folies amoureuses* became more difficult to apply to contemporary events; its fortunes did recover briefly in 1796, but soon dwindled again. Its moment had passed.
Comedies were banned, corrected and appropriated during the Revolution, because there was no way that it could be otherwise: there was no room on the stage for anything that did not relate to contemporary events. Agathe’s rebellion, the references to Albert’s *loix si dures*, the call to arms and the defeat of the tyrant could, therefore, become contemporary and instructive. It is at the other end of the spectrum entirely from *Le Dépit amoureux*, but not from *Brutus* or *Guillaume Tell*. Like these two tragedies, *Les Folies amoureuses* presents spectators with an example of how to behave, how to rise to greatness, and how to cast off the limitations of their past. These plays present a sharp contrast with Molière’s comedy: whereas one portrays a present that is entirely disconnected from its past, the others show how to break away from that same past. It is not that the past does not exist – it is simply that it is rejected.

History, therefore, plays a prominent role in many of the most popular texts of the period. It must either be absent or soundly denounced – and in fleeing her tutor, in resolving to remove her ‘mask’, Agathe is rejecting any possibility of compromise. In escaping her prison, she has broken free of the constraints imposed upon her by an external authority. Power, it seems, will no longer come from a higher source. Her future is uncertain – but she is confident that it will be a happy one. And perhaps this optimism is the real reason behind the comedy’s failure to maintain its early popularity – for it was a cheerful optimism seemingly at odds with its political environment. Death, violence and fear were the hallmarks of the Terror, and even afterwards, there was a sense that the time for gaiety had passed: ‘nous avions peur de nous compromettre en riant’. Les Folies amoureuses is a fairytale version of the Revolution: the tyrant is defeated by the beautiful princess in the tower and her handsome knight, but everyone carries on unharmed. Yet, the Revolution was no

35 *La Décade Philosophique*, 1796, X, p. 558.
fairytale. A time was coming when France’s problems could not be solved by smiling schemers, and more direct action would be necessary.
In all, then, the tragedies and comedies appropriated during the French Revolution - though seemingly very different - are all connected by their vocabulary, characters, themes, settings and ‘unstable’ Revolutionary popularity. However, though the objects of appropriation may demonstrate such similarities, the manner of their appropriation varies considerably. *Brutus*, indeed, was appropriated several times, whilst *Guillaume Tell* was only appropriated during the Terror. Some were popular with the public (*Le Dépit amoureux, Les Folies amoureuse*)s); others were popular with a particular government (*Guillaume Tell*). Many were appropriated on the basis of some positive appeal (be it the presence of a national exemplar, or military lexis), whilst others became popular due to a lack of negative, aristocratic connotations. In some ways, it is the mode of appropriation to which each play was subjected that sets each work apart; for it reveals not only the text’s Revolutionary appeal, but also its ‘role’ on the French stage.

In the case of tragedies, the political nature of their appropriation is both clear and open: in fact, the government literally ‘stamped’ this onto *Guillaume Tell* when its sub-title became *les Sans-Culottes Suisses*. This does not mean, however, that comedies could not be political also. They were not financed by the state, and their characters were not national exemplars, but they were still the subject of a more subtle brand of political appropriation. *Les Folies amoureuse* appealed because of its violent, military lexis; its humiliation of the authority figure; the empowerment of the non-aristocracy; the calls to war and victory, and the rejection of subservience. These are all ‘values’ that are either common to other appropriated works (such as *Brutus*) or have an obvious connection to the progress of the French Revolution, with the defeat and shame of Albert in Regnard’s comedy bearing clear parallels to the fall of Louis XVI from absolute power. The appropriation of comedy was thus not apolitical.
Comedies were expected to support the ‘propagation des bons principes’, and to support ‘les moeurs’.\textsuperscript{1} They were expected to be Revolutionary. And, thanks to the power of appropriation, even seventeenth-century comedies could support the course of the Revolution. The barrier between spectator and stage had become so weak, so difficult to discern, that whatever was seen in the theatre had to relate, in some way, to the Revolution. The divided nature of the audiences - and consequently the potential for a royalist interpretation of some plays - necessitated the censorship and alteration of works such as *Brutus* and *Le Misanthrope* to ensure that they continued to encourage the ‘bons principes’ of the time. Did this mean that they were counter-Revolutionary? No - it means that the power of appropriation was being used to suppress the creative, productive efforts of spectators who would appropriate such a play to their own cause. Just as spectators had become embroiled in a battle for dominance at early performances of *Brutus*, appropriation was a way to assert Revolutionary dominance.

Those texts that were used as political propaganda (such as *Guillaume Tell*) were the ones most frequently re-written and censored. They were the chosen weapons of the Revolutionaries, and thus needed frequent honing. Because they were so close to the government - to the point of being cited in political discourse - it was all the more important for them to defy any attempt at a royalist interpretation. In suppressing problematic lines of dialogue, in making more Revolutionary substitutions, the Revolutionaries were not only exercising their power, but displaying it for all to see. Conservative journals made complaints, and the *Courrier des Spectacles* even railed that ‘un des plus grands abus que nous ayons reproché aux théâtres, c’est de changes les

\textsuperscript{1} See Chapter 6, ‘Resetting the Clock on *Le Misanthrope* and *Le Dépît amoureux*: Positive and Negative Appropriation’; Chapter 7, ‘Cross-Dressing, Role Play, Knights Errant and Tyrants: Overthrowing the Stereotypes of Power in Regnard’s *Les Folies amoureuses*’. 206
pièces'. They argued that deceased authors ‘ne souffriraient sûrement pas que l’on mutilât ainsi leurs productions’ (p. 196). But how could they stop it? Lemierre’s distress at Guillaume Tell’s Revolutionary career did not impede its role as political propaganda. Appropriated plays ceased to belong to their authors: they belonged to the Revolution.

The objects of appropriation were thus all political, and all in the possession of the Revolutionary cause. There is, however, certainly a discernible ‘gap’ in my corpus between the negative appropriation of Le Dépit amoureux and the positive appropriation of Le Misanthrope, Les Folies amoureuses, Guillaume Tell and Brutus. The two categories are not absolute. A text may, in fact, exhibit signs of both modes of appropriation: for example, though Les Folies amoureuses contains obvious ‘positive’ themes and dialogue, it also has some ‘negative’ qualities, in that it contains little evidence of the monarch or his court. Meanwhile, Guillaume Tell is noticeably absent of royal characters, with even the role of a tyrant played by a ‘gouverneur’ instead of the monarch proper. Appropriation, in this sense is a sliding scale that admits of degree, so that the positive appeal of one play does not necessarily indicate that it has no ‘negative’ attraction, too.

In the case of my corpus, I would suggest that Guillaume Tell is the strongest example of positive appropriation, with the death of the authority figure and its obvious parallels to France; second would be Brutus, with the foundation of Republican Rome (but no execution of enemy characters); then Les Folies amoureuses and its victory over the aging despot, and finally Le Misanthrope, with Alceste’s distaste for aristocratic society being complicated by its royalist setting. At the other end of the spectrum, Le Dépit amoureux’s appropriation is largely (though not exclusively) negative in nature.

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The point at which these compositions can be situated on the positive-negative scale of appropriation has no bearing on their performance figures, or on the strength of their political presence in the French Revolution. I do propose, however, that positive appropriation was more associated with tragedy, whilst comedy tended towards negative appropriation. The most popular *ancien régime* tragedies of the French Revolution had national exemplars for heroes - and consequently, they became active models of how citizens should behave. These tragedies had to contain behaviour and principles that could be imitated; the rejection of history, of a royalist society, was not enough on its own.

*The Point of No Return: The Problem of History*

The question of how to deal with history is one that relates to each play in my corpus. And, in almost each one, it is resoundingly rejected: Brutus holds Tarquin’s claim to the throne as being completely without value; William Tell refuses to bow to the might of a distant monarch, in spite of his ‘lineage’ or ‘inheritance’, and Agathe flees her tutor, shattering the authority which had been given to him by her parents. *Le Dépit amoureux* might be said to go one step further, as it denies the very existence of history at all, with the problems of inheritance that dominated the published play omitted from the majority of performances. Arguably, it is only *Le Misanthrope* that acknowledges the claims and power of the past, as the machinations of the aristocrats / the court overpower Alceste’s relationship with Celimène, and bring it to its conclusion. Moreover, the inclusion of royalist terminology in the dialogue means that it is easy to situate the comedy in a specific period of history – the *ancien régime*. It thus fails to reject history in a double sense – both within the world of the play, and in terms of the text’s references to an external, historical system.
The appeal of this rejection of history is only too clear, for the Revolution saw the calendar re-set at ‘An I’ – that is, in a very real way, France tried to reject its own history, and distance itself from the past realities of the nation. This has obviously been noted in modern scholarship, with Mechele Leon stating that ‘inventing a complete break with the past’ was the ‘era’s defining political strategy’. 3 What is ironic, however, is that this rejection of the past was found, not in modern works, but in the comedies and tragedies that emanated from the very regime the Revolution had overthrown. How could they flee the past when the texts they appropriated were the very representation of that past? Admittedly, the history they portrayed was either unspecific or culturally removed from France, but Brutus and Guillaume Tell are nothing if not historical. They simultaneously expose the existence of the past even as they reject their own personal histories – and thus expose the flaws inherent in any attempt to re-set the clock at zero. The Revolutionaries may have banished the more obvious signs of the absolute monarchy from the stage, but they allowed symbols of long-deceased men and regimes to flourish. Was it simply the case that Brutus and Tell had been so utterly appropriated that they had been separated from their origins, and become modern Frenchmen? It is true that they were national exemplars, and their respective situations were interpreted as representations of Revolutionary Paris. And yet, I believe that the dominance of ancient figures over the theatre – Brutus, Tell, and even Marcus Brutus – had another cause.

The dominance of ancien régime plays over the Revolutionary repertoire presents a paradox. Even as the Revolutionaries rejected history, they depended upon it. Even as the claims of inheritance were destroyed, they turned to historical examples of revolt (Brutus, Guillaume Tell, La Mort de César) to justify their actions. Why? Because it displayed the full extent of their power. They could take the plays of the

ancien régime, the very plays that had been performed during the reign of a king, and make them Revolutionary. It was a destruction of the past, but also a creative exhibition of power: anything could be made Revolutionary. Some of the most ardently pre-Revolutionary journals of the decade (La Vedette, Les Révolutions de Paris) rejoiced in the horror of ‘aristocrats’ at the Revolutionary content of ancien régime plays. More conservative publications expressed their horror at the changes that were being made to dramas such as Le Misanthrope. In appropriating those works that had been associated with the previously aristocratic realm of the theatre, the Revolutionaries were engaged in a power display. Because what else was appropriation but an exercise in politics and power?

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4 See Chapter 1, ‘Introduction’; Chapter 4, ‘Revolutionary Brutus: Royalist, Republican, Reject’.
9: APPENDIX


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