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DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRENCH DRAMA  
OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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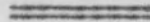
The purpose of this thesis is to show the development of the comedy of the eighteenth century by selections from representative plays which illustrate the principal phases of the period. The eighteenth century, as we shall see, is divided into several periods from a literary point of view,--the early period when the writers tried to model their works on those of the preceding century, and the latter half century where new elements begin to creep in. This study will divide these writers into three generations. The first will continue the works of Moliere, but lack the genius to rival him. The second generation will return to Moliere with more ability for imitation; in this period will also come the drama of sensibility. The third generation with Diderot and Sedaine will develop into melodrama, and there we shall see tendencies of the drama of to-day.

At this time I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. W. S. Barney who has so kindly assisted me in this research.

Annie Preston Heilig

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PART I

The dramatic literature of the seventeenth century was characterized by the psychological study of man from either the tragic or the comic point of view; of man taken as a psychological unit and considered only in the permanent manifestations of the soul and therefore universal; of man to the exclusion of anything that was not a study of character, that is to say, man in relation to professions and social conditions.

Tragedy and comedy were rigorously kept apart, each in its own particular object of study. Thus Corneille had specialized in questions of honor, patriotism and religion; Racine, in problems of love; Moliere, although bringing on the stage a collection of bourgeois and servants, taken from the middle class, because one could not laugh at kings or the nobility, made fun of vices which are quite universal and eternal.

On the other hand all discussion involved in either tragedy or comedy had no bearing at all upon

the time, the classes, the social or political conditions; and contemporary political and social problems were very carefully omitted from the study. In short, the theatre of the seventeenth century is not a mirror of a particular period. It is so eternally true in its pictures that toward the end of the eighteenth century an English actor, Robert Kemp, could say that Molière as an artist would be considered as belonging not to France but to humanity. The above facts characterize the universality of the French theatre of the seventeenth century.

In the eighteenth century such was the admiration for great masters like Racine and Molière, that dramatists thought only of trying to maintain the traditions of those two masters.

Toward the middle of the century, however, it was evident that such imitation was insufficient to satisfy the new cravings of the dramatists and of the public. We find especially in the second part of the eighteenth century that the dramatic productions assumed new characters. Psychological studies were not, it is true, discarded, but what the seventeenth century had carefully avoided, that is to say, the study of the particular as against the general or universal, became the main preoccupation of the dramatists. By the particular one means everything that is character-

istic of a period, inherent situations, social classifications, professions, etc. Also the political order was no longer monopolized by pamphleteers but was found on the stage. All activities of society interested the dramatists.

The theatre assumed a social importance, so much that it was used in tragedy as well as in comedy as a weapon in the fight for the rejuvenation of society and for a reform of institutions. This does not mean that the characteristics of the theatre of the seventeenth century were absent from the eighteenth century theatre.

One means to insist only upon the interest that the dramatists took in their own times and in the fact that the theatre of the eighteenth century was a reflection of the immediate preoccupation of the men of letters and of the public of the period; on the fact that dramatists embraced the cause of the "philosophers". Such a radical change in the attitude of the dramatists is explained by the same reasons that brought into the public consciousness the decided changes that were to culminate in the Revolution.

Many important influences contribute to the change in the forms of the drama in this period. The social conditions in France supplied some of the most important phases. The eighteenth century early began to evaluate in the light of reason, the long established



customs and institutions; and the result was the formation of a body of opinion represented by the enlightened thinkers called the "philosophers", who put their literary abilities to the service of the causes which were dear to their hearts, namely, social, religious and political reforms. "Thus we see the eighteenth century is the period which caused the gulf between the autocracy and self-government, between Roman Catholicism and toleration, between the classical spirit and Romantic revival. The spirit of change came about after the death of Louis XIV, (1) with the crumbling of the regime of autocracy and bigotry; (2) with the hope that long periods of civil war were over; (3) with the reaction in favor of individualism which took form especially in lack of restraint in social life, scorn of principles previously accepted in the political and religious order; love of luxury and general depravity. As for the upper classes who had given to the king soldiers and courtiers and to the church abbots and bishops, they found themselves in 1715 depressed by the life of servitude at the court, by the hypocritical attitude imposed upon them by the old and idle king."<sup>1</sup> Now that the life of constant representation at the court, of necessary curbing of passions was no longer necessary or even

1. Strachey, Landmarks in French Literature, p. 132.

possible, they wondered what they were going to do. Boredom reigned over their life and with boredom a craving for new sensations, hence their debauchery or at least their easy-going life. A general emptiness of soul is the mark of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. For some this fostered intellectual pursuits, a mingling with the philosophers; for others it meant looking for strong sensations, to be found only in the culture of passion, in the elaboration of a new form of sensibility. In short, we witness in the upper classes a sort of psychic crisis. This is not more true of France than of England; there seems to be a let-down in moral life everywhere during this period.

In intellectual life the reaction took the form of criticism of: (1) the Divine Right of Kings, (2) of Autocracy, (3) of the absolute power of the church, (4) of the existing social order. Following this destructive criticism, an elaboration of plans for a better order culminated in two new theories; Enlightened Despotism and Self Government.

In literature and art the old theory of the imitation of the ancients was shaken by a long quarrel, and the principle of authority was totally destroyed. The man of letters was no longer a specialized artist; he was now a thinker who admitted the value of his own

point of view as opposed to tradition and was very often swerved by sentiment.

In the social order very few great families were still supporting themselves by the proceeds from their lands. The bankers were more and more powerful; a new class of financiers was elbowing its way up to the first ranks of nobility. Nobility in itself did not insure an idle and respected life. Young and impoverished nobles found it quite respectable to go abroad and build a new fortune in the colonies. The middle class was assuming a new importance; the upper classes, thanks to the servitude imposed on them by Louis XIV, were losing their importance and the former respect attached to it. A bourgeois was soon to be able to speak his mind about the nobles. The privileged classes themselves were uneasy and dissatisfied. Many welcomed the new theories and it became a fad to accept and discuss new, subversive ideas.

In the political order the local Parlements gained importance from the death of Louis XIV; and free discussion helping, we can very well understand why in 1789 all the delegates to the États Généraux were able to present a precise program of reforms which spelled the destruction of the old régime.

In the religious order the death of Louis XIV and Madam de Maintenon caused a general outburst of

suppressed skepticism. The Regent Philip of Orleans was showing the way. The courtiers were following suit with the bourgeoisie treading on their heels. Voltaire became the true representative of this spirit. Frank skepticism and defiance of the established order were shown in the quarrel with the Jesuits who in almost every nation in Europe were condemned, for they were the defenders of hierarchy and the spirit of authority.

In short, as early as the first years of the reign of Louis XV we find a rebellious preference for reason against obedience, for individual thinking against discipline, for independence against autocracy, for individual liberty against hierarchy; that is to say that we witness the formation of a self centered, critical, aggressive public. This, of course, had its influence on the body of literary artists.

Some followed tradition, and found that they could not long interest the changing public; others and the best were delighted to find themselves caught in the world of a turbulent life, were interested in the full manifestations of their powers, their inquiring minds delving into sciences, philosophy, politics, political economy as well as studying new conditions for the drama, the novel and art in general. Very often a great writer was at the same time a

fervent student of a new order, that is to say, a philosopher. We might state that in the second part of the eighteenth century the best literature was also the most combative and was in the hands of the philosophers.

The development of colonies by France, the greater security by trade, the absence of wars, the hope of finding fortunes in the far away lands and the idleness following long wars were incentives for more travel and more international contacts. Cosmopolitan interests manifested themselves. Foreign countries were looking to France as a model in all phases of life. French was the spoken language of the educated classes everywhere.

The French then began to compare their conditions with those of other foreign countries and were much influenced by the liberty and tolerance which seemed to permeate the literature and customs of England. Frenchmen like Voltaire and Destouches had already visited England and brought back with them many new ideas which they introduced into their works. Englishmen came to France to study and were entertained in the "salons". There were exchanged ideas and opinions. Thus began, developed, and came to a grand conclusion a movement which inaugurated social, political and religious reforms through a corresponding movement in the current of ideas.

Why is it that the theatre which in the seventeenth century so carefully avoided all controversy should now be considered as a very effective weapon in the hands of the reformers? It was always an excellent medium of propaganda, because the appeal had to be made to the crowd rather than to the individual, and the people of the eighteenth century had a passion for the theatre. The theatre was now the rage of the bourgeois and lower aristocratic classes. At this time in Paris there were two theaters, the Théâtre Français and the Théâtre Italien, which competed in showing the works of the chief playwrights. Encouraged by the establishment and the success of these playhouses the dramatists sought to please the public and new types of plays began to appear.

Since tragedy and comedy, on account of their external form and the traditions to which they held, did not prove sufficient in the hands of true dramatists as a means of carrying on the new philosophic propaganda, the intermediary form of play called the "drame" developed in the last half of the century. This form was considered very advantageous for influencing public opinion and was the natural outgrowth of combining tragedy and comedy, since the people were tired of the conventional types, as such. They wished to see characters more real than kings.

and queens, or rather to see characters more like themselves. The playwrights were not slow in realizing this; neither were they slow in taking advantage of their opportunity to spread propaganda for reforms. The opportunity was excellent, since there was little or no censorship of plays, for the public interest and the people against whom the plays were directed were the first to ask for their presentation. Naturally, after the presentations, the plays were discussed, which fact further helped to develop public interest.

"The eighteenth century theatre, then, was a real forum where was debated each evening the ideas which troubled the mind, the system which already deeply interested the divided society. There one engaged in the struggle of the old ideas and the new; there were discussed the questions of the rights of the aged, of paternal authority, of conjugal relations, of inequality of social conditions. All a leaven which moves to laughter without thinking of the peril which can come from it. Comedy casts to the winds these vague scattered ideas which one day will come to rest in the mind of a vigorous logician like Rousseau and be translated into threatening and aggressive theories. The theatre without doubt does not always correct morals, in spite of the famous sayings, but it does

have the gift of suggesting and making common certain boldness which would frighten one if seen in a dogmatic work but which laughter makes one pass over.

Through the tolerance accorded the comic muse, the theater is going to become a reflecting mirror which not only produces the manners and the physiognomies of the epoch, but its dreams, its chimeras, its illusions, its display of sentimental philanthropy, its virtuous declamations mingled with the boldest theories of love and marriage."<sup>1</sup>

Thus we have found that tragedy as well as comedy took up the fight for reform. Voltaire, as an author of tragedy, propounded on the stage his own political and religious theories. And in the comedy, men like Regnard and especially Beaumarchais did their best to ridicule, not especially universal and eternal vices, but the political, social and moral conditions of their time. The evolution of the drama followed the awakening of public conscience and the evolution of literature in general. It coincided with the movement of the "philosophes". In fact the drama of the second half of the eighteenth century was in the hands of the "philosophes", namely, Voltaire and Diderot, who were influential in the publishing of the "Encyclopédie".

1. Lénient, La comédie en France au XVIII siècle, I, 159.



The eighteenth century in French drama was divided into two periods; the first one was a period of continuation and imitation of the preceding one, a period of groping, as it were, for it is not easy to shake off all conventions at once, and too, the dramatist is less free in the beginning, for he cannot afford to give too great a shock to his audience at once. The second period was one of more originality. "In it we find the new tendencies which caused the decadence of tragedy, that is tragedy becomes a "pièce à thèse" and the value of a play like *Zaïre* is in its ideas; it is for us a document on the "façon de penser" of the eighteenth century."<sup>1</sup>

But it would be wrong to think that the entire dramatic production of this period was the work of propagandists for a new order. Others attempted to please the public and to follow the general trend of feeling as well as of thinking. "As for the comedy, while following Moliere, it evolves toward comedy of customs, the satire of conditions taking little by little more place than the analysis of characters, suddenly however towards 1730 and without one being able to give an appreciable cause, it seems that one returns to the comedy of character. Destouches, Piron, Gresset carry on this temporary reaction. But the

1. Des Granges, Histoire Illustrée de la littérature Française, p. 538.

genre without doubt being exhausted, one turns away from it and we see appear the sentimental comedy, imitating the tragedy of Racine in the theatre of Marivaux. One finds at last in this sentimental comedy too many conventions, an imitation too far away from nature, a genre of too artificial an interest. Then appears the "comédie larmoyante" or the "drame bourgeois" of La Chaussée, which later developed into the "tragédie bourgeoise" and with Diderot. Sedaine and Beaumarchais give birth to the drama of today".<sup>1.</sup>

1. Brunetiere, Histoire de la littérature française classique, pp.230-31.

PART II  
 THE STATE OF THE DRAMA  
 AT THE  
 BEGINNING OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

---

"It may be said of French tragedy that the classical conception hung over it like a pall during the eighteenth century. From the great works of Corneille and Racine were deduced a set of fixed rules; and the eighteenth century playwrights considered that a slavish imitation of the methods employed by these models was sufficient to provide tragedy comparable with theirs. It did not occur to them that something beside a proud recipe was necessary to insure an important result. Those dramatists who did not have some intuition that serious drama required innovation were for the most part unable to reconcile new departures with the classical formulae to which they held unswervingly<sup>1</sup>".

Crébillon was the only tragic playwright of any importance between Racine and Voltaire. He was the first to see that to hold its own tragedy must necessarily introduce new elements. One attributes to Crébillon these words; "Corneille has taken the earth; Racine Heaven: Hell is left to me"<sup>2</sup>. His aim

1. Brenner and Goodyear. Eighteenth Century Plays, p.XI
2. Des Granges, op. cit., p. 653

is to incite terror and he introduces the romanesque which is more melodramatic than tragic. His tragedies then are melodramas in verse. His style is often heavy and obscure though remarkable through its firmness and its violence.<sup>1</sup>

As Voltaire also had the intuition that tragedy must undergo a change if it were to make an appeal to his age, he set to work on certain possibilities to rejuvenate it. He was a great imitator of Racine and followed him closely in regard to poetic and dramatic principles. In bringing about a change, however, Voltaire was anxious to put into his plays some novelties, a plan which was unusual for his time. He had spent some time in England and had been influenced by the works of Shakespeare. As he felt that French tragedy was too long and that there was not enough action, he made it more lively; he also felt that if more emphasis were put on the spectacular, it might better please the public. Henceforth, then, he developed this element in his dramas. Voltaire also denied that love was an essential element in tragedy and wrote three plays, the most important of which is Mérope, in which this love element is lacking.

"Voltaire is credited with fifty three plays, over half of which are tragedies offering much variety

1. Des Granges, op. cit., p. 655.

of subjects and settings. He used nearly twenty different countries and periods. Greece and her dependencies, Biblical lands, Rome of course, Africa and America, several places in the Orient and France. In this respect and in the details of subjects rather than in their general themes he broadened the limits of tragedy, which he has romanticized in the direction of intrigue and action.

In Zaire (1732) the unquestionable masterpiece of Voltaire's tragic theatre, one finds a conflict between religion and love. Zaire must choose between her religion and her love for the sultan Orosmane. Jealousy on the part of Orosmane brings about the death of Zaire and himself. The interest of the play lies in the humanity of the characters. They are alive and sympathetic. Voltaire in his Preface said; 'Zaire is the first play in which I have dared to abandon myself entirely to the sentimentality of my heart'. The innovation of this play is the depiction of the chivalry and Christianity of the crusaders and the elements resembling Shakespeare are the marriage of the Sultan and the Armenian girl, and the jealousy of his wives; however, the father of Zaire is a Frenchman.

Voltaire has tried to hold tragedy on the high plane of gallantry and complicated romanesque, and to

restore it on the stage by giving to his plays more lively action, and by making more interesting and more poignant the general truth of sentiment and passion. One has to regret, however, that he has to the detriment of this painting, admitted too much action, too much of the spectacular, too many attempts at contrasts of customs; that he has committed in the development of his plays through a disastrous method of composition and correction, strange awkwardness, and often abused *méprises* and recognitions; that he has not always given to his style and versification the care which would be desirable. But he had at least a real and exceptional instinct for the theatre, the art to bring into it touching situations and to profit by them; he has known how to make his characters live, to make them sympathetic and even to create characters; Mahomet, Zaire and Hérope are not unworthy rivals of the characters of Corneille; he has lent to passion a language full of sentiment and naturalness, something not at all commonplace then; he has painted certain rôles of intense human emotion, giving to the expression of sentiments a general import which finds an echo in all hearts; he has known how to treat great interests and not without eloquence; he has been often, if not a great poet, a poet always elegant, smooth, vigorous and colorful; he had the

honor of introducing Shakespeare to France, of composing tragedies with French and Christian characters and of leaving alone with Racine a tragedy without love which is a masterpiece".<sup>1</sup>

Brunetiere<sup>2</sup> has said that Voltaire lived in too civilized a world to understand, to know, and to express truly tragic sentiments. Peace, salons, pleasing surroundings, bringing with them "the sweetness of evil", have softened the great passions which no longer exist in literature except as a law of tragedy.

Such are the characteristics which have kept the tragedies of Voltaire and his followers from living to our day. Lanson<sup>3</sup> said that the eighteenth century made an effort to revive tragedy but its remedies ended by killing it.

With the innovations which Voltaire made in his tragedies, they are no longer types of the "genre" called tragedy but an evolved type of the serious and dramatic play which in the end of its evolution will be called "drame".

#### THE FOLLOWERS OF MOLIERE

The first generation, Regnard, Lesage, Dancourt.

As we have seen, tragedy in the eighteenth century follows Corneille and Racine. Comedy tried to imitate Molière,

1. Petit de Julleville, Le Théâtre en France, p.5578
2. Brunetiere, op. cit., p. 157
3. Lanson, Histoire de la littérature française, p.645.

who, however, had no immediate followers. After him there was a transition period before he had any real imitators. In this period appear the works of Regnard, Lesage, and Dancourt.

In the study of the development of the drama of the eighteenth century it shall be the purpose of this thesis to show its evolution by means of synopses of the representative plays of the main authors of the period.

Regnard (1656-1710) continues the comedy of character, but employs caricature. As his sole purpose is to amuse, he treats the humorous side in his plays in a manner calculated to bring about hilarious laughter. His characters create a mirth which is unquestionable, but their morals are wrong. In "Le Légataire Universel" (1708) act V, after Crispin in disguise has dictated Geronte's will we have him saying:

Crispin. Laissons-le dans l'erreur: nous sommes héritiers.

Lisette, sur mon front viens  
ceindre des lauriers;

Mais n'y mets rien de plus pendant  
le mariage.

Lisette. J'ai du bien maintenant assez  
pour être sage.

The passage quoted from Le Légataire Universel shows that Regnard did not intend to moralize. There



are many amusing scenes in Le Légataire universel which is the story of an old man almost ready to die. Having no immediate heirs, he decides to leave his fortune to a niece and nephew, whom he has never seen. A near-by nephew and the servant Crispin intervene. The servant disguises himself and plays the parts of the unknown niece and nephew. He shows them up in such a fashion that Uncle G ronde does not wish to leave them his property. While G ronde is in a stupor, Crispin dresses like him and induces the notary to write the will as he dictates. Because he is so disguised, because Lisette weeps so much and Eraste is so concerned about his uncle, the notary is easily deceived. When the notary returns with the duplicate of the will and G ronde knows nothing about it, they are able to make him believe that he has made the will in his sleep and he says: "C'est donc ma l thargie". Eraste with his servants manages to keep him deceived and after a misunderstanding on his part, there is this refrain: "C'est votre l thargie". This happens so many times that it is extremely hilarious. G ronde maintains the will that Crispin has made, never realizing that he has not dictated it himself. This allows Isabel and Eraste to marry; also Crispin and Lisette.

"In most of Regnard's plays all classes are

mingled and confused. A servant says openly to his master. "You swear in your room and I on the staircase. I imitate you in everything."<sup>1</sup>

"The movement in his plays is rapid and natural. His intrigues are cleverly worked out and Lénient with others, says that his dénouements are regarded as superior to those of Molière."<sup>2</sup>

"Dancourt will not be discussed at length, but his interest lies in the fact that he presented peasants on the stage, and through them he is said to have invented the "style villageois", Bellinger says that Dancourt's ideas were in the right direction, but his equipment as a dramatist was not sufficient to give much weight to his work."<sup>3</sup>

The principal object of Lesage (1668-1747), like that of Dancourt, was the painting of the customs of the times, the disconcerted world and especially the new power of money. Lesage has used every character to show the corruption of his day. Brunetière has said that Turcaret (1709) is a comedy of customs, treated by means of the comedy of characters, that is to say, a comedy in which the situations are subordinate to the exigencies of the painting of the characters. Lesage, will in addition, have the honor of immortalizing the "traitants" in the person of

1. Lénient, op. cit. I.23
2. Ibid I.27
3. Lénient, op.cit., I, 23
- Ibid I, 27
- Bellinger, A Short History of France, p.268

Turcaret.

"Turcaret is a former lackey who has become rich one knows not how; he is one of those rascals whose sudden rise is a problem and a scandal. He is a shameless, heartless rascal, become rich through his underhand dealings, speculating on the vices and miseries of his fellowmen. He is a libertine and débauché; he has left his wife whom he keeps in the country with a pension, allowing her all foolish privileges so that he in town may have his liberty and the right to call himself a widower. He denies his family and hides his origin as one ashamed of it. His wealth is his only merit".<sup>1</sup>

The Baroness is the same type of character. She has duped Turcaret and plays him for his money, in order to get it for the chevalier; the latter in turn has duped the Baroness, who is a widow of nobility without dignity and subject to flattery and a good time.

The play takes many humorous turns but nothing particularly striking happens to cause real outbursts of laughter as in Regnard. The end of the play is rather amusing, when wife, husband, sister, chevalier and marquis all meet at the house of the Baroness. The surprise of the whole party at Turcaret's entrance,

1. Lénient, op. cit., p.141.

his surprise at seeing his wife and sister, and then his arrest are very amusing.

All the characters of this play are immoral to the extent that they do many tricky things for money. The servants trick their masters and each character tricks the other, but in the end Turcaret is caught and must pay for his vice. The servants, however, have plotted and as Frontin, the servant, says in the last scene, "Now ends the reign of Turcaret and here mine begins". With his rich and witty sayings, Frontin is the clown. He tells so many truths that he shows up both the character and the personages of the play. As is often true in the plays of this period the servants are the superior characters. They seem to be able to read human nature better than their master, but in morals they are like them.

The following excerpts portray somewhat the trend of the characters:

Frontin. J'admire le train de la vie humaine! Nous plumons une coquette, la coquette mange un homme d'affaires, l'homme d'affaires en pille d'autres: cela fait un ricochet de fourberies le plus plaisant du monde. (Act I, Sc. XII.)

Frontin. Mais patience, après quelque temps de fatigue et de peine, je parviendrai

enfin a un état d'aise: alors quelle satisfaction! quelle tranquillité d'esprit! je n'aurai plus à mettre en repos que ma conscience. (Act II, Sc. XII.)

Turcaret. Me venir dire à mon nez que j'ai été laquais de son grand-père! Rien n'est plus faux; je n'ai jamais été que son homme d'affaires.

La Baronne. Quand cela serait vrai; le beau reproche!. Il y a si longtemps! cela est prescrit. (Act III, Sc. VI.)

Lisette. Tu as les billets?

Frontin. J'en ai déjà touché l'argent, il est en sûreté; j'ai quarante mille francs. Si ton ambition veut se borner à cette petite fortune, nous allons faire souche d'honnêtes gens. (Act V, Sc. XVIII.)

Lisette. J'ai du bien maintenant assez pour être sage.

Both have received their money through intrigue, thus we see the moral bad, but with Lesage the main character had to pay for his evil doings.

"Lesage believes that it is through the truth that his pictures can portray a moral lesson and always he is content to avenge virtue through the irony with which he denounces vice."<sup>1</sup>

1. Abry, Audio, Crouzet, Histoire illustrée de littérature française, p.294.

## THE IMITATORS OF MOLIÈRE

The second generation-  
Destouches, Piron, Gresset.

After the death of Molière there were two generations of writers who more or less imitated him. We have considered the first generation in the preceding paragraphs; the second contains Destouches, Piron and Gresset. From the titles of their plays Le Glorieux, La Métomanie, Le Méchant, one sees that they expect to continue, or rather revive, the comedy of character as Molière created it in the seventeenth century. The comic vein weakens with this second group, however, and we find new elements creeping in.

"Moral and instructive comedy seem to have been the intention and principal object of Destouches. On this point he goes further than the great masters of the seventeenth century. Corneille declares that the end of all theater is first of all pleasure; if through the liberality of the soul, the poet can add some instruction, so much the better; but pleasure is the first consideration of dramatic art. Molière is of the same opinion and finds that the great art is to please. Destouches, like La Bruyère, believes "It is not enough that conditions of the theatre be not bad: it is necessary that they be decent and instructive".

Destouches explains himself in the Preface to Le Glorieux "I believe that dramatic art is valuable only in so far as it has for its end to instruct, while amusing. I have always had for an incontestable maxim that something amusing, which may be a comedy is an imperfect work and even a dangerous work if the author does not propose to correct customs, to attack the ridiculous, to decry vice and to put virtue in such a beautiful light that it demands respect and veneration."<sup>1</sup>

Le Glorieux is the masterpiece of Destouches, and by some it has been called the comic masterpiece of the eighteenth century. It is the first play in which the element of pathos is joined with that of comedy. In this respect he is a forerunner of *La Chaussée* rather than a follower of Molière.

The conflict in Le Glorieux is between the nobility and the new class of wealthy aristocracy. Count Tufière (*Le Glorieux*) is extremely haughty, and while forced to marry in the new class if he is to be able to have the comforts of life, he submits only half-heartedly. Although not wicked, he is a character whose extreme vanity makes it impossible to get along with or to admire him. He refuses to acknowledge his father, but his heart is at least a little touched by his father's reproaches and in the

1. Lénient, op. cit., pp. 181-2.

end he falls on his knees to beg pardon. In this manner he wins the heart of Isabel, his fiancée and also his father's forgiveness. This father has come back into his own, and "Le Glorieux" again has his former standing in society and all those things which make it hard to change character, yet he says to Isabel "Vos goûts, vos sentiments feront mon caractère". Act V, Sc. VI.

Destouches had intended to end his play with a moral lesson, but instead of being punished, vice is rewarded after a light repentance.

There are many contrasts of character in the play. Philinte is as exaggerated in his humility as the Count is in his pride. Lisette, the most active and the most lovable character in the play, is the daughter of Lycandre and the sister of the Count. She has been reduced to a servant's position through circumstances but has remained her true, charming, virtuous self. She has endeared herself to Lisimon, son of her master, and has even won the heart of her master, who is coarse but not criminal, one of those impossible characters in the world of the nouveau-riche.

Lycandre is a noble character; though in poverty, he still maintains his dignity. He restrains himself as long as he can, but finally his own pride makes him



want to punish his son. Afterwards he forgives him like a true father.

Destouches tries to affect the emotions of the spectators in such a way as to make them weep. His characters utter maxims and moral instructions which they try to illustrate by their actions. This necessarily means that his comedy must take a serious tone. Even though he was unaware of the direction into which he was leading the theatre, Destouches introduces elements which are later to constitute "tearful comedy".<sup>1</sup>

In the following lines we see the humiliation of "Le Glorieux" before his father

Le Comte--Mon coeur, tout fier qu'il est,  
ne vous méconnaît plus.

Oui, je suis votre fils, et  
vous êtes mon père.

Rendez votre tendresse à ce  
retour sincère!

(Il se jette aux pieds de  
Lycandre.)

Lycandre--(Au comte, en le relevant et  
l'embrassant) En sondant votre  
coeur, j'ai frémi, j'ai tremblé...

Mais, malgré votre orgueil, la  
nature a parlé

Qu'en ce moment pour moi ce  
triomphe a de charmes!

Piron ranks close to Molière in classic comedies, whether we consider the brilliancy of the dialogue, originality of character, or interest of the plot.

1. Brenner and Goodyear, op. cit., Intro. p.XIII.

La Métromanie, or The Poet, is a five-act comedy in verse. It is a masterpiece of intellect of the theatre as far as literary qualities go. Piron himself was the type of the principal character of the play. La Métromanie (1738) is a work apart, not only in the theatre of Piron but among the comedies of the eighteenth century and of all times. It is a literary play par excellence, without trace of pedantry, of high intelligence, with all the charm of naturalness and of ease, and even though as live and as gay, as gentle as it is, it seems one of the most difficult to play, one of the least accessible to the public at large. Sainte-Beuve has said that it requires a young, intelligent audience having still the memory of their first ambition. It has been called by Voltaire la Piromanie since Piron himself is the principal character. In this story Damis "la Métromane" pleads the cause of poetry with a warmth and enthusiasm which would make him the most eloquent of lawyers if he consented to enter the bar."<sup>1</sup>

"He confesses keenly that appetite for glory and his anxiety to satisfy it. In vain Baliveau tries to show him that the season for poets is over, that the art is exhausted after so many masterpieces but Damis is not frightened with his struggle with the

1. La Harpe: Piron, "La Métromanie", p.VI.

glorious masters of the past. His uncle ends by foretelling him of the misery, the ridicule, the gossip of the cafés, the stings of satire and of criticism of which he is going to become the target. Damis waits and defies them. All this scene is a continual explosion of "vers étincelants". Never since Molière and Regnard has the style of the comedy been so live and so brilliant".<sup>1</sup>

"Damis thinks that the poet should not buy his renown at the price of his reputation. Glory cannot be where virtue is not. His school will be a school of morality, of comfort, and of steadfast honesty. A poet can ally sensibility and fair play, he does not have to combat the impulses of his heart as does a judge. Damis loves the sentiment which makes his genius vibrate. His passion defies a Breton muse to celebrate wit and feeling whose qualities do not strike the imagination as physical graces but are worthy of being sung and loved. He admires Lucile only to kindle his spirits and to praise Mériadec. He only says to himself that a moral and virtuous writer is an astonishing man. His art is too elevated to be upheld by low sentiments.

"Je veux que la vertu plus que l'esprit  
y brille  
La mère en prescira la lecture à sa fille--  
(Act III, Sc.VIII)

1. Lénient, op. cit., I, p.234

Damis play fails but he tries again and the success seems for him the most advantageous marriage. Unnecessarily he sacrifices the whole world on the altar of poetry. The poet recalls with joy the sufferings over which he has triumphed and which still inspire him. Love of verse is a mania at this time and La Métromanie recalls to youth that there is genius in the ardor of riming, that poetry rarely leads to glory and more rarely to fortune, in spite of the Franciscans who have comedies played at their homes; but it is a school, a perseverance and strength; in order to triumph there must be reverses. Spectators of 1738 were led astray because Piron in his struggle between the bourgeois and the artist dared first to make the artist triumph."

"Piron in La Métromanie has not ventured into unknown regions. His characters are the usual classic type except the poet, who is himself a man of talent but not a genius, this character alone is distinct. In his play he has elements of all "genres". He is neither romanesque and moralizing like Destouches, nor does he deal with intrigue like Regnard and Dufresny, nor the psychologic comedy of Marivaux, nor the "comédie larmoyante" of La Chaussée, but a comedy of charming optimism written in the midst of an agreeable society. The characters are excellent

people "well fed and living comfortably, painted in their daily life".<sup>1</sup>

La Métromanie charms by its thoughts, which are just, discreet, and sane; by its naturalness of expression; and by the number of happy situations.<sup>2</sup>

Danis is Piron himself, who says:

"A ce que nous sentons, que fait ce que nous sommes." (Act III, Sc. VII.)

This is a hint of "La sensibilité", which is soon to follow. Other passages showing this sensibility for poetry are:

"Non, jamais si beau feu ne m'échauffe la veine". (Act I, Sc. III.)

"La sensibilité fait tout notre génie  
Le cœur d' un vrai poète est prompt  
à s'enflammer  
Et l' on ne l'est qu'autant que l' on  
sait bien aimer." (Act I, Sc. III.)

Franciskus-

"Or, il faut quelque loin qu'un talent  
puisse atteindre  
Eprouver pour sentir, et sentir pour  
bien feindre."

In this chapter I have tried to show the development of the theatre up to the period of "La sensibilité" by giving some of the characteristics of the writers who bridge the gap between the neo-classicists and La Chaussée, in which there were writers of great talent but none of first-class genius. Regnard did

1. Chaponnière, Piron, sa vie et ses oeuvres, pp.243-244  
2. Ibid, p. 266

not succeed in the new type because he tried to imitate Molière; then, too, as his sole purpose was to amuse, he played upon special characters. Lesage highly developed "Turcaret", a new type, the financier who had come into existence with the rise of the bourgeois class. Destouches in Le Glorieux brings in something of the pathetic. Piron makes himself the hero in his play. La Métromanie also brings in this element. To Destouches and Piron, then, it is necessary to add Cresset, who tries to put all the evils of the day into one person. Le Méchant is his masterpiece and is representative of the comedy of character. In these last three authors we see traces of sentimentalism, which will fully develop with La Chaussée. Le Méchant belongs to that genre of high, simple comedy whose model is Le Misanthrope, in which there is no intrigue, little action, and a background as smooth as a mirror in which are reflected a certain number of characters and contemporary portraits. There everything is clear, precise, luminous, with less animation and zest than La Métromanie but with more finesse, worldly practices and observations, touches of penetrating satire, and a live and delicate painting of Parisian society, analyzed and judged by a provincial".<sup>1</sup>

1. Lénient, op. cit., I, 244.

"There is, independently of the painting of customs and characters, a general thesis, a question of the day, the parallel between the life of the province and that of Paris. "Le Méchant" is indeed the product of this idle, shrewd, clever society where slander, intrigue, a witticism, and a bad trick played on a neighbor become serious events. Cléon's greatest despair is to see people happy, and, he does the best he can to spare himself this unpleasantness. His wickedness is a negative passion.<sup>1</sup>

The action of Le Méchant is simple, but the chief character is too complex. Gresset has been criticised for uniting into him all varieties of wickedness, envy, treachery, hypocrisy, scandal and deceit. Notice this enumeration of qualities which Lisette gives to him.

"Un fourbe, un homme faux, déshonoré, perdu  
qui nuit à tout le monde, et croit tout  
légitime".

Un mauvais coeur, un traître, enfin un  
homme horrible."

---

"Semer l'aigreur, la haine, et la division  
Faire du mal enfin, voilà notre Cléon."  
(Act I, Sc. I, II.)

Instead of three or four traits, we find Cléon composed of many. He even makes fun of the name given

1. Lénient, op. cit., I, p.246.

him and says--

"Tout le monde est méchant, et personne  
ne l'est." (Act IV, Sc. VII.)

"Le Méchant" has an influence over Valère, but Ariste does not allow himself to be misled by him. Ariste is an honest man who adds a good heart to strength and good sense. He undertakes to struggle against evil, and through love of good arrives at eloquence. His frankness and his loyalty contrast with the malice and the duplicity of Cléon, whom he openly detests and scorns. When Valère speaks of the success of Cléon Ariste says--

"Vous le croyez heureux? Quelle âme  
méprisable!

Si c'est là son bonheur, c'est être  
misérable!" (Act IV, Sc. IV.)

Ariste is not only a sermonizer but a man of resolute actions. He knows how to unmask hypocrisy and rascality. When Florise was frightened about evil reports which Cléon was spreading about herself, her daughter, and Geronte, he assures her:

"Qu'il parle mal ou bien  
Il est déshonoré, ses discours ne sont rien  
Il vient de couronner l'histoire de sa vie  
Je vais mettre le comble à son ignominie."

The conduct of Cléon is deceitful and mysterious; that of Ariste, sincere and frank. It is openly and face to face that he wishes to denounce Cléon.

"Sans me cacher, je veux qu'il sache que c'est moi  
Un rapport clandestin n'est pas d'un honnête homme



Quand j'accuse quelqu' un, je le fais  
et me nomme". Act V, Sc. IV.

It is Ariste who leads Valère to right principles.  
It is also through him that Geronte's eyes are opened".<sup>1</sup>

"Geronte is the traditional father of the comedy.  
He loves his province, chateau, and garden. He is  
opinionated in his affections, even for those who are  
not worthy, though difficult to win over he neverthe-  
less pardons "Le Méchant".

"qu'il ne soit plus parle de torts ni de  
querelles  
Ni de gens à la mode et d'amitiés nouvelles,  
Malgré tout le succès de l'esprit des Méchants  
Je sais qu' on en revient toujours aux bonnes  
gens". (Act V, Sc. X.)

Valère has seen something of the world, on which  
he dotes. His sophisticated air hurts Geronte and Chloé  
who have loved him from childhood. However, nature which  
makes him good at heart, makes him finally see the evils  
of Cléon. He repents of his ingratitude and cruelty  
and realizes that he loves Chloé.

"Je ne sais où j'en suis, ni ce que je résous  
Ah! qu' un premier amour a d'empire sur nous!"  
(Act III, Sc. XII.)

His is the conquest of a beautiful soul returned  
to love and virtue.<sup>2</sup>

Chloé is a young girl of the province, discreet  
and docile who without murmuring is a victim of cir-  
cumstances. She resists neither her mother nor Valère,  
but when Valère returns, her love for him also revives

1. Lénient, op. cit., pp.252-3

2. Ibid, p. 256.

and she pardons him.

Florise, the soubrette, aids Cléon in trying to break up the marriage of Valère and Chloé. Though true to type, Lisette and Frontin, the servants, are good and honest creatures, better than their masters,- not an unusual feature of the eighteenth century drama.

The story of "le Méchant" carries a moral. The fact that the hero is abandoned by all, even his servants, shows that one must pay for his vice.

"Rousseau said that when Le Méchant was played for the first time, Cléon did not seem to any one to correspond to the epithet "méchant", for such was the condition of society. The hero was then a common type just like everybody else. Gresset depicts in this manner a cold, calculating, dilettante sort of meanness, the basis of which was selfishness and vanity. Cléon's evil nature is especially displayed in his effort to prevent the marriage of Chloé and Valère; he stands ready to marry either Florise, the sister, or Chloé, the niece of his old friend Geronte,- who had the utmost confidence in him until he found that he was about to slander him--Cléon has no scruples, he tortures character and virtue for pleasure. When he is finally driven from the house, he is by no means humiliated but goes away with a sneer and a threat.

With a more lively plot, the play would have been

not unworthy of Molière. But we have now reached the end of attempts at classical comedy, for no longer do we find efforts at painting great types; and comedies of character disappear with Le Méchant.<sup>1</sup>

1. Brenner and Goodyear--op. cit., p.302

## LA SENSIBILITE

## PART III

Not all of the dramatic literature of the eighteenth century was the work of the propagandist for a new order. Others attempted to follow the public trend of emotion, as well as of thinking, and the eighteenth century in the history of the drama in France had the privilege of producing a new type of comedy, "la comédie larmoyante", born of the development of a new type of sentimental life, which in literature has been called "La sensibilité".

"La sensibilité" is developed from the Latin word "sentire" which means to feel, to know, to understand, to think, to believe, to have the power of understanding. Furthermore, sensibility is the power of perception and is present wherever occur psychic or material vibrations. It is popularly associated with the workings of the human mind but can be distinguished in any physical disturbance or physical reaction.

Sensibility varies to a great degree. In the plant, for example, it is limited largely to reactions of heat, cold, dampness and light, while in the human mind it is practically infinite in its scope. Sensibility might be called the power of having sense, understanding, intelligence, embracing the quality of being

susceptible to outside influences and the workings of both the conscious and the subconscious mind.

"Sensibility in literature meant the reflection of intelligence on real or possible emotions. It is less sentiment than consciousness, or especially the notion of sentiment. A "sensible" soul is one which understands the occasion on which it ought to feel, which produces with the most ardor possible all the exterior actions which correspond to those occasions of feeling; from that point then this passion will be moved by hypothetical or abstract ideas.

This "sensible" literature develops in the first part of the eighteenth century parallel with philosophic literature. The contrast of these types is only on the surface; at bottom it is apparent that it is one aspect of the philosophy of the eighteenth century that gives birth to that "sensible" literature.

This philosophy grew as a reaction against the gloominess and the puritanism of the last years of the reign of Louis XIV. Under the influence of Mme. de Maintenon the court lost most of its gaiety, and religion came to exercise much control over the life and policy of the king, whose salvation was Mme. de Maintenon's chief concern.

"One sees this "sensibility" breaking through at the end of the seventeenth century. The moral and

religious transformation of society favored its development. When the thoughts of man were lowered toward the earth, pleasure took an infinite value. Now in a society impregnated with the excess of intellectual exercise and the practice of politeness there was pleasure in sentiment, and no one knew how to act. At the same time in this society, true sentiment was rare. Society became more affected and transferred its value to the idea of sentimentalism which is its ordinary substitute. That is why about 1700 one begins to find a peculiar joy in spying into oneself and around oneself for sentimental manifestations. It is first by way of love, of friendship that the inclination exercises itself; then philosophy inundates the mind; in the place of love of God, it puts love of humanity; in the place of corrupt nature, it offers nature entirely good. Humanity, nature, all social relations, all social reactions became an occasion for souls to vibrate with intense emotion or to become delightfully tender, but psychologic observation disappears and sensibility commands certain ways of seeing and explaining man.<sup>1</sup>

Whence came these ideas of "sensibilite"?

"This was the period in which the principal aim of the theorists was to destroy the principle of faith.

1. Lanson, op. cit., p. 689.

They taught that divine power never disturbed the laws of nature, and that all the happenings in the life of the universe and humanity are natural and rational. They taught that the supernatural and miraculous were illusions, even untruths. Some of the greatest minds of the eighteenth century rejected this affirmation, but unconsciously it directed their thoughts. They developed lovingkindness. They found pleasure in being kind in thought and art. The new theory was that nature is good, that crimes and sins are temporary mistakes, that one must pity those who have gone astray, and that lovingkindness is the best virtue, the surest way to be rewarded by God.

From this cult of "sensibilité" came a reaction against "sensibilité" in its finest sense, a reaction from it and Epicurean life. During the beginning of the century there appeared libertines who looked for pleasure alone, who thought it splendid to be wicked, ironical and sceptical. They sought out all kinds of voluptuousness. One special form was to be pleased with finding themselves able to take pity on others. They obtained pleasure from life by experimenting with the emotional. They looked for opportunities for it, created imaginatively those opportunities, exerted themselves to be moved, exaggerated situations and emotions."<sup>1</sup>

1. Lanson, op. cit., p.667

Some of the precursors of this humanitarian movement in other fields of literature and through the pulpit were Fénelon, Saint-Pierre, Massillon and Vauvenargues. These writers were moved by humanitarian reactions, where love of humanity replaced divine love, rather than by Christian principles.

Fénelon writes like Virgil and Homer, giving sentimental pictures; tragedy to him is something that makes one shed tears. In Télémaque he says, "There is no need for judges, for every one is judged by one's own conscience".<sup>1</sup> This philosophy teaches that man is essentially good; therefore human nature inclines toward virtue. Throughout his works he emphasizes to the prince his lesson on the disasters of amour-propre and stresses the fact that one finds peace and happiness in forgetfulness of self. He thinks that love of man is a true form of pure love. One may say that Fénelon holds fast to the past but announces the future. He believes in the goodness of nature. If nature is good, then one should love his fellow-beings; if nature is good, then one should develop love and "sensibilité".

Saint-Pierre says "Notre bonheur consiste à vivre suivant la nature et la vertu". His Paul and Virginia represent the golden age of humanity, nature

1. Tilley, - Decline of the Age of Louis XIV. pp.257-8



that has not perverted society. Their ignorance of all morals and all sciences is the greatest guarantee of their virtue. He also said, "Be virtuous, for virtue is the harmony of harmonies, it is the most beautiful homage rendered by man to his creator."<sup>1</sup>

Massillon in his "Petite Carême" shows himself a sympathizer with the poor and the oppressed, a general friend of humanity. Brunetière regards his sermon "sur les tentations des grands" as a proof of exaggerated sensibility. In it he warns kings against the glory of wars and stresses the evils done to mankind. In "sur l' Humanité des grands vers les peuples" (Oeuvres Choisis, p. 60) he proclaims that princes and great men are only great in so far as they promote the welfare of others, and that a king's true glory is in the affection of his subjects. He believes there was happiness in being the cause of happiness in others. He felt the insufficiency of purely lay morality; that man can be honest without being Christian. Brunetière says that Massillon found so many germs of virtue and sensibility that had it not been for the restraint of orthodoxy he would have proclaimed the natural goodness of man.

Massillon insists that one should help others, not for duty's sake, but for the sake of the pleasure derived from it.

1. Abry, Audic, Crouzet, op. cit., p.412

It was Vauvenargues who gave so much hope to the philosophers. He is the best witness of the importance that "sensibilité" assumed in the eighteenth century. Apparently a reasonable stoic and a philosophical moralist, he believes in the great rôle of intelligence.

"That which penetrates the spirit without pain does not often reach the heart". He loved humanity and believed in the goodness of nature; he has delicately celebrated friendship and universal fraternity.

"Nothing is perfect without friendship; nothing is whole, nothing is "sensible"-----The entire universe is only one whole; there is in nature only one soul, one body; the one who tears himself from that body makes life perish within him".<sup>1</sup>

Vauvenargues believes that sentiment is superior to reason, and it is on the heart that moral and intellectual life is founded.

"Our passions are not distinct from us; there are those which are the depth and the substance of the soul---The vices of man well born may be turned to glory."<sup>2</sup>

"No one is subject to more mistakes than those who act only by reflection."

"Great thoughts come from the heart." Reason deceives us more often than the heart."<sup>3</sup>

1. Canot--La Littérature Française par les Textes,  
pp. 364, 5, 6.

2. Vauvenargues, Intro. A la connaissance de l'esprit humain.  
p. 40

3. Ibid, Réflexions, pp. 127-151

Vauvenargues is convinced that sentiment fortifies good sense, refines judgment, helps to perfect good manners.

"He maintains the worth of man's endowment, believing in the harmony of man and nature. His philosophy tends toward simplicity, moderation and the golden rule."<sup>1</sup>

With this philosophy too, the emotions visibly became more sensual, growing into a refined form of selfish voluptuousness, that of showing tenderness to satisfy oneself.

With the advent of this "sensible" society the theatre was not long in producing plays to meet the new conditions of the soul, and from the beginning of the eighteenth century tragedy and comedy were tempered with sensibilité. It remained to La Chaussée, however, really to give it birth in the "comédie larmoyante".

1. Abry, Audic, Crouzet, op. cit., p.326

## LA CHAUSSÉE AND "LA SENSIBILITÉ"

## PART IV

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The comedies of the time of La Chaussée seem more alive than their predecessors because the authors knew how to elaborate upon their themes. With Marivaux they tended toward the romanesque, and they were fully so with La Chaussée. He was the inventor of emotional comedy and bourgeois tragedy; in brief, of an intermediary "genre" between tragedy and comedy, using both, which consisted especially in exciting pity for the misfortunes and unhappiness of people in general rather than the unhappiness of the great.

"The comedy of La Chaussée is to tragedy what the obituary is to the funeral oration. These plays written in verse through a kind of transition between the old comedy and the modern "drame" were not without cleverness and charm. The fables which overlay them were well imagined and new enough; the situations, often plausible; the characters, though without any real depth, attractive; and the morals, edifying. Thus La Chaussée had found all of the constitutive elements for the success of the popular drama of today. The fact that he succeeded proves especially that the theatre after having been the entertainment of the elite became that of the crowd. The drama of

La Chaussée is very important in the history of dramatic poetry. His Préjugé à la Mode (1735), École des Amis (1737), Mélanide (1741), École des Mères (1747), caused many tears and announced not only the theatre of Diderot, Sedaine, Beaumarchais, Pixérécourt, and Ennery but even the explosion of sensibility which marks the second part of the eighteenth century. La Chaussée's drama is the point of departure toward a number of things. He is little as a source, great as a river. No one had more tributaries."<sup>1</sup>

The most obvious characteristic of this comedy was that it was not comic; in fact it was not intended to be humorous, but pathetic. The species, however miscalled, responded to the new needs of the times. It was the result of the awakening sensibility of the soul, of that growing tenderness of spirit, of that expansion of sympathy which was later to bring about the Romantic upheaval.<sup>2</sup>

The plays of La Chaussée swarmed at all times with dramatic situations. An exaggerated sentimentality and pompous style, combined with romanesque plots,--by which one means the use of such elements as disguises, mistaken identity, abductions, etc.,--and his important innovation of presenting scenes of

1. Lavissee et Rimbaud, Histoire Générale. pp.699-91
2. Brander Matthews,-- Drama in the 18th Century. p.272

domestic life, showed the decided trend which the drama was taking. It was from the problems of family relationships that he evolved moral theses in sentimental emotionalism.

Illustrative of this emotional comedy we find La Fausse Antipathie, an example of La Chaussée's handling of an old theme. The main situation is that of a husband and wife long separated but finally united. La Chaussée has used the element of confusion of identities; he has confronted his heroine with several crises and elaborated upon the situations in such a manner as to bring out the emotional values.

Léonore is a bride whose husband has been attacked by a jealous lover immediately after their marriage. He has killed the lover and fled. Léonore, believing him dead, seeks refuge in a convent. Later she goes to her uncle's to live. A stranger by the name of Damon comes as a guest; at first sight he falls in love with Léonore, and she with him, but he tells her that he is already married. Léonore's cousin also falls in love with him. Damon suggests divorcing his wife in order to marry Léonore, but she disapproves of the idea, saying that she puts herself in the wife's place. Not until she is torn between love and duty does she recognize Damon as Sainflor, her own husband, and realizes that there are really no obstacles to

their happiness.

This play is probably the first to discuss the question of divorce. As La Chaussée wishes to present honorable people on the stage, Léonore could not accept the proposal of Damon; so she submits to her fate, shaming Damon when he suggests the divorce from his former wife. However, her uncle Geronte tells her in regard to the affair:

"Ma nièce, en vérité tous ces grands  
sentiments  
Sont des inventions pour orner des romans.  
(Act III, Sc.IV.)

Pourquoi s'abandonner au torrent des  
scrupules

De trop grands sentiments sont souvent  
ridicules. " (Act III, Sc.VI.)

to which Léonore replies:

"Il me coûtera cher, que dis-je malheureuse!  
Mais la nécessité me rendra vertueuse.  
J' ai gagné sur mon coeur."

"In this play one sees no serious study of character and passions, but a marked intention to moralize, to preach, to criticise parents for forcing their children to marry without love, and to reproach husbands and wives who separate too easily.

La Chaussée shows the tendency of the philosophy of the day, that when a heart is allowed to follow its inclinations it will go where it should. At first

sight Léonore loved Damon, but she checked herself so far as was humanly possible, and her actions teach the lesson of honest love and virtue rewarded.

The success of La Fausse Antipathie encouraged La Chaussée to write another play of this new "genre". In Le Préjugé à la Mode (1735) he had the purpose of ridiculing a prejudice of the day. A man who showed that he loved his wife was subject to derision; therefore La Chaussée sets out to show the absurdity of this idea. The story portrays the suffering of a wife who doubts the love of her husband, because he does not show it. It also sets forth the suffering of a husband who loves his wife devotedly, but who is so much the victim of this common prejudice that he cannot confess it.

Durval and Constance are the couple in question. A victim of society, Durval pretends not to love his wife and lives apart from her. Constance, the virtuous wife, suffers much from this attitude of her husband. This fact is brought out by conversations with a certain Damon, who is a friend of her husband, and who is in love with Sophie, a cousin of Constance. Sophie, knowing how much Constance has endured, apparently conceives a hatred for marriage. She seems to believe that all husbands are like Durval - inattentive and unfaithful to their wives as soon as married. Although



his previous conduct would tend to justify Sophie's opinion of him, Durval proves that he still loves Constance by sending her presents; but still a slave to a common prejudice, he dares not admit that he is the donor: his pleasure comes in sending them incognito:

"On s' enrichit du bien qu' on fait à ce  
qu'on aime,

Mais je me satisfais, j' embellis ce que  
j' aime."

Durval confesses his love for Constance to Damon, who encourages him to declare his love to her again. Unfortunately there are around Durval a few petits-mâtres, and even his father ridicules so severely a husband who expresses his love for his wife, that Durval dares not follow the dictates of his conscience and heart.

Constance attributes Durval's anonymous presents to those two Marquis who are trying to pay her court, each one attempting to make the other believe that he is successful in his love for Constance. Even Durval believes that they are successful until an explanation follows, to his great confusion. Finally the misunderstanding comes to a happy ending. Durval triumphs over his fears of public opinion, declares his love and is pardoned by his ever "constant" wife.

In this slow-moving play everything is calculated to appeal to the "sensibilité" of the audience. Throughout the play Constance appears as a virtuous, loving,

sensitive and suffering wife who dares not complain. She excites pity from the beginning. In Scene I of Act I, Damon, in his pity for her, says

"Épouse vertueuse autant qu'infortunée!

He also tells her that Sophie is sorry for her:

"Vous ferai-je un aveu, peut-être  
inexcusable?

Elle vous trouve à plaindre.

In Scene II Constance decides to hide her grief in order not to make her situation more miserable:

"Me verrai-je toujours dans l'embarras  
cruel  
D'affecter un bonheur qui n'a rien de  
réel?  
Oui, je dois m'imposer cette loi rigou-  
reuse;  
Le devoir d'une épouse est de paraître  
heureuse.  
L'éclat ne servirait encor qu'à me tra-  
hir;  
D'un ingrat qui m'est cher je ne ferais  
hair;  
Du moins n'ajoutons pas ce supplice à  
ma peine:  
Son inconstance est moins affreuse que  
sa haine."

In Scene III her father-in-law tries in vain to make her confess that she is unhappy. She does not do so, but Sophie says:

"Oui--malgré vous, madame,  
J' ai vu--j' ai reconnu les traces de vos  
pleurs:  
Au fond de votre coeur j' ai surpris vos  
douleurs.

In the last act and almost in the last scene she confesses her love for Durval to a man wearing a dis-

guise, whom she believes to be Damon, but who is no other than her husband. Constance makes a complete confession of how much she has suffered in being deprived of his love, how much she still cares for him and how tenderly she would love him if he would only come back. Here Durval too, gives way to his feelings, at first in disguise and by means of a letter, but later in his true character:

"Il est à vos genoux

C'est où je dois mourir...Laissez-moi  
dans vos larmes

Expier mes excès, et venger tous vos charmes".

(Act V, Sc.V.)

In addition to the touching situation, La Chaussée had recourse to the conventional means of exciting in the audience a tender interest in his heroine by a direct appeal to the women. In the scene in which Durval reproaches Constance for her supposed infidelity he says:

"Les femmes sont d'ailleurs terribles sur  
ce point;  
Elles ne s'aident pas; mais accusez-en  
une,  
L'émeute est générale, et la cause est com-  
mune.  
Vous verrez aussitôt le peuple féminin  
S'élever à grands cris, et sonner le toc-  
sin;  
Protéger l'accusée, et s'enflammer pour  
elle;  
Se prendre aveuglement de tendresse et  
de zèle;"

(Act. IV, Sc.XIV.)

By the use of a conventional vocabulary and emphatic sentences his characters express their feelings, they speak of love as "le feu" their sorrow as "supplice" their joys as "ravissements". Durval insists that he is not "insensible". He often expresses his desire to die. All the characters speak in halting manner, with exclamations and in broken sentences which helped to convey the depth of feeling.

"Est-ce une illusion? Est-ce un songe funeste---?

Le doute----la fureur----O ciel----?

Ah! Malheureuse----

Est-ce à moi qu' ils ont fait leur confidence  
affreuse---

Constance, est-il possible----? ai-je bien entendu?

Ton faible cœur s' est-il lassé de sa vertu?"

The principal characters, Durval and Constance, according to stage indications must express themselves in a dreary, melancholy, tender, or lachrymose way. Such were the tricks to which La Chaussée resorted in order to make his audience weep over the unfortunate situation of an unhappy wife.

As in all of La Chaussée's plays there is a moral involved, and he gives advice through his characters. In this story Damon is the sage and in the lines which he speaks to Durval one can see expressed the ideal of La Chaussée.

"La vertu n' est point sujette à ses caprices  
 La mode n' a point droit de nous donner des  
 vices,  
 Ou de légitimer le crime au fond des coeurs  
 Il suffit qu' un usage intéresse les moeurs,  
 Pourqu' on ne doive plus en être la victime;  
 L' exemple ne peut pas autoriser un crime  
 Faisons ce qu' on doit faire, et non pas ce  
 qu' on fait.

(Act II, Sc. I)

The proper mingling of laughter and tears had been a great difficulty for La Chaussée. In 1741 he attempted Mélanide, a comedy without any comic elements. It was the pathetic alone upon which he wished to insist. Lénient says that one weeps at the beginning, one weeps in the middle, and finally one weeps at the end.<sup>1</sup>

"The story of Mélanide shows many conflicts. She has come from Brittany to Paris where she lives in the house of a friend, Dorisée, a widow without fortune, who is anxious for her daughter to marry well. La Marquis d' Orvigny appears. He is an old man, honest, worthy, rich and very amiable. He is pleasing to Dorisée as a suitor for her daughter, but Rosalie loves Darviap, a young officer reared by Mélanide as her nephew. As Mélanide does not desire this marriage, she attempts to send him back to the army before his leave is over, but he will not go. Mélanide tells her story to Théodon, the brother-in-law of Dorisée. As a young girl she was engaged to the Count d' Ormancé who was to marry her. The family had broken the engage-

1. Lénient, op. cit., p.309

ment and had separated them. She had become a mother and had remained in a convent for years. Her parents had disinherited her. To Théodon's surprise this is the same story the Count has told him. Théodon does not tell Mélanide, but he begs her to see the Count. When she does see him, she recognizes him as her former lover and faints. Théodon tells the Count that the one for whom he has wept so long is living, to which he replies: "So much the worse, for I love elsewhere"-- Finally he promises to do what he can to overcome this new love. Darviane finds Mélanide still opposed to his marriage with Rosalie. He believes himself sacrificed to the Count, whom he insults. They are ready for a duel and Mélanide begs him to make excuses. She tells him that he cannot marry Rosalie, that he is an illegitimate son. She insists upon greatest respect for the Count, which Darviane does not understand at first. He finally guesses, however, that the Count is his father, and without giving himself away he asks the Count what a son should do to be recognized by his father and to render justice to his mother. The Count, troubled, does not answer at first; then Darviane tells him "Either you are my father, or the duel will be fought." The Count stretches out his hands to him and all ends happily. Mélanide has found her husband, and Darviane marries Rosalie. Tears of joy and tenderness

flow from the eyes of all."<sup>1</sup>

There is some intrigue in this play and the action is new. There are dramatic situations, stage tricks cleverly worked out, and not a hint of the ending. One does not know in the beginning that Darviane cannot marry Rosalie, that he is a natural son; nor does one know that he is the son of Mélanide. It is not known that he is the rival of his father for the hand of Rosalie. In the scene in which Mélanide tells him of his birth he is left to guess that the Count is his father. He approaches the Count; one does not know how he will be received, for the Count does not know that he has a son, nor that Mélanide is so near, even though Théodon has told him that she lives. Too, the Count has shown his human side; after mourning for his wife for eighteen years, he now loves Rosalie. One does not know until the very end that at the sight of Mélanide his heart will melt with pity and that his old love will return and all will end happily.

The characters in Mélanide do not stand out as individual. They are virtuous; they are good; Mélanide is an innocent, persecuted woman always weeping. The Count shows himself the most human of all perhaps when he hears that Mélanide is alive, but the moment

1. Lanson, op. cit., pp. 161-2

he sees her there is enough sentiment in his soul to make that old love return and to make virtue triumph.

From the beginning of the story one weeps for Mélanide and for Darviane--for Mélanide, particularly when we hear the Count say:

"Ah! Mélanide, hélas! quel moment prenez-vous.  
 Pour venir réclamer le coeur de votre époux.  
 Malgré moi, malgré lui, l' amour vous a trahie.  
 Je ne l' ai plus ce coeur; il est à Rosalie.  
 Il est trop tard."

(Act III, Sc. VI.)

One weeps for Darviane when his mother opposes his marriage with Rosalie and again when Rosalie refuses him in order to marry the Count. Rosalie loves Darviane but she must obey her mother. She must be sensible and send him away for she knows how much they love each other; she must pretend that she does not love him, although Darviane is very much agitated.

DAR. J' ai tort d' être sensible.

ROS. L' égalité d' humeur fut toujours mon partage.

DAR. Plus je sens vivement, plus je sens que je suis. L' égalité d' humeur vient de l' indifférence---L' insensibilité ne saurait être un bien. (Act I, Sc. IV.)

ROS. Il faut vous éloigner, il faut nous séparer. Imaginez partout que j'y serai sensible, autant que je dois l' être. (Act. I, Sc. IV.)

Later she continues to show her good sense by trying to send him away since they cannot marry, for



Darviane confesses so ardently his love for her.

ROS. Sans aucun amour, on peut être sensible

L'amitié véritable à sa tendresse à part

qui ne fait à nos coeurs courir aucun hasard.

(Act III, Sc. II.)

Again one weeps for Mélanide and Darviane when she is forced to tell Darviane of his birth in order to prevent a duel between him and his father. Dorisée writes Mélanide that Darviane has insulted the Count and that a duel is inevitable. Mélanide calls Darviane and gives him moral advice in a scene which shows much sentiment:

(1) Il faut apprendre à souffrir un malheur

"Quand on ne le fait pas, on s'en attire un autre."

(2) "Un moment d'imprudence a souvent fait verser

Des larmes que le temps n'a pu faire cesser."

(3) "Obéissez enfin, ce n'est qu'en réparant

qu'on peut tirer parti des fautes qu'on a faites.

Envers votre rival soyez plus circonspect

Et ne sortez mais du plus profond respect

que vous devez avoir pour lui; je vous l'ordonne."

Darviane, not understanding, replies:

"Mon rival, si l'on veut est un homme important

s'il se croit offensé; nous avons notre usage,

s'il veut, nous nous verrons, ceci nous rend égaux." (En mettant la main sur son épée).

(Act. IV, Sc. V.)

Little by little then Mélanide tells Darviane of his birth, leaving him finally to guess the whole truth. He thinks badly of his father and has all tenderness for his mother.

"Le sein qui m' a conçu doit frémer à ma  
vue."  
(Act IV, Sc.V.)

He is so violent against his father that Mélanide does not continue her story.

"Ah! ciel! tu m' as choisi mon père  
Dans un jour malheureux de haine et de colère  
Daigne me le nommer. Je veux dès aujourd  
'hui suivre partout ses pas et m' attacher  
à lui.

J' irai lui reprocher sa honte et son parjure.

(Act. IV, Sc. V.)

Darviane thinks about what his mother has told him and begins to suspect that the Count is his father. He approaches the Count, makes excuses, and tells him his story:

DAR. Si vous ne m' êtes rien, je n' ai rien réparé  
L' excuse n' a plus lieu. Votre honneur  
vous engage

A laver dans mon sang un si sensible outrage,  
Osez donc me punir, puisque vous devez,  
Vous allez m' arracher Rosalie, achevez,  
Prenez aussi ma vie; elle me désespère."

(Act. V., Sc. II.)

COUNT. Malheureux! qu'oses tu propose à ton père?

DAR. Cher auteur de ma vie!

LE MARQ. O cieli tu me vais voir en comblant tous  
mes vœux.

que le devoir n'est fait que pour nous  
rendre heureux. (Act. V. Sc. III.)

Mélanide recognizes the Marquis before she actually sees him: she hears him speak and says 'twas her heart and not her eyes that knew him.

"Hé: peut-on se méprendre à l'objet qu'on adore?"

C'est lui-même: j'en ai des signes trop certains.

Mes sens se sont troublés, mes yeux sont éteints;

Mon cœur a tressailli." (Act. II, Sc. V.)

The voice of nature which is essentially good has spoken to her heart.

"Mélanide, free enough from morality itself, succeeded in making of the theatre a school where youth was able, while enjoying itself, to get lessons of wisdom and virtue. The habitual procedure of La Chaussée consists in provoking emotion by presenting a virtuous woman on whom have fallen many misfortunes.<sup>1</sup>

Mélanide suffered, and it is through her that La Chaussée gives us many maxims and lessons for youth.

1. Abry, Audic et Crouzet, op. cit., p.341.

"Quand on veut dans le monde avoir quelque  
bonheur.

Il faut légèrement glisser sur bien des  
choses.

Où y trouve bien plus d' épines que de  
roses."

(Act I, Sc. II.)

When she confesses her story to Théodon she says:

"C' est l' aveu d' une erreur qui n' a  
coûté ma gloire.

J' ai payé chèrement l' égarement affreux  
où je tombai.

Nous étions trop heureux. Notre amour  
nous trahit;

Ce funeste secret enfin se découvrit

Dans le fond d' un désert je me vis trans-  
portée

Où depuis dix-sept ans livrée à mes douleurs

Aucun soulagement n' a suspendu mes pleurs."

(Act II, Sc. III.)

In the above quotations one can see moral con-  
clusions on the question of "le Fils Naturel", as well  
as an expression of sensibility. La Chaussée has  
treated this subject pathetically, and the conclusion  
which he draws makes one weep with joy and sorrow.

"Quel! tu me vais voir, en comblant tous  
mes vœux

que le devoir n' est fait que pour vous  
rendre heureux.

(Act. V, Sc. III.)

Mélanide is a story of victory of nature and of innate goodness.

We see by the short study of the representative plays of La Chaussée that his comedy was far from that of Molière. It is no longer a study of characters but a story of situations and moralizing. He turns his back on the tradition of the comic theatre and announces a new trend, that of the "drame bourgeois", and in that lies his merit. His plays are no longer produced or even read for pleasure. By catering to the current of sensibility he has presented superficial characters, untrue situations and has been led to use an insipid and boring style. Even with private domestic life which he has tried to portray, there is mingled a shoddy romanticism of mistakes, disguises, etc. There are practically no villains; his characters must be virtuous, hence the need of the above devices. For him there are only two classes of people, the bad and the good. In La Fausse Antipathie Léonore is a virtuous woman; Mélanide in the drame by that name, another; Constance in Le Préjugé à la Mode is another. They have no color; they are tearfully model. Even the bad are not dangerously so; either they have been deluded or they are just weak, spineless, inconsistent characters such as Durval in Le Préjugé à la Mode. The characters are all the same: Constance could have

been Léonore. In short there is no characterization; there is no psychological problem; the characters do not develop; they are the same in the end that they were in the beginning. This situation is exactly the opposite of classical tragedy.

In the action there is no drama, and there is almost no study of the consequences of weaknesses, defects and vices, which characterizes the dramatic comedies of Molière. The comedies of La Chaussée are weak yet the heroes and heroines are shown to be suffering. Since most of them are virtuous, or not very bad, and as nothing happens, one act would have been sufficient to state the problem and bring it to a dénouement, but La Chaussée had to find material to fill five acts. He therefore resorts to misunderstandings, confusions of identity, and all kinds of artificial stage tricks in order to give a false impression and to postpone the inevitable dénouement. His style reflects his difficulty in finding something to say. Burdened as they are with emphatic, unnatural, pretentious expressions and interjections his comedies barely stand reading today, yet for that very reason they were successful in the eighteenth century. The artificiality of his plays corresponds to that of the "sensibilité" of the first part of the century.

In spite of these defects, La Chaussée occupies in the eighteenth century a conspicuous place among playwrights. He is a forerunner of modern drama, although he did not invent the mingling of the serious with the comic. He was not the first one to show the bourgeois on the stage, but he was the first to picture bourgeois life in order to make his audience weep. In that he is an innovator. In his insistence upon family life, and his study of marriage and parenthood, he has preceded Diderot, Augier, and Alexander Dumas fils.

He has been a moralist on the stage. In his subjects the author has shown the vogue for discussions about morality and virtue, the pleasure of sensibility, the power of love and life attributed to sentimental goodness, much talk about "nature", and the famous "voix du sang" which causes long lost relatives to find each other again.

"If La Chaussée has been surpassed, if today he is entirely forgotten, it is that he needed to rid himself of the awkward constraint of verse and so much use of the romanesque. On these two points Diderot completed the work of La Chaussée."<sup>1</sup>

1. Brunetière, op. cit., p.356.

## VOLTAIRE AS A FOLLOWER OF LA CHAUSSEE

## PART V

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In an earlier chapter of this study we have seen Voltaire as an innovator in tragedy. He tried the field of comedy as well as most other forms of literature. Now we find him a follower of La Chaussée. Though far from being a sincere sentimentalist and having little taste for "sagesse" in comedy, he made use of all vehicles at his disposal; sometimes because it suited his disposition to do so, and sometimes for purposes of propaganda in favor of his ideas. Thus he found sentimental comedy a suitable vehicle for social radicalism.

In 1736 Voltaire produced L'Enfant Prodigue. By that time "comédie larmoyante" had been permanently established and Voltaire had realized its popularity. A favorable opportunity presenting itself, he seized upon it and produced his first sentimental comedy. Although he did not acknowledge the ownership of this play for two years and although later he condemned this "mélange des genres", he now declared himself in favor of it, using the famous phrase "tous les genres sont bons, hors le genre ennuyeux". He said in his preface to the 1738 edition, "If life must be the representation of manners, this play has sufficient



merit to recommend it. "We see in L'Enfant Prodigue a mixture of the serious and the plessant; the comic and the affecting; thus the life of man itself is checkered, and sometimes a single incident will produce all these contrasts."

In 1749 Voltaire again attempted the "comédie larmoyante" with Nanine. Again he wrote a preface in defense of the type. This time he was following the trend of La Chaussée in Mélanide. Since there was no place for the comic in the story, he introduced an anecdote in the preface. This trifle, as Nanine was called by Voltaire, was played in 1749. In the preface Voltaire discusses a question which for years had been the subject for much dissention, whether one should write serious comedies. Voltaire declaims vehemently against this new species of drama to which Nanine belongs. He condemns everything that carries with it the air of city tragedy; in reality, what can be more ridiculous than a tragic plot carried on by low and vulgar characters? Above all he blames those romantic, forced intrigues which are to draw tears from the spectators, and which we call by way of ridicule "the crying comedy". He says that comedy may be impassioned, may be in transport or in tears, provided at the same time that it makes the good and the virtuous smile; but if it were entirely destitute of

the "vis comica", if from the beginning to the end it had nothing in it but the serious and the melancholy, it would then be a species of writing very faulty and very disagreeable. The theme of Nanine is that of Pamela by Richardson in 1740. This subject was receiving much attention at the time both in France and abroad. The theme of L'Enfant Prodigue was the age old one of the repentant prodigal. Yet Mlle. Quinault had recently seen it presented on the stage "de la foire St. Germaine and was about to suggest it to Destouches, but Voltaire persuaded her to leave it to him".<sup>1</sup>

L'Enfant Prodigue is the elder son of Euphémon père. Fierenfat, the second son, is worldly, though prudent. Euphémon fils is a goodhearted spendthrift who causes his father much sorrow. He early becomes a worldly, dissipated character. He loves Lise, who is the daughter of his father's friend, Rondon. But one day he leaves and when there is no word from him for years, Lise and his father mourn for him as dead. Rondon decides that Fierenfat will make Lise a good husband since he is rich and prosperous. He and Fierenfat try to get Euphémon père to disinherit Euphémon fils since he can do it legally. Lise objects to this, for she still loves Euphémon and consents

1. Brenner and Goodyear, op. cit., p. 351.

reluctantly to her marriage with Pierrenfat, whom she is going to marry only to please her father.

On the day set for the wedding Euphémon fils returns to his native city. He does not return home for he knows that he has disgraced his father, and he fears that he will not be well received. Jasmin, his companion who does not know that Euphémon has lived in this town, sets out to find work for the two. He goes to the home of Euphémon père and finds work for the son. On that same day Lise and Euphémon see each other at a distance and recognize each other. His repentance and their deep love reconcile them. Lise in turn appeases the father, and all ends happily.

"The sentimental heroine is the mouthpiece of Voltaire for the prejudices which he wishes to emphasize here. When the worldly brother says that the law gives the father the right to disinherit a spendthrift son, she indignantly replies:

"Je ne connais le droit ni la coutume  
 Je n' ai point lu Cujas, mais je présume  
 Que ce sont tous de malhonnêtes gens  
 Vrais ennemis du coeur et de bons sens  
 Si dans leur code ils ordonnent qu' un frère  
 Laisse périr son frère de misère  
 Et la nature et l'honneur ont leur droits  
 Qui valent mieux que Cujas et vos lois."

(Act III, Sc. IV.)

Similarly she pleads against the traditional regrets of parents to dispose of their children in marriage, and she opposes the legally supported tyranny of a husband over his wife.

"A mon avis, l' hymen et ses liens  
 Sont les plus grands ou des maux ou des biens.  
 Point de milieu; l' état de mariage  
 Est des humains le plus cher avantage  
 Quand le rapport des esprits et des coeurs,  
 Des sentiments, des goûts et des humeurs,  
 Serre ces noeuds tissés par la nature  
 Que l' amour forme et que l' honneur épure.  
 Dieux! quel plaisir d' aimer publiquement,  
 Et de porter le nom de son amant!  
 Votre maison, vos gens, votre livrée  
 Tous vous retrace une image adorée  
 Et vos enfants, ces gages précieux,  
 Nés de l' amour, en sont de nouveau noeuds  
 Un tel hymen, une union si chère  
 Si l' on en voit, c' est le ciel sur la terre.

Mais tristement vendre par un contrat  
 Sa liberté, son nom, et son état  
 Aux volontés d' un maître despotique,  
 Se quereller ou s' éviter le jour;  
 Sans joie à table, et la nuit sans amour;  
 Trembler toujours d' avoir une faiblesse,

Y succomber, ou combattre sans cesse;  
 Tromper son maître ou vivre sans espoir  
 Dans les langueurs d' un important devoir,  
 Gémir, sécher dans sa douleur profonde;  
 Un tel hymen est l' enfer de ce monde".<sup>1</sup>

(Act II, Sc. I.)

There are several touching scenes in the play. Euphé-  
 mon père is always mourning for his prodigal son. On  
 the day set for the wedding of Lise and Fierenfat,  
 hearing that Euphémon fils has died, he begs to put  
 off the marriage:

"Puis-je mon fils, mettre à ce festin  
 Le contre-temps de mon juste chagrin  
 Et sur vos fronts parés de fleurs nouvelles  
 Laisser couler mes larmes paternelles?  
 Donnez, mon fils, ce jour à nos soupirs  
 Et différez l' heure de vos plaisirs  
 Par une joie indiscrete, insensée  
 L'honnêteté serait trop offensée."

(Act II, Sc. VI.)

Euphémon père sees his prodigal son in every  
 unfortunate person he meets. On the day of the wedding  
 there come two such people to the town. One Jasmin  
 now the companion of Euphémon fils, goes to Euphémon  
 in search of work. Euphémon père finds work for both.

1. Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, pp. 192-3

In his talk with Jasmin he speaks of the resemblance of the other man to his son. Here we have a suggestion of "la voix du sang".

"Je l' avouerai, cet aspect imprévu  
D' un malheureux au peine entrevu  
Porte à mon coeur je ne sais quelle atteinte  
Qui me remplit d' amertume et de crainte  
Il a l' air noble, et même certains traits  
Qui m' ont touché."

(Act III, Sc. III.)

Later when Euphémon and Lise recognize each other one is touched by their devotion.

Lise. Vous Euphémon! Vous m' aimeriez encore?

Euphémon fils. Si je vous aime? Hélas! je n' ai vécu

Qu' par l' amour qui seul m' a soutenu  
J' ai tout souffert tout jusqu' à l' infamie  
Ma main cent fois allait toucher ma vie;  
Je respectai les maux qui m' accablaient;  
J' aimai mes jours; ils vous appartenaient.  
Oui, je vous dois mes sentiments, mon être.  
De ma raison je vous dois le retour.

(Act. IV, Sc. III.)

When Lise prepares Euphémon père for the meeting with his son, he begs her to spare his age and tell him whether his son still lives.

"J' aimai mon fils; jugez-en car mes larmes,  
 Ah! s' il vivait, s' il était vertueux.

(Act. IV, Sc. V)

Euphémon fils at the feet of his father, accompanied by Lise, receives his father's blessing--

"C' est la tendresse, et tout est pardonné  
 Si la vertu règne enfin dans ton âme  
 Je suis ton père."

(Act. IV, Sc. VI.)

Euphémon fils is so happy to have the love of both his father and Lise, that he is willing to give up his inheritance, but the ever-forgiving father replies:

"Non, sa bonté si désintéressée  
 Ne sera pas si mal récompensée;  
 Non, Euphémon, ton père ne veut pas  
 T' offrir sans bien, sans dot, à ses appas".

(Act. IV, Sc. VI.)

The play ends with a consoling moral:

"Non, il ne faut et mon coeur le confesse  
 Désespérer jamais de la jeunesse."

The great question of social equality is attacked in the story, Nanine.

Nanine is the daughter of Philip Humbert, a poor old man of good birth, who has been reduced in life to the position of soldier. Since military service

is not held in good repute, he prefers to allow his daughter to be brought up as an orphan. She is reared as a servant in the home of La Marquise, the mother of Count d' Olban. La Baronne is in love with the Count and wishes to marry him. Since he does not seem to be in a hurry, she accuses him of being in love with the servant, Nanine.

La Baronne tries to get rid of Nanine by sending her to a convent. The Count finds this out and, furious with the baroness, immediately declares his love for Nanine, who does not accept his proposal, though she loves him. Worried over this turn of affairs and having found out the whereabouts of her father, she writes him for advice. La Baronne gets the letter and shows it to the Count. Not knowing Philip Humbert, mad with jealousy, the Count sends Nanine away. She leaves without complaining. After she has gone, Philip Humbert comes and asks for an interview. He is not admitted at first, though he is persistent, for he is worried over the welfare of his daughter. He cannot understand how she is able to send him so much money. Nanine is sent for and immediately recognizes her father. The Count is so touched by her humility and sincerity that he begs her forgiveness for having been suspicious of her. Again he begs her to marry him, but she will not



consent without the approval of the Marquise, who gladly accepts her.

A gentleman's marrying a peasant for love was unheard of at this time, and it is from this fact that Nanine becomes a democratic comedy, full of liberal and humanitarian maxims. The Count is not embarrassed over being the rival of the gardener. He says:

"Blaise est un homme, il l' aime, il a raison,

.....  
Elle doit plaire aux jardiniers, aux rois  
Et mon bonheur justifiera mon choix."

(Act. I, Sc. IX.)

Le Comte and La Marquise also show themselves superior to prejudices in regard to Philip Humbert.

La Marquise: Pourquoi cela? Pour moi je considère

Les bons soldats: on en a grand besoin

(Act. III, Sc. VI.)

J' estime plus un vertueux soldat  
Qui de son rang sert son prince et l' état  
Qu' un important que sa lâche industrie  
Engraisse en paix du sang de la patrie.

(Act. III, Sc. VI.)

We arrive at the touching scenes in Nanine through the declarations of the Count, the intrigues of the baroness, who tries to force Nanine into the convent, and through the discovery of the letter to Philip Humbert. Accused of perfidy, Nanine is driven

from the house of her master who loves her. She does not complain or try to justify herself, but puts on her peasant clothes and sets out. Germon, a servant, is touched and bursts into tears at the sight of her.

Germon. Nous pleurons tous en vous voyant sortir  
 .....  
 Certe mon maître est bien malavisé.

Nanine. Je lui dois tout; il me chasse aujourd'hui  
 Obeissons--ses bienfaits sont à lui;  
 Il peut user du droit de les reprendre.

Germon. Mais que dirai-je au moins de votre part  
 A notre maître après votre départ?

Nanine. Vous lui direz que je le remercie  
 Qu' il m' ait rendu à ma première vie  
 Et qu' à jamais sensible à ses bontés  
 Je n' oublierai----rien---que ses cruautés.

(Act III, Sc. I.)

Throughout the play, however, one weeps with Nanine. Even when the baroness wishes to send her to the convent, she is not unwilling to go. She realizes that her love for the Count is impossible.

"Madame, au nom de ce courroux extrême  
 Délivrez-moi, s' il se peut, de moi-même.  
 De cet instant je suis prête à partir.

(Act. I, Sc. V.)

Later when she is alone she expresses her feeling:

"Mon coeur troublé de lui même est confus  
 .....

Pour mon malheur je suis trop éclairée  
 C' est un danger, c' est peut-être un grand tort  
 D' avoir une âme au-dessus de son sort  
 Il faut partir, j' en mourrai, mais n' importe."

(Act I, Sc. VI.)

And even when the Count sees her one is sorry  
 for her.

Le Comte. Quoi! vos beaux yeux semblent  
 mouillés de larmes!

.....

Notre baronne aura par ses aigreurs,  
 Par son courroux fait répandre vos pleurs.

Nanine. Non, Monsieur, non; sa bonté respectable  
 Jamais pour moi ne fut si favorable  
 Et j' avouerai d' ici tout m' attendrit.

(Act. I, Sc. VII.)

The unselfishness of her love and her bravery is so  
 clear that one cannot help being touched by it. The  
 Count, too, loves her the more for it. The coup de  
théâtre comes in these lines:

Le Comte. Je vous ai vue aux genoux de ma mère,  
 Je vous ai vue embrasser votre père;  
 Ce qui vous reste en des moments si doux  
 C' est à leurs yeux d' embrasser---votre époux.

(Act. III, Sc. VIII.)

Nanine was praised by Rousseau in his "Lettres sur les spectacles" (p. 38) because it upholds the principle of innate goodness and because in it honor, virtue, and pure, natural sentiments are preferred to the impertinent prejudices of rank". Its story of virtue rewarded is emphasized throughout the play and particularly in the lines of La Marquise

"Que ce jour-- -----

Soit des vertus la digne récompense,  
Mais sans tirer jamais à conséquence".

(Act. III, Sc. VIII.)

In the two plays L' Enfant Prodigue and Nanine Voltaire has used every occasion to rebel against the hard usages of society.

"Although he disclaims any philosophic motive by allowing Nanine to say that it cannot be possible, that as the English book which she is reading asserts, 'All men are born brothers, all are born equal', and although he insists that the marriage at the end must not be taken as a precedent, yet the play is a philosophical and social theory set in action. The prejudice "vaincu" is that of birth, it is much more a question of the "mélange des classes" than of the "mélange des genres".<sup>1</sup>

1. Brenner and Goodyear, op. cit., p. 351  
Lénient, op. cit., pp.51-52

Though Voltaire has followed the trend of popular drama and imitated La Chaussée, he has gone a step further in that he has made his plays more philosophical than his predecessors, for Nanine is a social document rather than a dramatic innovation.

## DIDEROT AND THE DRAME BOURGEOIS

## PART VI.

Diderot is generally recognized in France as the founder of a new type of comedy, but "It is not possible to grant to Diderot all the honor of a new dramatic form. His realistic mind fell naturally into a trend already noticeable in the French theatre. For some years comedy had been tending towards the serious and the sentimental. This is evident in Destouches and completely dominates the "Comédie larmoyante" of La Chaussée. Voltaire had used some of the plays as a vehicle for philosophic propaganda and there is no doubt that some English plays influenced Diderot. He took serious comedy and the ideas developed concerning it up to his time and formulated a definite, if incomplete, theory. What he proposed was an intermediary type which he called "genre sérieux et bourgeois" later to be known as the "drame". The philosophy of Diderot led naturally to this type of play".

We have already stated in our introduction the reasons that literature in the eighteenth century became increasingly important as a weapon in the hands of the philosophers. The upper classes of society to

1. Brenner and Goodyear, op. cit., p. 374.

whom the privilege of governing the country had long been attributed, now that the great ruler Louis XIV had disappeared, were continually showing their political inability and were utterly failing to help the king. The main problem was the financial one and the bourgeois class now held the money power. They had always been keenly aware of their importance in the state as producers, rich men, and money lenders, so in this financial crisis they felt that they held the key to the situation and should be consulted. Moreover the new colonial developments, the increasing foreign trade, and the consequent travel, and contacts with other nations were more than ever opening their eyes to different conditions abroad and gave them reasons for comparisons and new theories. No wonder that the philosophers were asking recognition of the bourgeois class in the face of the failure of the privileged ones. Political failure was not the only standard of comparison. Social usefulness was another term, and morality was a third one no less important. In general the bourgeois class with its life of industry, energy, resourcefulness, humble life and domestic virtues, offered a striking contrast to that portion of the privileged classes living at the court in idleness and dissipation. Not all the nobles were dissipated and vicious, but a sufficient number of

them in Paris or Versailles were social drones and immoral examples to justify the exaggerations and the cry for moral reform. Let us add to this that travel in other industrial nations like England and Holland, where the bourgeoisie was all-powerful, put some Frenchmen in contact with Protestant sects in England, who outwardly insisted upon virtuous, humble, and frugal family life. Their primitive life, coupled with honesty and success, was a further argument in favor of that theory then prevalent in France that "nature is good, that man is essentially good."

Diderot's theories in regard to the drama were influential. (1) Between the two extremes of tragedy and comedy there is an intermediary type, called "le genre sérieux", which constitutes a new form of drama. (2) The aim of this drama is to fight with the philosophers against prejudices, inequalities and abuses; therefore the ordinary man, the bourgeois, the merchant, etc., will take the places which the princes occupy in tragedy. We speak of tragedy not comedy, because the purpose of the drama is to teach a moral lesson, to propose an example; before that only the characters in tragedy were worthy of admiration. In comedy the bourgeois were presented to be laughed at, but in the "genre sérieux" the bourgeois are set up as models only one step lower than the tragic characters. These



bourgeois characters are examples of virtue. They are neither admirable, nor terrible but touching in their honesty. This theater therefore caters to the contemporary "sensibilité". A virtuous soul must be "sensible". This new drama satisfies its needs for emotion and tears. (3) As the characters are all bourgeois, the situations are taken from their every day life, which is more interesting than the extraordinary situations of ancient heroes. In family life lies virtue, so that the study of family dramas is the aim of the new "genre". Formerly, character only was the principal object of comedy, now in the eighteenth century the bourgeois through his trade, profession and occupation is powerful. The theatre then begins to study conditions. (4) As already stated the theatre is moral. It offers a predication on the reciprocal duties of the different members of a family. (5) In order to satisfy the "sensibilité" of the audience and increase the power of the comedy, the dramatists avoid all stage tricks and situations not true to life. Every drama is a "slice of life", a formula taken up again by the naturalistic theatre at the end of the nineteenth century. The scenes in this theatre are arranged to conform to deeply moving pantomime. (6) Last, a serious play cannot be a "slice of life", if poetry is used; therefore the dramatist must write

in prose and furthermore push as far as he can this true-to-life movement by using local color in stage scenery and accessories.

In his play bearing the title Le Père de Famille Diderot tries to preach a sermon on the duties of a father. He makes him interesting by showing him as a widower left in charge of two children to whom he is devoted. There must be a problem. They are poor and live almost entirely through the annuities paid by a brother-in-law, Major d' Auvilé, who is rich, hard-hearted, and not very honest so far as paternal duties are concerned. There comes the question of establishing the two children. The father would like his son St. Albin to marry in his own class.

St. A. que je suis malheureux!

Le Père. Vous avez un oncle qui vous aime et qui nous destine une fortune considérable; un père qui vous consacre sa vie et qui cherche à vous marquer en tout sa tendresse; un nom, des parents, des amis, les prétentions les plus flatteuses et les mieux fondées; et vous êtes malheureux.

Que vous faut-il encore?

(Act. II, Sc. VI.)

As for Cécile his daughter, she wishes to enter a convent but her father objects in spite of the very

prevalent custom. He wishes her to marry, for he is very much opposed to celibacy and eternal vows.

Le Père. ----Et qui la repeuplera de citoyens vertueux, si les femmes les plus dignes d'être des mères de famille s'y refusent?

.....  
Si le mariage expose à des peines cruelles, c'est aussi la source des plaisirs les plus doux.

Qu'y a-t-il au monde qu'un père aime plus que son enfant?

(Act II, Sc. II.)

Should his son obey the paternal authority, there would be no play. The conflict then is between the father and the son, through which a point of morals is raised, a prejudice overcome. Diderot wishes to emphasize that neither money nor birth creates happiness, and that even at the price of a mésalliance happiness is to be found in marriage, whatever the station of the bride. Therefore St. Albin is shown deeply in love with a girl outside his own rank, who works for a living in Paris. She is made more interesting by being portrayed as a modest girl whose father is dead and who, since she has been left without fortune, shows her courage by earning her own living and being a walking example of virtue. Her virtue is the more

effective since she has already changed St. Albin from a wastrel to a virtuous and purposeful young man. He even goes so far as to forget his own rank and aspirations to take on the garb and live as a man of Sophie's condition. He has to announce to his father his resolve to marry this working girl, hence the conflict between the father, the spokesman of the prejudices of his own class, and the son, the spokesman of the new social theories and an advocate of the new ideas about love and marriage. The father refuses his consent, and the son is very unhappy.

St. A. Elle est pauvre, elle est ignorée; elle habite un réduit obscur. Mais c' est un ange, c' est un ange; c' est un ange; et ce réduit est le ciel. Je n' en descends jamais sans être meilleur. Je ne voie rien dans ma vie dissipée et tumultueuse à comparer aux heures innocentes que j' y ai passées. J' y voudrais vivre et mourir, dussé-je être méconnu, méprisé du reste de la terre....Je croyais avoir aimé, je me trompais. C' est à présent que j' aime-- (en saisissant la main de son père) Oui... j' aime pour la première fois.

(Act I, Sc. VII.)

Le Père. Quittez vos projets; je le veux, et je vous l' ordonne par toute l' autorité qu' un père a sur des enfants.

St. A. L' autorité, l' autorité! Ils n' ont que ce mot.

Le Père. Respectez-la.

St. A. Voilà comme ils sont tous. C' est ainsi qu' ils nous aiment. S' ils étaient nos ennemis que feraient--ils de plus? Des pères! des pères il n' y en a point--il n' y a que des tyrans.

Le Père. O Ciel!

St. A. Oui, des tyrans.

Le Père. Éloignez-vous de moi, enfant ingrat et dénaturé. Je vous donne ma malédiction; allez loin de moi.

(Le fils s'en va, mais le père court après lui)  
Où vas-tu, malheureux?

St. A. Mon père.

Le Père. Éloignez-vous, cachez-moi vos larmes: vous déchirez mon coeur, et je ne puis vous en chasser. (Act. II, Sc. VI.)

The dénouement must be a happy one. Let us not forget that the uncle has much to say in this matter. He thinks that he can solve the problem by doing away with Sophie by a lettre de cachet. Furthermore the same uncle to whom money is everything would like to prevent the marriage of Germeuil and Cécile because Germeuil is without fortune. The uncle's wiles

fortunately are brought to naught when Germeuil rescues Sophie and hides her in Cécile's room. When St. Albin cannot find Sophie, he is enraged and Trahard states that it is not what he says but how he says it that shows his sensibility in this scene. He finds that Germeuil has been his friend and the uncle learns, to his confusion, that Sophie is his own niece whom he has refused to help. He can no longer oppose the union and the play ends happily with the father's blessing both couples.

"Une belle femme, un homme de bien, sont les deux êtres, les plus touchants de la nature. Donnez deux fois, en un même jour, ce spectacle aux hommes---Mes enfants que le ciel vous bénisse comme je vous bénis.

.....  
Oh qu' il est cruel--qu'il est doux

d'être père!"

(Act. V, Sc.XII.)

Diderot leaves the lesson that happy families must be created through love alone, that conditions of birth and fortune have nothing to do with happiness in marriage and that parents should be aware of this fact.

The first play in which Diderot tried to apply his theories was Le Fils Naturel, written in 1757, but not produced until 1771. It is studied here after

Le Père de Famille, which was written in 1758 and produced at Marseilles in 1760 and in Paris in 1761, because he codified his theories in the Preface which he called Entretien sur le Fils Naturel.

This play takes its title from the social condition of a young man Dorval and his love for its central theme. He was born outside the bonds of matrimony; his mother died shortly after; and his father was forced to find refuge in the West Indies. From a distance the father has taken care of the son, who is now a young gentleman of means. Dorval has a friend to whose sister, Constance, he is almost engaged; and this Constance has brought up a young orphan, Rosalie, whom her brother, Clairville, is going to marry. Dorval loves Rosalie and Rosalie loves him. Unscrupulous loves would disdain the obligations of friendship, but not one of these four characters is dishonest. On the contrary, they are extremely virtuous. The unhappy situation, brought to a climax by Rosalie's refusing to marry Clairville and by letting Dorval understand that she loves him, tortures Dorval. The sentiments of the four characters are expressed in long emotional monologues. Dorval, rendered pessimistic and misanthropic by the conflicts between love and conscience, is ready to disappear. He says:

"J' ai reçu du ciel un coeur droit; c' est le seul avantage qu' il ait voulu m'accorder----Mais ce coeur est flétri, et je suis comme vous voyez---sombre et mélancolique;----j' ai---de la vertu, mais elle est austère; des moeurs, mais sauvage-- une âme tendre, mais aigrie par de longues disgrâces. Je peux encore verser des larmes, mais elles sont rare et cruelles."

(Act. IV, Sc. III.)

He then learns that Rosalie's father, whom she has never seen and who takes care of her from afar, has lost his fortune. Dorval will give Rosalie his own fortune so that Clairville can marry her. The play is brought to a happy ending by the arrival of Rosalie's father in Paris. When it is learned that he is also Dorval's father, he explains why he has allowed his children to be brought up separately. Dorval will now marry Constance, and Rosalie will marry Clairville.

There are many points of ethics emphasized in this long play. One of them is that conditions of birth are nothing,--virtue is everything; another point is that virtue lies in the curbing of passions. The main interest of the play is in the lengthy picture of love in conflict with friendship.

The way that Diderot appeals to the public's



sensibility is by depicting pathetically the physical trouble of Durval, for instance, with his superabundance of sad looks, cries, sighs, etc. The scene of Durval's prolonged monologue expresses his upset morale. It is pathetic, broken into by swoons, sighs, cries, halting speeches.

"Quel jour d'amertume et de trouble! Quelle variété de tourments! Il semble que d'épaisses ténèbres se forment autour de moi et courent ce coeur accablé sous mille sentiments douloureux! O Ciel! Ne m'accorderas-tu pas un moment de repos!"

(Act. III, Sc. IX.)

When Clairville leaves Rosalie, he is like a madman: he goes, he comes, he stops, he sighs from grief, from fury, he leans his elbows on the back of his chair, his head in his hands, his fists in his eyes, he is silent, utters unaccented sentences, violent exclamations, throws himself in a chair, in a low tone utters the fatal word:

"Elle me hait, elle me hait! qu'ai-je fait pour qu'elle me haïsse? Je l'ai trop aimée. (He is silent, he gets up, he walks, he appears a little more tranquil) Oui, je suis lui odieux. Je le vois, je le sens.

(Act III, Sc. VI.)

When Dorval and Clairville meet, the troubles and tears of Dorval, the silence of the two men, then the low and sobbing tone of Clairville when he asks for Rosalie's answer show their depth of feeling.

Clairville. Vous êtes troublé! vous ne me parlez point! Vos yeux se remplissent avec des larmes! je vous entends; je suis perdu:

Dorval. Si Clairville pouvait lire au fond de mon âme! mais j' ai satisfait à ce que vous exigiez. (Act II, Sc. IV.)

When Dorval, miserable as he is, tries to make others happy by giving Rosalie his fortune incognito, he gains our sympathy.

Dorval. Hélas! à bien juger, ce sacrifice si peu commun n' est rien---Clairville me devra son bonheur! Rosalie me devra son bonheur! le père de Rosalie me devra son bonheur! Et Constance---elle entendra de moi la vérité;---elle tremblera pour la femme qui oserait s' attacher à ma destinée. En rendant le calme à tout ce qui m' environne, je trouverai sans doute un repos qui me fuit? (Il soupire) Dorval, pourquoi souffres-tu, donc? pourquoi suis-je déchiré? O vertu! n' ai-je point

encore assez fait pour toi!

(Act III, Sc. IX.)

And Constance, when she talks to Dorval on the subject of unhappiness and human inheritance, touches one.

Constance. Nous leur représenterons sans cesse que les lois de l'humanité sont immuables; que rien n'en peut dispenser; et nous verrons germer dans leurs âmes ce sentiment de bien-faisance universelle qui embrasse toute la nature-----

Vous m'avez dit cent fois qu'un âme tendre n'envisageoit point le système général des êtres sensibles sans en désirer fortement le bonheur, sans y participer. La naissance nous est donnée; mais nos vertus sont à nous."

(Act IV, Sc. III.)

The ordinary tricks of appealing to the audience's "sensibilité" are as conspicuous in his plays as in those of La Chaussée. Exaggerations, broken sentences, exclamations and sighs--Diderot has followed the general trend of the public.

In the conclusion of Le Fils Naturel the old father returns just in time to see the touching scenes of love, in which Dorval, Constance, and Clairville, Rosalie and Lisimond weep and sob.

"In addition to the tears in Le Fils Naturel signs of them have also been seen in Le Père de Famille when all the characters weep emotionally at the happy conclusion. Diderot often exaggerates these crises of collective tears and shows us between the lines the place for them."<sup>1</sup>

In Le Fils Naturel one finds the mutual affection between Dorval and Rosalie to be only le voix du sang.

"In 1769 the success of Le Père de Famille was affirmed; one counted as many handkerchiefs as spectators; hearts melted emotionally; one shed abundant tears, and women fainted on hearing St. Albin and Cécile. The misfortunes of Sophie and St. Albin, the hardness of the major, the solemn moralizing of D'Orbesson, touched a public who recognized themselves in the characters of Diderot on the stage."<sup>2</sup>

These plays were successful not only at home but also abroad, and while the qualities of his plays were only temporary as we have shown in a preceding paragraph, they appealed to a special disposition of the mind of the age. Another cause of success was the vehement acting which was Diderot's idea. The picture of unhappy love, made more interesting by the acting than by the long conventional monologues of the former theater, is something new which will be more and more put to use on the stage in the nineteenth

1. Trahard, Les Maîtres de la Sensibilité, I, 197

2. Ibid., I, 199

century. An additional merit of Diderot's is that he shows to the average man that he is capable of strong emotions and virtues like the heroes of classical tragedy. Unfortunately Diderot's plays are no longer interesting to the public, yet he can be said to have shown the way to the Romanticists and other playwrights of the nineteenth century.

At the same time his insistence upon virtue, upon the unhappy situations of virtuous young people, his over-simplifications of characters, soon become the definite traits of what we call melodrama. Diderot has foreseen the thesis-drama in his suggestion that the theatre attempt moralistic plays, and he forecasts the social drama in suggesting the development of man's social status rather than his character.

Because his theories have much truth in them, there appears after Diderot a much more gifted playwright, who uses these ideas with firmer form, more action and more wit, and thus gives a happier demonstration of what Diderot intended to do; namely, *Sedaine*.

## SEDARNE, A FOLLOWER OF DIDEROT

## PART VII

We have seen comedy in its various aspects: "larmoyant" with La Chaussée; declamatory with Diderot; satiric with Voltaire; but with Sedaine, who took Diderot for his guide, we shall see again frank laughter and sincere emotion. Sedaine, like Diderot, wished to present a moral lesson through the imitation of nature. "With the ability of a real dramatist he was able to interpret and illustrate these theories in a great play. He saw Diderot's weakness in insisting upon the pathetic alone, and he created a much greater impression of reality, of life-likeness, through a combination of the serious and the comic. He too gives us a "père de famille" but as a great dramatist would present such a character in interpreting the theories of domestic comedy."<sup>1</sup>

In Philosophe sans le Savoir we find the characters speaking and acting naturally. The whole family love and respect each other. Even the servants are spontaneous and are loved and respected by the family. The plot does not develop through the vice or virtue of any one member of the family, but each one shows a sweet, genial attitude toward the others.

1. Bænner and Goodyear, op cit., p. 446.

The play merely presents a social problem; namely, that the milieu is still aristocratic and that it is necessary to overcome the prejudice against work,--particularly that of the commerçant. The hero of the play is a nobleman who has fought a duel, has had to leave home, and who under an assumed name, that of Vanderk, has become a merchant. He has sent for his fiancée whom he marries. He has made money and contributed much to the needs of his family. His sister, a marquise, does not respect his occupation, but she does not refuse the money which he sends in order to keep her in her high estate.

In this play Sedaine really gives us a play true to everyday family life. It is realistic, but not to the point of presenting the crude side of life. M. Vanderk is the father of a happy family in which hopes and fears, joys and sorrows mingle. His daughter is to be married, and on the same day his son, who has resented an insult to his father, must fight a duel. This insult is not personal but relates to his father's occupation, which the son feels he should defend. Old Antoine, the confidant of Vanderk père, believing that it is nobler to uphold a prejudice than to lose honor by disregarding it, allows his son to fight.

Vanderk père (avec fermeté)--Je suis bien loin de vous détourner de ce que vous avez à faire (douloureusement.) Vous êtes militaire, et quand on a pris un engagement vis-à-vis du public on doit le tenir, quoi qu'il en coûte à la raison et même à la nature.

(Act II, Sc.VIII.)

Early in the play Vanderk père has told his son of his life, of his own duel, and of his entering trade. Vanderk regards a merchant as "l'homme de l'univers", and it is for that reason too that he allows his son to fight. In this case reason is subservient to honor. Vanderk recognizes only two other conditions superior to that of a merchant.

"Le magistrat qui fait forcer les lois, et le guerrier qui défend la patrie. (Act.II,Sc.IV.)

He believes that personal merit is superior to rank.

"Le compte le plus rigide qu' un père doit à son fils est celui de l' honneur qu'il a reçu de ses ancêtres..

.....

Ce qui légitime dans un gentilhomme les droits de la naissance; ce qui fait la base de ses titres: la droiture, l'honneur, la probité. (Act.II,Sc.IV.)

He has been unwilling that his son know before this of his noble rank.



"J'ai craint que l'orgueil d' un grand nom ne devint le germe de vos vertus."

(Act II, Sc. IV.)

Vanderk is sad that his son is to fight a duel, for he prefers that, instead of exposing himself to death on account of a prejudice, his son would shed blood for his country. Although he does not allow Antoine to fight for his son, he sends him to the dueling ground with surgeons to protect him in case of injury.

Vanderk père. Crois-tu, mon pauvre Antoine, crois-tu, mon vieux camarade, que je sois insensible. N'est-ce pas mon fils? N'est-ce pas lui qui fonde dans l'avenir tout le bonheur de ma vieillesse? Et ma femme--ah, quel chagrin! sa santé faible--mais c'est sans remède: le préjugé qui afflige notre nation rend son malheur inévitable.

(Act IV, Sc. IX.)

Vanderk is holding a conference with the father of the man with whom his son is fighting when the death of Vanderk fils' is announced. This is a tender scene in that one can feel that Vanderk père is touched by something, but he controls his emotion so well that no one guesses the truth. Eventually the alarm proves to be false and his son returns. Vanderk says:

"Ah! messieurs! qu' il est difficile  
 de passer d'un grand chagrin à une grande  
 joie mais.....

.....

Ah! messieurs, Ah! mes enfants, je suis  
 dans l' ivresse de la plus grande joie."

(Act VII, Sc. XII.)

Sedaine in the Philosphe sans le savoir has presented us with a real philosopher. He gave this name to his play, however, after much discussion, for the titles were hard to decide upon at that time because it was the situation not the character, which made the play. Vanderk is innately a philosopher, and some of the features which distinguish him as such are:

(1) Control over his emotions, as we have seen him display when he sent his son to the duel, and again when he heard of his son's death. This did not mean that he did not love the youth, but that he realized that he must be brave for his son's sake and for the sake of the other members of the family.

(2) Liberal mindedness, shown when he sent his sister money though she did not recognize his occupation. He further exhibits this trait by not objecting to his daughter's marriage outside the rank of nobility. In regard to his sister he says--

"Elle est cependant la meilleure de toutes les femmes, mais voilà comme un honneur de préjugé étouffé des sentiments de la nature et de la naissance." (Act II, Sc. VI.)

Again he shows tolerance when he lends money to Desparville père, who is a Protestant and who has been refused money at other places on account of his religion. Even after that he invites Desparville and his son to the wedding, which takes place after the duel is over.

Vanderk père says, "Monsieur, les honnêtes gens n'ont besoin que de la probité de leurs semblances, et non de leurs opinions." (Act V, Sc. IV.)

(3) His realization that reason is not all powerful in its fight against prejudices, as expressed in

"quand on a pris un engagement vis-à-vis du public, on doit le tenir, quoiqu'il en coûte à la raison et à la nature."

(Act. III, Sc. VIII.)

(4) His consideration for others. One sees tenderness and sympathy throughout the characterization of Vanderk père. He tries to live in such a manner that his daughter may "ne perde jamais de vue, ma fille, que la bonne conduite des père et mère est la bénédiction des enfants." He thinks of his wife and in every instance wishes to keep from her those things which will make her suffer. She must never know the

sorrow he is experiencing in regard to their son. "Que de chagrin pour sa mère!" is an oft-used expression,--also: "Ah! quel chagrin! sa santé faible."

Victorine, the daughter of Antoine, has half-way given her heart to Vanderk fils, but one is unaware of the fact until she betrays herself by her worry before the duel and her tears at the announcement of his death. Vanderk will not allow her to appear before his wife lest her tears betray the duel.

The marquise and Antoine furnish the comic elements of the play. The marquise wishes to pose as a distant relative on his wife's side and Antoine, inexperienced as he is, wishes to fight with a soldier for his young master. Antoine and Victorine are not the valet and soubrette of former plays, but are more or less a part of this happy family who express themselves in natural language. Vanderk is a philosopher by his actions, and not by means of long declamatory speeches such as Diderot used in his plays.

Sedaine has improved over Diderot in his dramatic cleverness. The duel brings the crisis and obliges the characters to say what they think and to express the moral lessons which Sedaine wishes to emphasize. His speech in regard to commerce, an honorable occupation which is worth as much as nobility and birth, his speech against the duel, and his speech for

tolerance and liberty of conscience are all spoken in a plausible, unartificial manner. His characters, painted in a very true manner, may be accepted as real. Victorine, the servant girl is allowed to be herself without having to hide her feelings for her young master. Sedaine is sincere in his observation of family life. There is realism in the painting of this picture of bourgeois life. Vanderk is pathetic, but not falsely and tearfully sentimental. In him one finds a "sensible" soul. He deplores prejudices, uses reason with moderation, and has highest regard for honor. He finds his source of happiness in being temperate.

"Sedaine confesses that he wished to reconcile the public to the term "philosopher", hence, the title of the play. He has skillfully arranged the character of Vanderk so that it will appeal to all classes. The bourgeois would delight in the generalizations and the moralizations; the church party could not find any objections to his moral code; and those of the philosophers who were wearying of the struggle would take fresh courage in certain of Vanderk's views."<sup>1</sup> The play is a new creation, the most modern of its time and a model for the realistic drama of Scribe. It is the masterpiece of the eighteenth century bourgeois family drama.

1. Title of Sedaine's Le Philosophe sans le Savoir. Ira Owen Wade--Princeton University Modern Language Association, Publication Volume 43, Pages 1026-38. December 1928.

M E L O D R A M A  
PIXÉRECOURT THE KING OF MELODRAMA  
PART VIII

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The germ of melodrama was doubtless latent in many types of play, but it was prominent in the drame bourgeois, whose purpose it was to present "a slice of life", and to emphasize those elements which aroused the sensibility of the audience in regard to vice and virtue. In the chapter on Diderot we have seen his insistence upon virtue, upon the unhappy situations of exemplary young people, and upon the over-simplification of characters. These characteristics of Diderot soon become the definite traits of what was later called melodrama. While we might study Beaumarchais and Mercier before Pixérécourt--in that Beaumarchais introduced incidental music into his plays, and Mercier paved the way for melodrama by the use of commonplace prose,-- we shall study Pixérécourt especially, since he has been called the "King of Melodrama" or the "Corneille of the boulevards."

Melodrama was properly a dramatic mixture of music and action in which music accompanied the gestures and spoken words, but in which there was no

singing. It is thus related to the Romantic drama which depended on sensational incidents with exaggerated appeals to conventional sentiments. The melodrama was a mingling of the comic and the "drame" and was full of dramatic emotional plots which made their appeal, not through the characters themselves, but through the situations which are tragic and often filled with horror. The artificiality of confusions, mistaken identities, and the terrible physical deformities tend to make the play soul-gripping for the average listener. The characters are of conventional type: the villain, the hero wrongfully accused of crime, the persecuted heroine, etc. There is always a moral situation in which virtue is threatened; vice is triumphant until the dénouement where virtue is rewarded and crime punished. The titles of the plays themselves suggest melodrama, for instance L'Enfant du mystère, La Lettre de Cachet. We shall cite here an extract from the work of M. Paul Ginisty on melodrama (Chap. III and IV) which shows clearly how Pixérécourt codified melodrama.

"The melodrama will henceforth follow certain laws. There will be four essential characters: the tyrant or traitor stained with all the vices, endowed with all the evil passions; an unfortunate woman, adorned with all the virtues; an honest man, protector

of innocence; the comic character according to the traditional acceptation, which will make one roar with laughter in the midst of tears. The villain will persecute his victim, who will suffer until the moment when her misfortune is at its height; the honest man, assisted by the comic character who traditionally puts himself on the side of the oppressed, will come to deliver her and take revenge on the enemy. The style will be imposing through its emphasis, through the abundance of epithets and through its great number of moral maxims scattered throughout the dialogues. Usually there will be three acts. The structure will be of uniform development: the first act devoted to love, the second to misfortune, and the third to the triumph of virtue and the punishment of vice. The ballet will be ingeniously brought in according to the circumstances. The music, which plays an important role, (The librettos of Pixérécourt always named the musician) will emphasize the dramatic situations, accompanying the entrance and exit of the characters, increasing the effect of the emotions produced, opening the soul and preparing it for the kind of sentiment which one is going to develop before it."<sup>1</sup>

It is that type of play which, appearing on the eve of the Revolution, helped to arouse the people of that time. After the Revolution the melodrama, as

1. Hartog, -Pixérécourt, p. 85.



a type, was a necessity because "Everybody had just played in the streets and on the public squares the greatest drama of history. Everybody had either been a revolutionary soldier or exiled. To these solemn spectators who still smelled blood and powder, emotions similar to those experienced were necessary. They had to witness conspiracies, dangers, scaffolds, battle-fields, powder and blood in their dramas. It was necessary to recall to them in a theme new in context, but uniform in its results, this great lesson which is summed up in all philosophies and supported by all religions: that even here below, virtue is not without reward, and that crime is never without punishment."<sup>1</sup>

For thirty years the plays of Pixérécourt were most popular, in that their appeal was to all classes. They awakened the tenderest sympathies, and at this difficult period in history they seemed a providential aid. The public of the time demanded morality, but a morality within its reach. It needed to find in the theatre a basis for the personal and universal condemnation of crime and for the definite victory of good.

"Pixérécourt felt it his divine mission to produce through melodrama a kind of propaganda for virtue;

1. Nodier, -Intro. to works of Pixérécourt, p.V

he wished to make men better; that is why he moralized incessantly in a sincere and convincing manner. His plays were produced almost every evening in several theatres of Paris and in those of the large cities of the provinces for more than thirty years."<sup>1</sup>

Charles Nodier, who was apparently a great admirer of Pixérécourt, said in his preface to the Théâtre Choisi de Pixérécourt that his lessons were always serious and profitable and that crime, especially among the lower classes, had never been so rare as during the run of his plays. The wicked would not dare put himself in the place of the villain who was inevitably punished. The melodrama of Pixérécourt was a picture skillfully painted, whereby crime appeared in all its ugliness, whereby virtue was adorned with all its graces, whereby<sup>2</sup> the play of providential interference in human affairs was ennobled by the most reasonable circumstances. One always went away feeling better, and this is no vain hyperbole."

On examining the works of Pixérécourt from the point of view of technique, one must recall that he wrote for the public at large and not for the highly educated. He understood very well that his audience did not insist upon seeing on the stage types made in its own image, that it liked noble style, and that it

1. Hartog, -op. cit., p. 212  
2. Nodier, -op. cit., p. VI.

delighted in terrible situations, touching or comic-- in a word, that it wished successively to shudder, to weep, or to laugh.

The melodrama of Pixérécourt is a drama of situations; no one knew better than he how to invent plots, nor how easily to work out a good ending to these plots; however, he was not able to respect the three unities, but he adhered to them as closely as possible, especially the unities of time and action. He thought the unity of place monotonous and, since Sedaine followed only the first two mentioned, he was satisfied to imitate him.

Nor did he wish his plays to be monotonous in any other respect. He put on the stage the most elaborate decorations and costumes. Local color was to him of vast importance, and it was particularly in his historical melodrama that he used it so much. His idea was to make his plays as realistic as possible, and in his Chien de Montargis he introduced the famous dog as one of the chief characters. Pixérécourt was always clear; as he did not wish his audience to have to think, from the first of his plays it was easily seen what was going to happen. One knew that the villain would do his best to persecute his innocent victim and that in the end the hero, aided by the comic character, would come to her rescue after she

had suffered many dangers. The audience was well aware of all that was taking place, and while there might be surprises it was well understood that everything would turn out right; thus the spectator could give himself up to enjoy the different emotions produced without having to worry over what was going to happen.

"La voix du sang" is also important in his plays. In Coelina which we shall later analyze, there is a well-to-do inhabitant of Salenche, M. Dufour, who has welcomed an unfortunate dumb man, Francisque Humbert, into his home. The niece of M. Dufour is interested in this man and pays him charitable attention. She soon learns that the man is her father.

Pixérécourt took most of his characters from the source from which he borrowed his plot and ordinarily he did not change them. He liked to introduce into his plays characters who suffered from some illness or physical weakness. Let us mention Francisque, the dumb man in Coelina; also Dufour, in the same play, who suffered from the gout. In La Femme à deux Maris the father of Eliza is blind; and in Le Chien de Montargis Éloi, the servant, is dumb. It is evident that Pixérécourt thought that characters of this sort were suited to melodrama--that the blind, the dumb, the foolish excite the curiosity and the pity of the

audience and offer occasion for pathetic and striking situations.

In regard to the comic in the plays of Pixérécourt he believed that the comic character was as necessary to melodrama as the villain, that nature is more prolific in comic characters than in heroes. He thought, moreover, that greatest beauties are born from contrasts; therefore the more foolish the comic character, the more noble the hero. It is through this device that he manages to arouse laughter and tears at the same time.

His style is unnatural, - in its emphasis often mysterious. He does not allow his characters to speak in a natural tone. We see them called "homme sensible", "créateur vertueuse", "noble épouse", "femme admirable", "monstre inhumain", vil séducteur", etc.; and, as in *La Chaussée*, it is this artificiality of language, this affected paraphrasing exaggerated in its images, which aids in the success of melodrama.

We shall study here two or three of Pixérécourt's melodramas, which have been chosen because of their close resemblance to the "drame bourgeois".

Coelina is the story of a girl by that name who has been placed in the home of M. Dufour as his niece. He believes her to be the daughter of his brother, the Count. She and his son love each other, but as

Dufour is an honest man and does not wish anyone to say that his son loves her because of her great fortune, he does not encourage their love. Truguelin and his son, who are Coelina's maternal uncle and cousin respectively, announce their intention to visit in the home of Dufour. This causes Coelina much anxiety, for her mother has told her to beware of Truguelin. Coelina is afraid that he wishes her to marry his son. A few days prior to Truguelin's arrival a poor old dumb man has been admitted into the home of Dufour at the request of Tiennette, the governess, who has great sympathy for people of this kind. When it becomes necessary to make room for Truguelin, Dufour plans to send the old man away, but Tiennette intercedes and Dufour yields. When Truguelin arrives, to his horror he finds that the poor old man is his sister's first husband, whose tongue he had cut out eight years before. He plots to get rid of him and writes a note to Dufour, giving him the particulars of Coelina's birth. Stephany, Dufour's son, reads the note just before he and Coelina are to be married. Dufour has mistrusted Truguelin at first and has consented to Coelina's marriage with Stephany, but now on receiving this letter, he sends her away with Francisque, the dumb man who has been declared her father. Stephany wishes in vain to follow her.

Truguelin flees after sending the note, for he realizes that Dufour's doctor has recognized him, and he is afraid of the law. He takes shelter in an old mill to which Coelina and Francisque have also gone. It is there too, that Francisque was rescued eight years ago. Michaud, who remembers Francisque, takes them in. Francisque sees Truguelin and recognizes him by a scar on his hand; he warns Michaud, who in turn warns the archers who have been there in search of Truguelin just a few minutes before. There is a struggle; Truguelin is wounded and arrested. On hearing of Truguelin's arrest, Dufour and Stephany rush to the mill, where they find Francisque and Coelina. Francisque presents Dufour with a paper which tells him the true story of Coelina's birth. She is his daughter, and her mother was Truguelin's sister. The sister, persuaded by Truguelin, had deserted him to marry Dufour's brother. Dufour becomes sympathetic, and since he is his brother's only heir, he gives the fortune to Stephany, who in turn gives it to Coelina, and they are happily married.

Pixérécourt has devised two ways of appealing to the sensibility of the audience; first, there is Francisque Humbert, who is touching on account of his physical condition, and when one knows that a crime has been committed against him, one is indignant.

In the scene in which Dufour questions him about himself, he has to write the answers which Tiennette reads. This scene produces sympathy for him. He shows his goodness of heart in the letter which he writes Dufour after the arrival of Truguelin. He does not wish to disturb the happiness of his daughter. This letter also shows the language of the "sensible" soul that he is.

"Homme généreux! je ne puis demeurer plus long-temps chez vous sans troubler la tranquillité de votre famille, et je me retire, pénétré de la vive reconnaissance. Agréez mes remerciements et mes adieux, et croyez que quelque part que je sois, je n' oublierai jamais l'honnête M. Dufour et ses aimables enfants". (Act. I, Sc. II.)

In this instance, Dufour decides that he does not wish Francisque to leave, and he sends Coelina for him. Coelina is happy, not knowing yet that he is her father; however, she has shown a charitable interest in the poor old man. It was "la voix du sang" which lead her heart toward him. She has already said to her uncle in his behalf:

"Il me semble tout fier d' avoir pénétré ma pensée et me demande d' un air suppliant de lui permettre de baiser ma main qu' il



baigne de ses larmes, Oh! mon oncle, on ne peut être un méchant homme avec un si bon coeur". (Act. I, Sc. IV.)

A second means of arousing the emotions of the audience is the manner in which Truguelin suffers the remorse of conscience when he is about to be caught and punished for his crime. This gives us the moral of the play, the punishment of crime and the reward of virtue. The setting for this scene is picturesque; it is a wild place, a storm is raging, it thunders, Truguelin's voice resounds from the rocks, he is alone, he talks to himself:

Où fuir? où porter ma honte? Errant depuis le matin dans ces montagnes, je cherche en vain un asile qui puisse dérober ma tête, un supplice. Sans ces habits grossiers rendu méconnaissable à l'oeil le plus pénétrante, je me trahis moi-même et baissant vers la terre mon front décoloré, je ne réponds qu' en tremblant aux questions qu' on m'adresse. Il me semble que tout dans la nature se réunit pour m' accuser, ces mots terribles retentissent sans cesse à mon oreille: Point de repos pour l' assassin! vengeance! (On entend résonner l' écho Truguelin se tourne avec effroi) Où suis-je?

quelle voix menaçant? Ciel! que vois-je?---(Il tombe anéanti sur un banc) Ah! si l'on savait ce qu' il en coûte pour cesser d' être vertueux, on verrait bien peu de méchants sur la terre.

(Act III, Sc. I.)

This remorse of conscience is pathetic, but he must be punished. He sees Michaud, whom he recognizes and who he knows is pursuing him.

O ciel! On m' a reconnu! Funeste conséquence du crime! Je ne vois partout que des accusations.

Throughout the play, true to the form of melodrama, there are moments of joy, moments of sorrow, beautiful scenes, tragic scenes, lovely characters, a tragic character, a grotesque character, sometimes likeable, sometimes not--and the comic character.

There is always a character like Tiennette, who looks after Dufour, who is ill with the gout. She always has to warn him, too, in regard to his thoughtless inhumanity, reminding him that all sin is punished. When he sends Coelina away Tiennette finds him so uncharitable that she insists on telling him many times:

Vous serez abandonné de tout le monde---  
vous traînerez une vie languissante et  
malheureuse et que personne ne vous plaindra,

parce que vous l'aurez mérité."

There is nothing simpler than the humaneness which Pixérécourt teaches in this story through the action of his characters. He shows us through the villain, human nature in all its baseness.

La Femme à Deux Maris is a "drame bourgeois" which Pixérécourt has known how to adapt to the needs of the stage, even though he borrowed its plot from a novel. Eliza Werner at the age of fifteen has married against her father's wishes a man who turns out to be a rascal. After suffering his ill-treatment for six years she returns with her son to her father, who still refuses to forgive her. As her father is now blind, Eliza comes again to care for and cherish him under an assumed name. After having ample proof of the death of her first husband, Fritz, (through a ruse of his own) she marries Count Fersen who is wealthy and as good and kind as Fritz was cruel. She is very happy now and has established her father on her estate. But to her horror one day she receives a letter from a friend telling her that Fritz has just escaped from prison, where he has been for eight years. Not satisfied with the suffering that he has caused her in the past, Fritz now searches for her in order to torture her further. He comes to the chateau, meets their son in the woods, questions him enough to find out his

identity, then tells him that the Countess is his mother. Jules has known her only as his benefactress. Fritz sends Jules with a message to her. Eliza sees Fritz, begs him to go away and offers him jewels, but he insists on interviewing her husband. Count Fersen sees him; and, having been informed by his brother, the Major, that Fritz is a deserter from the army, he insists that Fritz leave and offers him a large sum of money, which Fritz accepts, though he is secretly planning the death of the Count. He plots with his servant that when the Count comes that night to give him the money, the servant will kill the second man who passes a certain spot. Fritz plans to pass first and have the Count pass next, but Bataille, the servant of the Count, hears the plot. When they come that night, he passes first; Fritz not seeing him, passes next; the servant of Fritz, carrying out orders to kill the second man who passes, kills his master. After the death of Fritz, Werner forgives Eliza and all are happy.

There is action in the play from the beginning. At once Eliza excites the sympathy of the audience when she receives the letter from her friend. As she reads it and tells her life story to Brown the Chaplain, who has delivered the message to her, we can see her emotion expressed in her halting, breathless, sighing sentences and phrases.

"O ciel! dois-je en croire mes yeux!

Oh, mon---c'est impossible! Plus de doute!  
malheureuse, je suis perdue.

Deux époux! Grands dieux! quelle affreuse  
situation!

O---cet Isidore Fritz---ce misérable---  
l'auteur de tous mes maux---il est---faut--  
il que ce soit l' affreuse vérité!---il est  
mon époux.

Me voilà placée entre deux époux, dont l' un me  
mériterait que ma haine---tandis que l'autre  
aimant sensible, et généreux, a tout fait  
pour moi---O, mon dieu! quand finiront toutes  
mes persécutions?" (Act I, Sc. III.)

And later when she must tell her son of his father,  
she says:

"Oui, ton père est un monstre! Si tu savais---  
mais non;---tu n' en as déjà que trop appris!  
tu n'as que trop à rougir de lui appartenir!  
Oublions-le, s' il se peut---"

(Act. II, Sc. V.)

Eliza excites pity again when incognito, she cares  
for and cherishes her father, who refuses to forgive  
her but from whom she receives most generous appreciation

in such expressions as:

"Femme adorable! ma bienfaitrice, ne m'enviez pas ce court instant de bonheur (Il prend ses mains et les baise) (Act I, Sc. XIII.)

"Celui qui honore la vieillesse attire toujours sur lui l'estime des hommes et la bénédiction du ciel." (Eliza soupire)

(Act. II, Sc. VI.)

She hopes now to be able to make herself known to her father and begins to plead her own cause in the third person.

"Peut-être n'est-elle pas aussi coupable que vous le croyez---Si l'on vous avait trompé?---Lui avez-vous permis de se justifier?"

Werner replies:

"Il n'est rien qui puisse justifier un enfant d'avoir méconnu l'autorité paternelle: ---et peut-être éprouve-t-elle aujourd'hui loin du vieux père dont elle a détruit la félicité, etc.---les châtimens que le ciel réserve aux enfants ingrats!

.....  
Il n'est rien qui puisse fermer entièrement le cœur d'un père---mais elle ne le saura jamais."

(Act. II, Sc. VI.)

She continues to plead, but realizes the uselessness of exposing herself. Finally it becomes necessary and even then he refuses to forgive her. He leaves her, but after Fritz is killed he sends for her.

"Dans mes bras! Eliza! Jules! venez sur  
mon coeur!" (Act. III, Sc. XVI.)

and Count Fersen says:

"Un père offensé qui pardonne est la plus  
parfaite image de la divinité---"

In this play we find much of the language of "sensibility": "femme adorable", "femme admirable", "homme adroit", "vil séducteur", and the like. The play is also full of moral sayings which show belief in the punishment of vice and the reward of virtue.

Werner says:

"Mais le triomphe des méchants n' est pas  
éternel."

and Bataille, the naïf says:

"On triomphe toujours quand on combat pour  
une bonne cause."

In La Femme à deux Maris, Pixérécourt wishes to show the fate of young girls who marry against their parent's wish, who hear the call of love above duty, who think of nothing except the teaching which the philosophers called nature and which was often nothing more than folly. In the past much has been said for

love, and parental objection has been ridiculed; but Pixérécourt teaches that not all nature is good and portrays this theory by showing Fritz as nature in its basest form. His meanness is contrasted with the beauty of the character of Edward the Count.

Le Chien de Montargis is taken from an historical novel and comes more directly from tragedy than from comedy.

A troop of archers arrive at an inn to spend the night, among them Aubri, Landry, and Macaire. That evening the Captain makes Aubri lieutenant. This office also carries with it the hand of the Captain's daughter. Macaire is extremely jealous, and Landry is jealous for him; together they plan to get rid of Aubri. Aubri lives in the village and has a very faithful dog, Dragon. That night he and his dog go for a walk in the forest. Macaire and Landry meet him and talk with him; Aubri challenges Macaire to a duel to settle this rivalry. That night they kill Aubri and bury him beneath a tree. The dog which they tied with Macaire's belt, escapes, goes home, scratches on the door, pulls on the skirt of the maid who opens the door, and shows signs of warning them of tragedy. She and others from the house follow the dog and find the body of Aubri. Eloi, the dumb servant, is believed guilty for a



long time, because he has on him the purse of Aubri which he was to take to Paris to the mother of Aubri in case he did not return from the duel. Éloi is put in prison. In the meantime Macaire's belt is found, and on the day of the trial the evidence is that Macaire is guilty. He confesses, and all is well for Éloi.

The touching scenes here occur when the dog reveals the death of his master and particularly when Gertrude tells how he acted when he returned to the scene of the tragedy.

"Là, ce fidèle serviteur, dont l' action touchante fait honte à l' humanité s'arrête au pied d' un arbre et se met à gratter la terre fraîchement remuée, jusqu' à ce qu' il ait creusé assez profondément pour découvrir le corps de son malheureux maître.

A cette vue, il fait retentir la forêt de ses gémissements et semble, à force de caresses, vouloir rappeler à la vie ce corps inanimé. Ses regards me suppliaient de l' aider dans ce pénible travail; mais hélas! tout espoir était perdu, tous secours inutiles; je n' ai pu que mêler

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mes pleurs à ses cris douloureux et  
prolongés, qui m'ont déchiré l'âme."

(Act II, Sc. VIII.)

Immediately after the murder Macaire begins to suffer remorse, but he does not confess until the evidence is against him.

"Du repos---pour moi---ah, Macaire! qu'as-tu fait?"

And in the end he says:

"Le ciel est juste; il sauve l'innocent et frappe deux coupables à la fois. Il lui rend grâce de m'ôter une existence que je ne pouvais supporter, chargé de l'épouvantable fardeau d'un tel crime."

The melodrama of Pixérécourt is true to form in all his plays. One finds here the grotesque, the tragic, the innocent punished unnecessarily, but in the end virtue is rewarded.

Even though melodrama had its enemies and perhaps there was much to be said against its exaggerations and grotesqueness, it nevertheless served its day. Pixérécourt had good intentions and his influence was great. He was not subtle in the morality which he taught, but "He avoided the mention of adultery, outrage, incest, prostitution and all crimes which could have been capable of corrupting the young people

of both sexes who frequented his plays. There was not a word in his works which could be shocking to virginibus puerisque<sup>1</sup>.

This "genre" of drama was widespread in its influence and is far from being dead to-day, since there are many works of the Romantic theatre which are melodramas except that they are better written; too, this "genre", though more coarse in its details and situations continued in the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth through the cinema.

We have intimated a little earlier in the chapter that this type was appealing to the masses in their demand for morality. The natural instincts of people in general are moral; they wish to see vice punished and virtue rewarded; their desire is to see justice reign on earth.

Too, it is only human that one needs to express strong emotions, and at that time exaggerated sensibility was the vogue. The theatre became its vehicle; suffering and weeping at the misfortunes of the heroine, anxiety on her account, fear of villain and his power and then delight in his punishment--all this could be experienced in melodrama.

In the material presentation of his plays Pixéré-court made an effort to reproduce nature and to be

1. Hartog, op. cit., p.219.

as true as possible in his scenery with wild places, etc. He utilized all the resources of stage setting to impress his audience, and from this comes the influences of local color of the Romantic Drama and also the material transformation of the theatre of the nineteenth century.

The study to show the evolution of the stage set especially to study the development of the scenic artist from its beginning in the Renaissance to the exclusive importance of the artist who painted the background of a stage set. The study should also include the history of the scenic artist and the methods used in the past and the work of the scenic artist in the present.

In the study of the scenic artist the student should be made to study the history of the scenic artist in the past and the present. The student should be made to study the history of the scenic artist in the past and the present. The student should be made to study the history of the scenic artist in the past and the present.

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## CONCLUSION

## PART IX

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In the preceding chapters on the comedy of the eighteenth century, it has been the purpose of this study to show the evolution of the "drame" and especially to study the development of "la sensibilité" from La Chaussée to Pixérécourt. Representative dramatists of the period who together have contributed a "nouveau genre" have been treated. Marivaux and Beaumarchais might have been added, but those mentioned have served the purpose in developing the theme of sensibility.

In the early eighteenth century we have seen the comedy become a study of the particular against the general or universal; that is, the inherent situations, social classifications, professions, etc., become the subjects for drama. For convenience we have followed the usual division of the history of the drama, namely, the followers of Molière or comedy of character, la comédie larmoyante, and melodrama.

In the first group we found Regnard, Lesage and Dancourt. Regnard was a dramatist whose sole purpose was to amuse. His characters were overdrawn

to the extent of caricature. He showed no desire to moralize in his plays; in fact, they may be said to be unmoral. Lesage was more realistic; he created a new type in portraying Turcaret as the financier, a new profession which came into existence with the rise of the bourgeois class. Lesage took up the comedy of character to portray a comedy of manners, in which we find the indication of a moral, the punishment of vice, which is later seen in all its horror in melodrama.

The second generation of the followers of Molière were Destouches, Piron, and Gresset. Destouches regarded pleasure as the first aim in writing comedy, but if one could moralize, so much the better. Le Glorieux was his contribution, in which he presented pathos joined with comedy. He really meant to moralize, but instead of punishing vice, he rewarded it after a light repentance. It is in this play that we find elements which contribute to the "comédie larmoyante"; that is, a mingling of the comic and the serious. Piron used some of the elements of all "genres" and with Gresset's Le Méchant, we come to the end of the comedy of character. Le Méchant was important in that Gresset tried to put all the evils of the day into one character; however, he taught that vice is punished.

La Chaussée has been given the credit for developing the "comédie larmoyante" into an independent "genre". In his works we find an exaggerated sentimentality, superficial characters, untrue situations, insipid and boring style still written in poetic form, shoddy romanticism and disguises, mistaken identity, etc. In his plays there are no villains; his characters must all be virtuous. La Chaussée was not the first to portray bourgeois life on the stage, but the first to show it for the purpose of provoking tears. He wished to present the idea that repentance brings happiness and reconciliation; that the ideal man is not<sup>a</sup> selfish one, but a kind and gentle philanthropist. Sensibility itself is elusive, but at the same time an integral part of the human soul.

"Never forgetting the belief that the natural emotions of average men and women were virtuous and deserved sympathetic representation, the dramatists exhibited these emotions in all their multiformity; gentle and passionate, domestic and social, peaceful and revolutionary. They did not disregard altogether the comic aspect of life. Even Mélanide, which is more tearful than any other comedy of the period, has its amusing passages; and in most plays the humorous element is conspicuous. But in those portions of the



play which were intended to be sentimental, they employed their technical skill to bring that mood to clear and intense utterance".<sup>1</sup>

While La Chaussée wrote of social problems, Voltaire was more philosophical and presented a mingling of the classes rather than a mingling of the "genres". In Nanine he emphasized the problem of class prejudice.

Nothing offered so good a model for social reform as the type of play which Diderot produced. The philosophic movement was at its height, and he used his new theory as a real vehicle for propaganda. He began the study of conditions rather than of character. He wished to create an intermediary "genre" between the tragic and the comic. As he wished to make the play more realistic, there was need for great change in the stage technique. The scenery must be realistic; the characters must be natural; so he took them from everyday bourgeois life. Poetry was not suited to natural conversation; therefore he wrote in prose. His mistake lay in moralizing too much in long declamatory speeches and in portraying only the serious side of life. It remained to Sedaine to do what Diderot had hoped to accomplish. Sedaine was a dramatic artist and was able to portray bourgeois

1. Bernbaum, --op. cit., p.199

life in both its phases, the comic and the serious; also, he was able to distinguish the pathetic from false sentimentality of his time.

After Sedaine, we have studied the melodrama, a direct outgrowth of the "comédie larmoyante" but pushed to the extreme. Melodrama was the mingling of the tragic and the comic whose end was to make the audience weep or shudder. It was an exaggerated "comédie larmoyante" in its untrue situations and romanesque plots and style. We find more realism, however, in melodrama than in the other forms studied. Even though it is exaggerated, there is much that is true to life.

Through the stage directions which show an effort to reproduce nature and to be as realistic as possible, we find that Pixérécourt has used much local color (wild places, storms, etc.) to attract the attention of the audience. In his search for local color he announced the Romantic Drama, which by elaborate scenery helped the material transformation of the theatre of the nineteenth century.

Melodrama, as we have said, presented the horrible and the grotesque as well as the beautiful, the comic as well as the serious; it showed that not all nature is good, and it taught the moral that vice is punished and virtue rewarded. We have seen in a

previous chapter that the morality of Pixérécourt's plays was keenly felt, and for more than thirty years his plays were most popular in their appeal to all classes. The morality that he taught was within their own reach. His lessons were always serious; crime appeared in all its ugliness, virtue in all its beauty. Vice was always punished, and by providential interference in human affairs virtue became triumphant through the most reasonable circumstances. One always went away with his emotions stirred, for the natural instinct of man in general is moral, and it is his supreme desire to see justice reign on earth.

Thus we have seen the influence of the authors whom we have considered. In the eighteenth century, as to-day, the fundamental aim of the drama was instruction; that is, it was a social study. The sentimental drama was fundamentally opposed to the cynical aristocracy of former times and centered about the idea of reform. While the sentimental dramatists were not exactly revolutionary, being content to write moral maxims, they, nevertheless, showed the dissatisfaction of the times. Each author in his own manner and after his own inspiration produced the form of drama which he thought best suited to portray his ideas. The devices which materially helped each author were those of mistaken identity and the famous

"voix du sang". In many plays the problem of overcoming prejudices is prominent.

With *La Chaussée* we find the first concrete result of the merging of tragedy and comedy. However, as we have said, the comedy with *La Chaussée* was intended to be not comic, but pathetic. It was the result of the awakening sensibility of the soul which later developed into the "drame de famille" of Diderot and which showed elements of the melodrama which was to follow the Revolution.

"The real purpose of these plays was to cater to the everyday moods which cling to life. From them there was evolved an abundant literature of moral eulogy of the simple existence, contrasted with the seductions and vices of the town, a prose and poetry for family consumption and the edification of the ingenuous youth, with stress on virtue derived from goodness. In the breaking down of the pseudo-classical 'genres', we have found the tendencies enumerated above inextricably confused and merged to form a literature of sensibility. Literary taste became a lachrymose sentiment and tenderness, which was often soft-heartedness, or "sensiblerie", rather than "sensibilité". But sensibility, as a form of sympathetic feeling, was synonymous with virtue; emotion was the source of virtue, since one learns to feel

through misfortune. The reading public found enjoyment in the portrayal of bourgeois virtues and domestic sentiment."<sup>1</sup>

"The sensible man obeys the impulse of nature because sensibility in its essence is natural. Then sentiment was supposed to be a fresh factor in the advancement of the world, to refine the passions, put a curb on the brutalities of frank sensualism, temper the rule of the strongest, and soften the aspirations of life. It acted as a centripetal force that offset the tendency toward social disintegration and served as an invisible tie that held families and nations together when the bare process of facts and figures would have sent them flying apart."<sup>2</sup>

The literature from 1750 was no longer the art of merely picturing the beautiful, but of expressing in the vernacular ideas which were current. The principal reason that the French excelled, however, in this drama of sensibility was that they keenly comprehended the sentimental principles upon which the new plays were based. The successive experiments of La Chaussée, Marivaux, Voltaire, and Gresset led to an interesting variety of results, but they were all applications of the same fundamental idea. The dramatists employed their technical skill to bring

1. Wright,--Background of Modern French Literature, p.42.  
 2. Mason,--Is sentiment declining? Cent.61:626

the desired mood to clear and intense utterance. Their technique was good because it was guided by a confirmed belief.

In the development of the drama of the eighteenth century, then, there were:

"1. The comedy of character such as Molière created, and which reappeared in a weakened form, but not without a certain brilliance with Destouches, Piron and Cresset.

2. The comedy of customs, modeled on contemporary society, expressing their spirit, their customs, and their language.

3. The comedy "larmoyante et romanesque", a "genre" keeping an even balance between tragedy and comedy, roughly sketched, renovated; and a few created by La Chaussée, and systematized by Diderot under the name of "comédie sérieuse", or "tragédie bourgeoise", which are the real source of modern drama."<sup>1</sup>

1. Lénient, --op. cit., 1, 152.

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