FR322- Revolution and Empire

*Marie-Antoinette and the French Stage 1789-1793*

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“Live theater combines the discursive and performative aspects of political cultures.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Pre-1789 theatre was an essential political component of the absolutist monarchical rule, and fulfilled its brief, to emphasize “the power and magnificence of the Bourbon monarchy.”[[2]](#footnote-2) However, the tumultuous events of 1789, such as the creation of the National Assembly after the meeting of the Estates General (for the first time since 1614), the King’s rejection to recognise the National Assembly and subsequently his refusal to accept its constitution the *Déclarations des droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen*, were not ignored in the works of playwrights influenced by Enlightenment writers such as Montaigne and Voltaire. Neither were the consequent, and continuous, over the following four years, rearrangements of power who all claimed to represent “sovereignty in the name of the nation.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The year 1789 saw the establishment of the National Assembly, as the people’s representatives, (the Third Estate) rather than appointed by the divine right of the King, Louis XVI. This advance in power saw the monarchy’s position diminish, and, over the following two years, it would gradually wane until in 1792 France was declared a Republic. The following year saw rejection of all that the Bourbon dynasty stood for with the execution of the monarch and his queen and which also saw the beginning of the period of Terror. The year 1793 saw the political extremes amplifying their convictions, especially those of two opposing forces, the extremist left-wing Jacobins and the counter-revolutionaries.

 “The theater, of course, had never occupied an apolitical position within the political culture of Bourbon absolutism.”[[4]](#footnote-4) However, during this period of 1789-1793, which experienced the political pendulum swinging rapidly from one extreme to another, playwrights jumped to offer their interpretations of the crucial matters at the time: the portrayal, positive or negative, of the church, and more importantly, the monarchy.

 A person widely mocked more than glorified, was Louis XVI’s wife, Marie-Antoinette, daughter of the Austrian Emperor, she married Louis XVI as a political alliance in 1770 in order to attain peaceful stability between France and Austria. However, Marie-Antoinette soon came to be represented in France as a lascivious, foreign queen whose disregard for the French nation would lead it to ruin. The advances in print and the rising popularity of the theatre, particularly in the early revolutionary years, promoted on a wider scale this idea of the queen’s “body of infamy”[[5]](#footnote-5) directing, on various political and social levels, indignation at her. This was, at times, countered by those whose opinions had not been converted to this new wave of thinking. “C’est dans l’entourage de Philippe d’Orléans et dans celui du Comte d’Artois qui s’est construite la reputation detestable faite à la reine”[[6]](#footnote-6) Despite many nobles and supporters of the monarchy fleeing from France in the early years of the Revolution, there still remained a few people who would speak in support of the royal family, however there were far fewer who would do the same for Marie-Antoinette. “In October 1789, as at later times, most would blame Marie-Antoinette and her advisers rather than Louis himself.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

The dawn of the Revolution enabled the theatre to be accessible to all levels of society, because of the removal of political censorship. Over the course of the Revolution, and within the various different theatres in Paris and throughout France, the representations of the monarchy varied significantly, as did those of the queen. This essay will examine the representations of Marie-Antoinette on stage in three different plays present in the early revolutionary years, from 1789 until the year of Marie-Antoinette’s execution in 1793. Firstly, this essay will discuss Marie Joseph de Chénier’s play *Charles IX, ou, L’école des rois*, first performed in 1789, and will analyse the playwright’s hostile attitude towards Marie-Antoinette through the parallels between her and a former foreign queen of France, Catherine de Medici. Secondly, this essay will look at how Marie-Antoinette is portrayed positively by the famous political female activist and playwright, Olympe de Gouges in her 1790 play *Le Couvent ou les vœux forcés*. Finally, this essay will examine the propagandist representations of Marie-Antoinette by comparing some of them with Saint-Roman’s play *Louis XVI: tragédie en vers et en cinq actes*, published in Germany in the year of Marie-Antoinette’s execution, 1793. “No other trial attracted the same attention or aired the same range of issues as that of the ill-fated queen.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

1789 was the year of impetus that set the French Revolutionary decade in motion. The drastic changes to ‘Old Regime’ life, one of which was the electing of representatives to the Estates-General, “marked the coming-together of the complex and evolving social conditions in France.”[[9]](#footnote-9) However, in August 1789 the Comédie Française was not permitted to show *Charles IX, ou L’école des rois* “presumably because it vilified two pillars of the Old Regime: the church and the monarchy.”[[10]](#footnote-10) The quickly evolving nature of the Revolution soon abolished censorship of commenting on the monarchy and Catholicism allowing *Charles IX* *, ou, L’école des rois* to debut on stage on the 4th November 1789.[[11]](#footnote-11) Written before 1789 by Marie Joseph de Chénier, the play is set in the sixteenth century, in the lead up to the Saint Bartholomew day massacre of Huguenots in Paris and the provinces. The king’s acceptance of this massacre was traditionally believed to have been due to the poisoning influence of his mother, Catherine de Medici, which in the play parallels overtly with the queen at the time of the performance, Marie-Antoinette.

 Although the play itself does not contain any strong anti-monarchy sentiments, the need for development and change from the ‘Old Regime’s’ way of governing and living is present throughout. The dedicatory letter to the *Nation française*, which accompanies the script, clearly shows the transition of thought, influenced by prominent Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire, on supporters of the Old Regime: “Ils sont mes ennemis, parce qu’ils détestent la liberté”[[12]](#footnote-12) a notion which later amplifies itself through the hatred insinuated for Catherine de Medici; “Que ne le laissiez-vous au fond de l’Italie! Cruelle, ainsi par vous la France est avilie!”[[13]](#footnote-13) The play continuously forces its spectators, or readers, to look back on the past and, therefore, assess the present. The Roi de Navarre represents the historically admired figure Henri IV who, furthermore, instigates in the play this necessity for reflecting on past mistakes “Des désastres prochains sont les avant-coureurs.”[[14]](#footnote-14) The most obvious reflection on the past in the play is negative, and this idea of progression and learning from the past was prominent throughout the revolutionary period.

The notion of a foreign queen seems to have emerged from this historic hatred for Catherine de Medici which continued with the presence of Marie-Antoinette and this explains why the play makes palpable comparisons between the two. “Ainsi vous flétrissez le nom de Médicis ! Vous renversez les lois, vous perdez votre fils, Vous perdez tout l’état, reine & mère coupable”[[15]](#footnote-15) The play depicts Catherine de Medici not only as a precursor to Marie-Antoinette, but a representation of the consequences for French kings of having foreign queens. It is an extension to the alienation they are already subject to by the population in being female. In Act II, Scene I Chénier hints to the lack of knowledge a foreign queen has of her subjects when Catherine de Medici comments “Ils se rassemblent tous: connaissez leur faiblesse, et sachez les dompter à force de souplesse.”[[16]](#footnote-16) This attitude clearly aimed to encompass that of all foreign queens in France and by extension that of Marie-Antoinette. The further implication of this statement is the open disregard for one of the founding principles of the *Déclarations des droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen* of 1789, which signifies the importance of the individual, thus highlighting the queen’s lack of affiliation with France and also the natural values on which this new constitution would be based. This would have only exacerbated by the revolutionaries’ contempt for Marie-Antoinette.

The Saint Bartholomew day massacre is an event associated with great shame in French history, and Catherine de Medici is portrayed in *Charles IX, ou, L’école des rois* as its original instigator. In this sense Chénier’s several displays of hatred for her in the play, alongside the evident comparison with Marie-Antoinette may serve as a metaphor for warning for the French people. The intention was evidently to inspire contempt for her, but also to be seen as a method of protection for the Louis XVI, despite Chénier’s clear pro-Revolution motives in the play. Amidst the turmoil of 1789, in the provinces and in Paris, a constitutional monarchy was still considered the only natural political development after the establishment of the National Assembly. This, possibly, explains the title: *the school of kings*. “The king had two spouses- the privileged one, or the kingdom, which shared his sovereignty, and the alienated one, or the queen, who was separated from it.”[[17]](#footnote-17) However, the play depicts the dangerous powers of persuasion of certain women on French kings, and how this must be avoided.

“The fear of women in power, of woman’s empowerment, might be designated the Marie-Antoinette syndrome”[[18]](#footnote-18) Marie-Antoinette apparently being the only female influence on Louis XVI, due to his lack of official mistresses,[[19]](#footnote-19) was something which frightened the National Assembly and enhanced the opinion of him as a weak king. It could be said that Marie-Antoinette bore the brunt of this image of Louis as a weak king, by reflecting the accusation back to her and stating that she was a poisonous influence. In 1791 it was decreed that the closest male relative to the king’s son would act as his regent, rather than his mother. Perhaps in light of Catherine de Medici’s regency, and the memory of the events which occurred, the thought of a repetition of foreign regents frightened the revolutionary administration. Chénier certainly would have supported this, as his portrayal of Catherine is almost as a traitor to her son “J’ai calmé lentement son esprit combattu, Vantant sa piété, la première vertu”[[20]](#footnote-20) In *Charles IX, ou, L’école des rois* Catherine de Medici is portrayed as the only woman in a male dominated, political setting. Given that within the royal circles, the role of women was firstly to act as political bonds to marry and then secondly to produce sons, the thought of any authority being invested in them seemed out of place and perhaps unacceptable to the power balances in the French court. In addition, it could be said that it is this power of influence over the king of France, husband or son, which led to Catherine de Medici’s and Marie-Antoinette’s demise.

The parallels between the two female figures in the play create an atmosphere fearful of women’s potential, in particular that of foreign women, in positions of power during this time of progressive thought. An underlying theme of the play, reflecting on the past, makes Chénier’s intentions for using Catherine de Medici as a tool in the portrayal of Marie-Antoinette very clear, which is, not to make the same mistake again, through inciting contempt for her in the audience. Towards the end of 1789 a constitutional monarchy still seemed the only valid political system, however the revolutionaries’ disdain for Marie-Antoinette would preclude her from any power that regency could have entailed. “Médicis la reine sanguinaire, l’étrangère responsible d’un massacre.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

 “French Enlightenment did not have a single social identity.”[[22]](#footnote-22) In contrast to the heightened anti-royalist feeling that was circulating around Paris in the early years of the Revolution, certain people, such as Olympe de Gouges, openly supported the monarchy’s cause, and even Marie-Antoinette. Originally from Montauban in the south, where she was widowed at the age of 18[[23]](#footnote-23), de Gouges’s was in Paris between 1789 until her own execution in 1793, and she “argued vociferously for the recognition of women in the creation of the new republic.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Considering that “education for women was not a given”[[25]](#footnote-25) in the 18th century, particularly for an, allegedly, illegitimate daughter, the mere fact that she wrote and produced plays and political pamphlets proved the conviction to her cause. In October 1790, her play *Le Couvent ou les vœux forcés* was staged. It was a two-act story about Julie, a young convent girl, who on the day of taking her eternal vows to the church is approached by the son of the Marquis de Leuville, the man who forced her to live in the convent, who secretly tried to encourage her to marry him instead of taking her vows. “En me sacrifiant, je ne perds que moi seule, et je sauve ce qui j’aime; c’en est fait”[[26]](#footnote-26) Her resistance to marrying him shows her compassion towards a son’s relationship with his father and inadvertently aims to show a more human side to Marie-Antoinette, that of a devoted wife and a sympathetic friend.

The play highlights the virtue of a young girl, whose identity is about to be completely reshaped due to the decisions of higher authority. Perhaps this is a parallel of Marie-Antoinette’s journey from her family in Austria to her new, politically motivated, home in Paris to marry Louis XVI. Julie questions “comment échapper au sacrifice que l’on exige de moi? La résistance est désormais inutile ; accablée par tout ce qui m’environne”[[27]](#footnote-27)As Marie-Antoinette was passed across the Rhine she entered into her new life filled with obligation, where her sole function would be to produce an heir, a pact agreed in the hope of political union between the French and Austrian royal families. This is comparable to the Marquis in *Le Couvent ou les vœux forcés* “Julie est sans fortune; sa dot payée, ses vœux prononcés, je me verrais débarrassé, pour toujours”[[28]](#footnote-28) This parallel would show Marie-Antoinette as a young girl without a choice or a voice, which highlight de Gouges’s exact motives for involving herself in politics, particularly in such a thought-evolving period of time. De Gouges’s obvious royalist tendencies do not brand her as being against the Revolution. In fact, she continuously claimed that her motives for opening women’s opportunities in different parts of society were as a result of her patriotism towards France. It could be concluded therefore, that her admiration for Marie-Antoinette may have been as a tool of retaliation against the male dominated spheres of power and control.

De Gouges’s *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* is a rewriting of the original version produced in 1789 and aims to involve women in each article and to incite a more equal approach to the constitution. A notion de Gouges placed emphasis on, in both her revised version of the constitution and in *Le Couvent ou les vœux forcés,* was woman’s right to inherit, which was achieved in March 1791.[[29]](#footnote-29) Her aims were to recognise women’s rights as individuals and not as the property of men.

The prefatory letter to the *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme* is written to Marie-Antoinette, imploring her to be a spokeswoman for de Gouges’s purpose and to “support such a beautiful cause; defend this unfortunate sex, and soon you will have half the realm on your side, and at least one-third of the other half.”[[30]](#footnote-30) The notion of forgiveness is the lasting sentiment. The final scene depicts Sœur Angélique revealing that her own brother, who we learn is the Marquis de Leuville, killed her husband and then forced her to live in the convent and also to hide from Julie that she was her mother. The instant forgiveness he receives from the other characters is an overwhelming message at the end of the play “oublions le passé, et qu’une morale plus douce rende à l’avenir ces asiles moins redoutables.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Perhaps this message, albeit one of repentance, is unconsciously demonstrating Marie-Antoinette’s lack of choice and, on a wider scale, the domination of women in France by men. De Gouges was an advocate of the notion that equality is not only necessary but natural, and that it was not through the necessity of the church but, in fact, men’s manipulation of power which resulted in their seeking forgiveness from the women they had oppressed. This is through the fear of women holding power, particularly Marie-Antoinette, who for some people provided the image of “a powerful woman descended from an even more powerful woman.”[[32]](#footnote-32) Man’s need to control women through denying her any voice is something that de Gouges stood against. Through the play she hints that this was the situation imposed on the queen as a young girl as “the title (état) of queen, like that of wife, held no authority or right to govern. And the queen held no relation to the kingdom or to the state independent of her king. Her function was to produce sons.”[[33]](#footnote-33)And this is precisely what Marie-Antoinette was sent to France to achieve. The underlying, yet significant, message in *Le Couvent ou les vœux forcés* is that oppression is corruption, with particular reference to that of women.

“Hostility was directed less towards the essence of the old regime than to its abuses”[[34]](#footnote-34) and de Gouges believed women were abused by men’s unquestionable power. Her support of Marie-Antoinette is not out of personal favour but, as she says in her preface to the *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme*, she had witnessed how the queen had been “restrained by fear of the laws”[[35]](#footnote-35), which, essentially, is the fear of men and their control. Likewise, Julie shows her willingness to sacrifice her future to save a relationship between a father and his son.

De Gouges’s portrayal of Marie-Antoinette in a positive light not only aims to obtain a constituency to legitimise the *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme*, which is what resulted in its lack of success, but also highlights the importance of the family and forgiveness. “Souvenez-vous que la félicité de vos enfants est votre premier devoir.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

Le Comte de Saint-Roman’s play entitled *Louis XVI tragédie* is an interpretation of the reasons for, and the eventual, execution of Louis XVI. An important element of which are the reactions of his wife, children and sister, showing a sympathetic attitude towards the king and his family, which in a time of conflicting extremes between Jacobins and counter-revolutionaries, would have caused further trouble. The play was published in Frankfurt, Germany in 1793, the first year of what is now known as the Terror period and in which war was declared on France not only with outside states but civil unrest also ravaged the provinces and the capital. By this time Louis had already been taken to the guillotine and plans for Marie-Antoinette’s trial were underway.

The queen is portrayed in the play as a loving wife and mother, and their relationship is shown to be genuine, despite the crowding anti-monarchy sentiments surrounding them, to such an extent that the author implores the audience to be sympathetic towards Marie-Antoinette as she presses to defend her husband “Sans qu’on ait vu mon ame avec lui s’attendrir?”[[37]](#footnote-37) Saint-Roman’s bias towards the royal family and their supporters is evident in the way he portrays them as virtuous and humble, shown through Louis’s cautious attitude when speaking to the National Assembly. His sentences are short but not abrupt and he avoids saying anything malicious or over-defensive in response to his detractors. Additionally his self-sacrificial attitude for the nation exemplifies the sense of martyrdom that Saint Roman is clearly trying to portray, “Pour le salut commun que bientôt je périsse.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Whereas the revolutionaries, of the National Assembly, speak in a way that makes them seem coarse and bloodthirsty “On va juger Louis, & sa mort est certaine: Tout Français à l’envi le poursuit de sa haine; Et brigue de ses jours d’éteindre le flambeau, Comme son assassin, ou comme son bourreau.”[[39]](#footnote-39) The portrayal of the revolutionary characters in this way may have encouraged reflection on the events, and the instigators of the Revolution, and disdain for the bloody impacts that resulted from it.

As the wife of the King of France, Marie-Antoinette is “the first subject of the king and of France, the model of all others subjected to his power”[[40]](#footnote-40) In the first scene of Act III the queen gives an emotional soliloquy after hearing the announcement of Louis’s condemnation to death. She begins dwelling in self-pity, exclaiming how his death is the ruin of her ancestors’ and her glory. However, she continues by blaming herself “Qu’aujourd’hui tes sujets feraient tomber sur toi L’épouvantable horreur qu’ils concevraient de moi?”[[41]](#footnote-41) adding to the sense of Louis’s martyrdom and her own. Louis’s self-sacrificial approach to his death, in the play, would have been comparable, for those who believed that the monarch was the nation’s divine representative sent by God, to Jesus’s death for his people, adding to the sorrow associated with the execution of the king. The penultimate line sees her exclaim her protection over her children and husband, being the dutiful wife. This is a clear example, for the audience, of the playwright’s convictions towards the royal family, he also attempts to normalise them as a family, a familiar structure to which citizens can relate. This attempt to conventionalise Louis and Marie-Antoinette, and to convince people of their good will and devotion to each other and Louis to his people, is a far cry from other forms of propaganda that depict them.



*Figure 1*[[42]](#footnote-42)

The picture above shows Louis and Marie-Antoinette conjoined to create a monster. In other forms of visual communication, Marie-Antoinette was taunted for being “the erotic super potency, the political devilry, of the “female monster” .”[[43]](#footnote-43) The snakes stemming from Marie-Antoinette’s head insinuate that she is the mastermind behind the evil they have committed. This along with the many other negative portrayals of them, in not only visual but other forms of propaganda, represent the couple as malicious together and towards the French people. This is the diametric opposite of Saint-Roman’s depiction of their relationship and their sentiments towards France. For example, in the final act, Louis is eventually allowed to be reunited with the queen and his children. Saint-Roman illustrates the king attempting to dissuade the queen from resenting the nation and God’s will “Dieu veut qu’on me fasse subir: Il éleve mon ame au plaisir de mourir Résigné pleinement à sa volonté sainte : Mais c’est pour mes sujets que me reste la crainte”[[44]](#footnote-44) In contrast to many representations of Louis, Saint Roman attempts to inculcate regret among the spectators, or readers, of the play for Louis’s death, a sentiment which until the tumults of 1792 had almost been forgotten.

These opposites, admiration or hatred, for the monarchy were the source of disturbances across the revolutionary era, and the movement of pamphleteering was for many the origin of influential opinions. “Pamphlet writing is a perfect expression of this acceleration of time, inseparable from the Revolution.”[[45]](#footnote-45) However, for some people their opinions were only exacerbated by the commotions in France and its capital. In the pamphlet entitled *Républicains, Guillotinez-moi ce Jean-Foutre de Louis XVI, et cette putain de Marie Antoinette*, signed by “un vrai Républicain, vrai Patriote, vrai Sans-Culotte” the author refers to Marie-Antoinette as “femme plus odieuse et plus scélérate que les Médicis, que les Messalines”,[[46]](#footnote-46) an historical reference widespread not only through the revolutionary period but also dissipated among social classes and political extremes given extra credibility as “pamphlets had, for many, (…) the meaning of a prediction”[[47]](#footnote-47).

The conflict in opinion over not only the royal family, but Marie-Antoinette in particular, shows that at the opposing extremes she attracted some form of unity. Those in favour of the royal family at the time of her death in 1793, such as Saint-Roman, may not have necessarily been in France, but distributed around Europe, these nobles otherwise being known as émigrés*.* However, it is more evident from propagandist paintings and pamphlets that her enemies’ activity was centred in Paris. The most prominent attribute of the ‘period of Terror’ in France was its unpredictable nature. Writing from the safety of Germany, Saint-Roman’s depiction of Marie-Antoinette is that of the loving wife and caring mother, albeit indignant to France for having subjected her husband to such a fate. This is contrary to the attitude of the pamphleteer towards her who thought that “la guillotine est la récompence que tu as mérité.”[[48]](#footnote-48) For everyone, Marie-Antoinette must have meant something different, however the message conveyed by Saint-Roman is the undeserving nature of Louis’s death for him, his family and his people’s conscience. The portrayal of Marie-Antoinette in the play attempts to relieve some of the scorn she received by asking the audience to look at her not as the queen, but as a mother and wife who had consecrated her “gloire à sceller l’alliance.”[[49]](#footnote-49)

The evolution of the political impressions of the era is highlighted by examining the plays in chronological order. Firstly, Chénier’s disapproval of foreign queens, especially Marie-Antoinette, showed that at the time of the Revolution, the nation had obtained power and would refuse to tolerate the monarchy’s omnipotence. Through the historical representation of Catherine de Medici, Chénier asserted that the queen’s only function was to produce an heir and that Marie-Antoinette should have no position of power in France. Subsequently, Olympe de Gouges contrasted this opinion by conveying the message of Marie-Antoinette as the scapegoat for the actions of higher, male authority. In her bid to give French women rights to a political voice, Marie-Antoinette may have been de Gouges’s way of seeking legitimacy and a political constituency coupled with de Gouges’s willingness to defend the queen whose life had been completely dominated by men’s decisions. And finally, Saint Roman’s depiction of Marie-Antoinette as a normal woman, a dutiful wife and loving mother, in spite of opposing propaganda, and aimed to instil a sense of regret into the nation which had murdered the Bourbons and left France without a monarchist legacy. His pro-monarchy ideals may have been supported by the fellow émigrés and other counter-revolutionaries, however, they would have been contested by people at the other end of the political spectrum.

All three plays represent Marie-Antoinette through the early revolutionary years, yet from different perspectives. The bringing together of these three plays cannot be described as an all-encompassing representation of productions on the French stage between 1789-1793 due to the speed at which political opinions and situations, and consequently feelings towards the monarchy, changed. However, the analysis of these three plays does demonstrate this scene of varying sentiments through the portrayals of Marie-Antoinette in French theatre and, furthermore, to highlight that the 18th century Enlightenment had different effects on all citizens, some transforming and others re-affirming their opinions.

It is a clear conclusion that Marie-Antoinette, from whatever political perspective, was a divisive figure. This sense of division is represented through the selection and analysis of *Charles IX, ou, L’école des rois; Le Couvent ou les vœux forcés* and *Louis XVI: tragédie*. Furthermore, this sense of disagreement in opinion towards Marie-Antoinette is secondarily shown through the respective playwright’s intentions and the time at which their play was performed during the Revolution. From *Charles IX, ou, L’école des rois* we can ascertain that Chénier was an active revolutionary who, at the time, still acknowledged the importance of a constitutional monarchy, but encouraged the necessity to rid Louis, and France, of Marie-Antoinette. Whereas from their respective plays, it is clear that de Gouges and Saint Roman were in favour of the maintenance of the monarchy. The differences being that de Gouges called for the need for women’s place in society and politics to change, and therefore may have favoured some aspects of the Revolutionary cause, whereas *Louis XVI: tragédie* paints Saint Roman as a counter-revolutionary attempting to reinstate the monarchy and inviting the audience to reflect of the impacts of the Revolution.

The presence of Marie-Antoinette’s character in the theatre would surely have impacted on the audience, which was “diverse in its composition yet imperious in its judgement, as a metaphor for the nation whose political sovereignty was gaining momentum.”[[50]](#footnote-50) At this time, all components of the theatre were significant and 1789 was the threshold which defined the ‘Old Regime’ and the Revolution and by extension their individual theatres. The former needed the approval of the King, whereas the latter needed that of the audience. It is clear that each playwright’s objectives, in their own times, were to appeal to particular audiences which shared their views.

The power of the audience during this bloody period was a reflection of the declining importance of the monarchy and the increasing authority of the nation with “obstreperous spectators either bringing down a play they did not like or vigorously demanding a play the authorities disallowed.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Theatre was a method of, implicitly or explicitly, communicating politics to the people, and the selection of plays from 1789-1793, examined in this essay, show the ways in which the political climate changed.

The varying portrayals of Marie-Antoinette in the plays indicate not only the disparity in opinions of her but also the varying ways people used her as a figure to portray their individual political sentiments in the early revolutionary years. “Marie-Antoinette incarnait définitivement, aux yeux de ses ennemis, l’archétype de la mauvaise femme, pis, de la reine néfaste.”[[52]](#footnote-52)

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