

Elizabeth Fox, The Theme of Stability in the plays of the Napoleonic period, with particular reference to Pixierécourt

During the Consulate and Empire, theatre was arguably the most important art form in France. It was both a medium through which public opinion could be fervently expressed and a powerful propaganda tool that was exploited by the government. After years of turbulent instability, during which violence, death and political upheaval became typical events in France, Napoleon Bonaparte was asked by Sièyes, a leader under the Directoire, to help him orchestrate a coup d'état to be carried out on the 9th and 10th November, 1799.¹ Following this seizure of power, Napoleon was soon able to use the authority he gained in his position as First Consul to exert his influence over the Country. On 25 December 1799, Napoleon addressed the French about his duties as First Consul. He stated that laws and government actions should contain 'l'esprit d'ordre, de justice', and 'de moderation' because 'sans l'ordre, l'administration n'est qu'un chaos.' Through establishing order he believed that 'la stabilité du gouvernement' would be ensured.² A policy of centralisation was adopted to gain control to ensure that there would be no possibility of a return of either the monarchy or the Terror.³ People responded positively to Napoleon's actions, and in 1802, a plebiscite asking 'Should Napoleon Bonaparte be consul for life?' produced an overwhelming 'Yes' vote.⁴ This indicated that the public wanted a return to order and saw a strong government as the solution.⁵ Indeed, Napoleon came to be regarded as 'the saviour rescuing France from chaos'.⁶ His aim to give people 'a sense of civic

¹ This was known as the Coup of Brumaire. For further details, see Malcolm Crook, *Napoléon comes to power: Democracy and Dictatorship in Revolutionary France 1795-1804* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff; 1998), pp. 43-70

² *Oeuvres de Napoléon Bonaparte*, Vol. 3, Paris: (Panckoucke, 1821), p. 174-175

³ Martyn Lyons, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution*, (Macmillan, 1994), pp. 60-61

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 112-113

⁵ Jean Tulard, *Napoleon, the Myth of the Saviour*, p. 20

⁶ Malcolm Crook, *Napoleon comes to power: Democracy and Dictatorship in Revolutionary France 1795-1804*, p. 5

direction' was underpinned by Napoleon's *Code Civil des Français*, which was finalised in 1804.⁷ This document was essential to establishing order and stability, and it articulated Napoleon's views on how society should be structured. Napoleon had strong views on how society should function and he sought to reinstate certain political, moral and social values in the French people that would bring stability to the country. These values, in part due to censorship and government control, are reflected in the melodrama plays of the period. Napoleon's wish to gain control over the theatre reflected his realisation of the potential influence of theatre in engendering a stable society, and he did not hesitate to take action. From 1800, censorship measures were introduced. Napoleon dissolved the offices of the Directoire and placing the minister of the Interior, Lucien Bonaparte, in charge of monitoring theatres and authorising plays.⁸ As an admirer of formal theatre, the First Consulate supported the large theatres of Paris by introducing subsidies, including large budgets and pensions for the actors.⁹ However, theatre was not, as it once was, a form of entertainment uniquely for the elite. It had evolved so that it could cater for the masses, becoming more responsive to political and social changes, and this transformation resulted in the birth of a new genre, melodrama. The role of melodrama has been regarded as 'à la fois une école d'instruction civique et morale, un instrument de propagande politique et militaire et un moyen de divertissement à grand spectacle.'¹⁰ Thus melodrama was not merely to entertain, but to educate.

Nodier skilfully commented on Melodrama:

⁷Georges Lefebvre, *Napoleon 1, From 18 Brumaire to Tilsit, 1799-1807*, translated from the French by Henry F. Stockhold. Vol 1. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p.150

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 88

⁹ Robert Holtman, *Napoleonic Propaganda* (Louisiana State University Press, 1950), pp. 145-146

¹⁰ Jean-Marie Thomasseau, 'Le Mélodrame et la Censure sous le Premier Empire et la Restauration', *Revue des Sciences Humaines: le mélodrame*, 162 (1976), p.182

Le mélodrame était une nécessité. Le peuple tout entier venait de jouer dans les rues et sur les places publiques le plus grand drame de l'Histoire. Tout le monde avait été acteur dans cette pièce sanglante...il fallait des émotions analogues à celles dont le retour à l'ordre les avait sevrés¹¹

This demonstrates the potential influence that playwrights had over their audiences, since spectators could relate to events on stage and take guidance from the action. This essay will examine five selected plays by R. C. Guilbert-Pixerécourt, a reputed playwright known for his determination to inject morals into his plays.¹² 'C'est avec des idées religieuses et morales que je me suis lancé dans la carrière de théâtre.'¹³

In the Napoleonic context, Pixierécourt's views were important in bringing stability to France. Through examining his plays from the period 1799 to 1806, this essay will demonstrate the ways in which Melodrama illustrated and incited stability that the French craved after the Revolution.

Firstly, an important feature of melodrama is the use of stock characters. These characters are associated with certain stereotypes and retain key characteristics that the audience came to expect as the genre developed. Some figures help to create stability, whereas others do their best to disrupt the peace. All are important to the concept of stability, and their actions create 'l'image d'un monde où les innocents sont opprimés mais où finalement le bien triomphe.'¹⁴ This polarisation of good and

¹¹ Nodier, 'Préface' au Théâtre choisi de Pixierécourt, Nancy, 1841, tome, p. 8, in Jean-Claude Bonnet, *L'Empire des Muses. Napoléon, les Arts et les lettres* (Belin 2004), p. 194

¹² *Coelina ou L'Enfant du Mystère, La Forteresse du Danube, Le Solitaire de la Roche Noire, Tékéli ou le Siège de Montgatz, and Victor, L'enfant de la Forêt*. All accessed on 08/03/2007 at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/>. These will subsequently be referred to as *Coelina, La Forteresse, La Roche Noire, Tékéli* and *Victor*.

¹³ Jean-Marie Thomasseau, *Le Mélodrame* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), p. 39

¹⁴ André Billaz, 'Mélodrame et littérature: le cas Pixierécourt', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 162.2 (1976), p. 245

evil indicates that no compromise of principles is possible, and, as will be demonstrated, certain characters represent particular moral values that Pixierécourt considers important to highlight.¹⁵

The principal stock character and creator of disruption is the villain, whose role it is to threaten virtuous characters by thwarting plans for their happiness. This often concerns the villain's sudden interruption of a family unification such as marriage. The villain's entry often occurs when happiness is about to be secured; this heightens the impact of the villain's disruption. A good example of the use of the villain is Truguelin, in *Coelina*. Truguelin prevents the marriage of the hero and heroine by revealing a secret about Coelina's birth. However, Pixierécourt uses the villain to illustrate that crimes will not go unpunished and that true happiness can only come from virtue. Truguelin shows remorse for his actions by appealing to God. 'O mon Dieu!...vois mes remords, mon repentir sincère' (III.i). He also fears the 'funeste conséquence du crime!' that awaits him (III.i); this indicates to the audience that justice will be done. The message on the value of virtue is enforced, as he laments 'si l'on savoit ce qu'il en coûte pour cesser d'être vertueux, on verroit bien peu de méchans sur la terre' (III.i). Similarly, in *La Forteresse*, Valebrown reads aloud a letter from the Emperor saying:

Nous condamnons à une prison perpétuelle le ministre prévaricateur qui a abusé de notre confiance, nous nommons à sa place le chevalier Evrard (III.xi).

Thus justice is ensured and the guilty are charged, leaving the audience with an intense feeling of satisfaction because stability has been restored. Indeed, virtuous characters are rewarded and enemies are inevitably punished, and yet villains are

¹⁵ Jean-Marie Thomasseau, *Le Mélodrame*, p. 31

given the opportunity to repent. The character Roger in *Victor* is important in this context. As a bandit, his significance would have been immediately apparent to the audience, since banditry was a serious problem in French countryside at the time. In 1801 Napoleon introduced the Law of Plûvose, whereby courts were charged with clamping down on brigands.¹⁶ Roger exemplified the enemy with his perceived lack of virtue as the focus of the play, since his son, Victor, cannot marry his beloved Clémence unless Roger repents and becomes virtuous. However, in the final scene, having agreed to his son's wishes, Roger dies from battle and the Baron de Fritziere, declares that 'un homme, dirigé vers le bien, eût été peut-être un héros' (III.xvi). This sent a clear message to the audience about the value of virtue and reassured them that threats could be overcome by virtue. The villain thus evokes two key opposing themes at the centre of all melodramas, namely persecution and virtue and honour. As demonstrated, the villain's arrival in the stable and coherent world introduces disorder through the persecution of virtuous characters. The sense of persecution becomes more intense as play progresses. Vice is conquered and virtue reigns just as the villain is about to win, which heightens the triumph.¹⁷ The last scene of the final act marks a return to normality, a drop in tension and an end to persecution. Once this persecution ends, misunderstandings disappear, families reunite and all returns to order as equilibrium is restored. In this way, the final scenes send a clear moral message to the audience about the merits of virtue, which should guide their behaviour.

The second important stock character is the father figure. This role was central to the theme of stability during the Napoleonic period. Napoleon wanted to install a

¹⁶ Georges Lefebvre, *Napoleon 1, From 18 Brumaire to Tilsit, 1799-1807*, p. 129

¹⁷ Jean-Marie Thomasseau, *Le Mélodrame*, p. 27

patriarchal system in France. He directly intervened in the *Code Civil* to reassert the position of men in society, particularly within the family unit.¹⁸ This signalled a response to the popular belief that the Revolution had 'wreaked emotional havoc within families' and so had caused social instability.¹⁹ Family was of great value to the state, and concerning rights over children, 'Le père seul exerce cette autorité.'²⁰ Thus the father figure exercised authority over the family unit, so was in a position of power. The *Code Civil* also stated that a father could imprison his children for six months on strength of his word alone.²¹ Pixierécourt's plays reflect the important role of the father figure, particularly in *Victor* and *Coelina* in the characters of Le Baron de Fritzierne and Dufour, respectively; their judgement is crucial to the outcome of the plays. Victor seeks out his father to prove him virtuous in order to please the baron so that he will consent to his marrying Clémence (II.iii). This is in accordance with the *Code Civil*, which states that children 'ne peuvent contracter mariage sans le consentement de leurs père et mère' but 'le consentement du père suffit.'²² The crucial importance of parental consent here is central to the plot of the play. Another example of parental power is in *Coelina*. Upon discovering Coelina's illegitimate birth, Dufour tells Coelina and her father Francisque to leave (II.v). In the original novel upon which Pixierécourt's play is based, Stephany revolts at his father's injustice and runs away searching for his lover. However, the playwright creates coherence in Stephany's behaviour, so that, although he protests and threatens to

¹⁸ Georges Lefebvre, *Napoleon 1, From 18 Brumaire to Tilsit, 1799-1807*, p. 151

¹⁹ Suzanne Desan, 'Reconstructing the Social After the Terror: Family, Property and the Law in Popular Politics', *Past and Present*, 164 (1999), p. 82

²⁰ Le Code Civil, Titre IX de la Puissance Paternelle, Art. 373, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/evenements/code-civil-1804-1.asp> Accessed on 31/03/2007

²¹ Georges Lefebvre, *Napoleon 1, From 18 Brumaire to Tilsit, 1799-1807*, p. 152

²² Le Code Civil, Titre V du Mariage, Art. 148

leave, he remains with his father.²³ This ensures that despite disturbances in the plot, the central family unit is unshaken and the relationship between father and son is maintained, thus an element of stability remains, even in times of crisis.

In addition, the final scenes of several of the plays link the father-child relationship with happiness, since the re-establishment of order and the triumph of virtue are coupled with the unification of the father and child. For example, Olivier ‘court dans les bras d’Evrard’ exclaiming ‘mon père’, (III.xii) in *La Forteresse*, just as Edmond, in *La Roche Noire*, ‘serre dans ses bras Clotilde et Eginhard’, (III.xiv) stating that he has forgiven Ulric of his wrongs, and that ‘le seul [tort] que je ne pouvais lui pardonner, était de m’avoir privé de ma fille, le voilà réparé’(III.xiv).

The role of the father figure was also one of moral guidance and, as such, his judgement is linked to virtue and honour. In *Victor*, the Baron states that Roger must be an honest man. ‘S’il est honnête homme tu seras l’époux de ma fille’ (II.iii). The father figure thus approves if the situation is worthy. This is also the case in *Tékéli*, for although the father figure, Conrad, is less domineering, his agreement to help Tékéli enables the latter to escape. Conrad holds Tékéli in high esteem, and this is proven in Act II scene VIII, where Conrad offers ‘la moitié de la dot de ma fille’ (II.viii) to a peasant to prevent him from reporting Tékéli to the soldiers. The final scenes of the play emphasise the importance of the father-son relationship, as Tékéli ‘court vers lui et l’embrasse’ (III.xvii). The subliminal message to the people is that the patriarchal state led by Napoleon will create stability.

This links with the third important stock character in the plays: the heroine. This role represents purity and in melodrama was often the character under threat. It is

²³ Simone Bernard-Griffiths, Jean Sgard (eds), *Mélodrames et romans noirs : 1750-1890* (Toulouse : Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2000), p. 136

interesting to note that Pixierécourt took great care in maintaining this theme so that happiness could not be undermined in any way. For example, although *Coelina* was based on a novel by Ducray-Duminil, the plot was altered to prevent any reference to adultery. Pixierécourt transforms Coelina's illegitimate birth from two virtuous lovers into a legitimate one, emphasising the morality of a faithful marriage between Isoline and Francisque. This alteration meant that Coelina's birth is no longer damaged by adultery and makes Coelina legitimate, allowing her to be accepted into the family.²⁴ The *Code Civil* forbade adultery,²⁵ and so this alteration to the play foresaw Napoleon's requirements and was consistent with the law that stated that 'aucune intrigue ne pouvait mettre en scène un adultère'.²⁶ In addition, Napoleon's regime 'continued to exclude women from the sphere of politics and public affairs.'²⁷ A man could administer his wife's property and he could dispose of it, so women were subordinate to men.²⁸ The idea of the subordination of women was reflected to an extent in Pixierécourt's plays, for example in *Victor*. As Madame Germain distresses about the potential harm that could come to her, the Baron reassures her that 'je vous sauverai, femme infortunée', which underpins the helplessness of the female figure. (I.xii). These examples of men and women's roles in melodrama in the earlier plays reflect stability, where women play a marginal role in terms of action. However, Josephine, Napoleon's first wife, was entrusted with looking after affairs in Paris during his absence, so women were not totally powerless. In later plays of the period, such as *Tékéli* and *La Forteresse*, women play a much more active role, having a degree of responsibility. These examples in both reality and the plays appear to

²⁴Simone Bernard-Griffiths, Jean Sgard (eds), *Mélodrames et romans noirs : 1750-1890*, p. 131

²⁵Ibid, p. 132

²⁶Jean-Marie Thomasseau, 'Le Mélodrame et la Censure sous le Premier Empire et la Restauration', p. 179

²⁷Martyn Lyons, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution*, p. 102

²⁸Georges Lefebvre, *Napoleon I, From 18 Brumaire to Tilsit, 1799-1807*, p. 152

contradict the *Code Civil*, and is particularly pertinent in relation to *Tékéli*, which appeared in 1804, the year the *Code Civil* was finalised, so did not reflect the ‘stable order’ that Napoleon wished to create.

The inclusion of servants in the plays helped to establish stability because it supported the social hierarchy that had been strictly introduced under Napoleon. The use of *tutoiement* introduced during the Revolution disappeared and Napoleon appeared in public with escorted guards, underpinning the reinstatement of social order.²⁹ Characters were presented as serving, but also respecting, their ‘superiors’. In *La Forteresse*, Alix pleads with Philippe to let her talk to ‘M. Valbrown’ because ‘il dépend de lui de rendre à mon maître un service important’ (I.iii). This demonstrates the hierarchy of power within the play, but it is clear that Alix, despite the fact that she ‘ne possède rien au monde’ respects him, as she refers to him as having ‘une âme honnête et généreuse’ (I.iii). Addressing characters with titles, as we see here, also contributes to the hierarchy and to the notion of ‘knowing one’s place’.

The overall structure of melodrama is important for creating stability. Pixierécourt typically used a three-act structure and all his melodramas were conceived with an end view and so the third act was of crucial importance.³⁰ Thomasseau characterised the end of a melodrama as ‘une exhortation au peuple, pour l’engager à conserver sa moralité, à détester le crime et ses tyrans, surtout on lui recommandera d’épouser des femmes vertueuses.’³¹ Pixierécourt developed dramatic tension in the acts, culminating in and a reversal of the situation at the end. The beginning of each play

²⁹ Jean Tulard, *Napoleon, the Myth of the Saviour*, p. 122

³⁰ Howarth, ‘Word and image in Pixierécourt’s melodramas: the dramaturgy of the strip cartoon’, in David Bradby, Louis James, Bernard Sharratt (eds.), *Performance and politics in popular drama: aspects of popular entertainment in theatre, film and television, 1800-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 19

³¹ Jean-Marie Thomasseau, *Le Mélodrame*, p. 19

displays characteristics of order and stability, which are then disrupted by the arrival of the villain. Once the order is reaffirmed happiness can be secured, and yet this happiness is greater than that which existed at the beginning, suggesting that the events that the characters have gone through have made them more virtuous. ‘Les hiérarchies sociales, données comme ‘naturelles’ y sont restaurées au dénouement de la pièce’ wherein ‘le monde des personnages du mélodrame offre l’image d’une communauté organisée, stable, chrétienne.’³² The restored equilibrium is fully appreciated once it has been threatened because the events that threaten stability help characters to recognise the true qualities of virtue, honour and truth. Thus Melodrama was an important device that was able to ‘panser par l’utopie des blessures politiques’, since audience could relate to the disruption within the plays and were presented with a positive outcome to events.³³

Music and dance were devices typically used by Pixierécourt to relieve tension in his plays and promote stability by enhancing the visual appeal of the play, which was important for entertaining the audience.³⁴ Ballet, in particular, became a universal characteristic of melodrama that was coupled with music. Audiences came to expect this and its predictability was reassuring as a spectacle. Its purpose, however, was not simply to entertain. Indeed, it could be an effective way of expressing joy and emphasising morals. A clear example of this is the final scene of *Coelina*, where ‘tout le monde danse’ whilst Michaud sings a reassuring refrain:

Vous le voyez, mes chers amis,

De l’ombre en vain l’on couvre,

³² Jean-Claude Bonnet, *L’Empire des Muses. Napoléon, les Arts et les lettres* (Belin 2004), p. 194

³³ Ibid, p. 196

³⁴ O. G. Brockett, ‘The Function of Dance in the Melodramas of Guilbert de Pixierécourt, *Modern Philology*, 56.3 (February, 1959), p. 155

Les crimes que l'on a commis;
Tôt ou tard ça s'découvre.
Soyons bons, francs, vertueux;
Faisons souvent des heureux; (III.xii)

The song goes on to instruct the people to be 'toujours généreux' and reminds them that although many believe that happiness is to be found in riches, 'il n'est qu'dans la paix du coeur, sans ça point d'allégresse' (III.xii). These words are clearly intended to send a reassuring message to contemporary audiences that would encourage stability, since audiences were no longer composed only of the upper classes. Indeed, earlier in the play Michaud sings, 'ce jour n'est redoutable que pour les scélérats', which indicates that those who are virtuous have nothing to fear (III.ii). As has been shown so far, stability is bound up with morals and order. In this instance, we are reminded that virtuous qualities, rather than riches, bring happiness. To an audience who had suffered during the Revolution, this would have literally been music to their ears.

Comic characters are a means of relieving tension in the plays. They were not used principally to provide comedy, but rather, like music and dance, to lighten the tone at points so that the play did not become too intense and was not too turbulent. In *Coelina*, Michaud plays this role. His stupidity borders on the absurd, as he fails to recognise Truguelin despite his evident scar (III.iv). Another example found in *La Forteresse* demonstrates how Pixierécourt uses the comic's foolishness to explain the message to the audience. Philippe, the guard, only has one working eye. The others cover it so that Evrard can escape without him noticing. When Philippe states that he cannot see, Pauline says 'c'est dommage!' (II.xi). Clearly she did not find this a shame, emphasising the comic value of the scene. This may help alleviate fears of the

audience for Evrard's safety, and this reassurance may contribute to their sense of stability by projecting the message that difficulties can be overcome.

The monologues that feature in the plays can contribute to the overall stability of the plays by making clear the characters' emotions. Pixierécourt successfully exploits the use of monologues to manipulate his audience into sympathising with particular characters. They allow true emotions to be revealed, since characters may freely express themselves away from the company of others. Monologues additionally provide the opportunity to express inner conflict, so that the audience can clearly see the obstacles that block the road to happiness. An example of this is in *La Forteresse* when Olivier, 'seul, 'accablé sous le poids des sentiments divers', cries out 'O mon coeur me déchire' because he is torn between saving his adoptive father and his duty to the Emperor and his friend. The latter becomes no longer just 'le devoir', but 'le sentiment le plus noble de l'humanité qui est dans la balance' (I.xvi). It is clear how much is at stake, and so the audience becomes lured into the emotion that engages them in the turmoil. This serves to heighten the sense of satisfaction at the end of the play because the audience is truly happy that good has triumphed. This is also achieved through the 'monologue pathétique.' Characters gratified the audience by revealing the truth and so encouraged them to rally against the villain so that the triumph of virtue is all the more great at the end (Truguelin's monologue in *Coelina* when he shows his remorse is an obvious example.)³⁵

Melodrama employed various devices as a means of reinforcing the visual stability, some of which will be discussed here. Pixierécourt exploits the insertion of *tableaux*

³⁵Jean-Marie Thomasseau, *Le Mélodrame*, p. 23

into his plays. 'Leur récurrence, qui suscite une attente chez le spectateur... [contribue] à structurer le mélodrame comme genre.'³⁶ Their effect is to focus attention on key moments in order to heighten their importance and the stability of the resolved trauma. The audience came to expect these tableaux as part of the reassuring spectacle to divert people's attention away from reality. This can be seen in Act II Scene V of *Tékéli* where it enables the playwright to focus the audience's attention on the joy of Christine and Urbain's wedding by prolonging the moment. The *tableau* is effective in creating dramatic contrast, since it is followed by a disruption of the peace due to the arrival of soldiers. In *Victor*, a *tableau général* is used in the final scene to ensure the audience absorbs the message Pixérécourt sought to convey. The Baron's final piece of wisdom that 'il n'est de repose, à ses derniers instans, que pour celui qui ne s'est jamais écarté du sentier de l'honneur et de la vertu' is the most important message of all and the playwright 'freezes' the action so that this is not lost (III.xvi). Tableaux are thus very important in focusing on the theme of stability; they recapitulate the most important values in the play, which inevitably emphasise morals.

Scenery was also used to reflect events. One good example is in the opening of Act III in *Coelina*. Following the end of Act II, during which the villain triumphs, Act III begins with the theatre representing 'un lieu sauvage.' It is clear already that the wilderness depicted reflects the internal instability of virtuous characters, whose happiness is no longer secure. The disruption of moral order is echoed through the presence of a violent storm, which increases to the point that 'toute la nature parût de désordre.' The tone of this scene marks a stark contrast to that of act II, which takes place in a garden beautifully decorated for Coelina's forthcoming marriage to

³⁶ Jean-Claude Bonnet, *L'Empire des Muses. Napoléon, les Arts et les lettres*, p. 196

Stephany. As André Billaz has noted, this contrast has the effect of making the hardship of the heroine more touching and the punishment of the guilty party more impressive.³⁷ The presence of the ‘torrent écumeux’ that crosses the theatre heightens the sense of action and expectation that danger is afoot. Furthermore the violent weather symbolises nature’s reaction towards the disruption of moral order, as Truguelin states that ‘il me semble que tout, dans la nature, se réunit pour m’accuser’ (III.i).

However, despite all the points listed so far showing the ways in which the theme of stability is played out in Melodrama, there remain certain discrepancies which contradict stability and which suggest that all is not necessarily as unified and resolved as it seems. Indeed, some aspects of particular plays could be seen to threaten Napoleon’s regime, and so arguably cause instability. It must not be forgotten that all these plays were performed under the eye of Napoleon. Pixierécourt, like all the playwrights of the period, had to work within a system of censorship, which placed heavy constraints on what could be shown on stage. One clear example that reflects the power the censors had over Pixierécourt’s plays is the reworking of the end of *Victor*. The playwright was made to rewrite the ending sequences of the play so that Roger fought alongside Victor to prove his complete repentance, rather than against him.³⁸ This would have reinforced stability at the end of the play. Yet this constraint demonstrates the extent of the repressive measures ordered by Napoleon to control the smaller theatres. There was a clear contradiction between Napoleon’s view of what theatre should be (that of the formal) and the audience that Pixierécourt sought to address.

³⁷ Simone Bernard-Griffiths, Jean Sgard (eds), *Mélodrames et romans noirs : 1750-1890*, p. 130

³⁸ *Courrier des Spectacles*, An VIII. I am grateful to Daniel Hall for bringing this review to my attention.

Another example of equal importance is that *Tékéli* was banned after its forty-eighth performance. Duroc, the military governor of Paris, saw the play and was outraged at the apparent link to the current events. Pichegru, a French general, had gone to Paris in August 1803, to head a royalist uprising against the First Consul.³⁹ Duroc had succeeded in arresting Pichegru, but Thomasseau points out that Duroc saw similarities between Pichegru and the play that he did not like, since it threatened the establishment:

Comme Pichegru trouvant refuge chez Leblanc, Tékéli se cache chez un meunier qui, lui, ne le trahit pas. Lorsque le proscrit révèle son identité à son hôte, celui-ci ne revient pas sur son offre et clame bien haut : « Dans quelque circonstance que ce soit, l'honneur est tout pour un soldat, L'Empereur même n'a pas le droit de l'emporter sur lui »⁴⁰

That the play was banned the next day shows how any reference against Napoleon would not be tolerated, despite the fact that it was first performed on December 29, 1803, before these events occurred.

Lastly, during the period, religion was central to re-establishing stability. On July 16 1801, Cardinal Consalvi signed a treaty known as the Concordat. This recognised Catholicism as the religion of the majority of the French, but kept the Bishops under state control and limited the power of the Church.⁴¹ Napoleon believed that only by reconciling with the Church could he re-establish order and prevent a counter-revolution, since many French people, including some who strongly supported the Revolution, regretted the schism with Catholicism.⁴² Despite the clear significance of

³⁹ Jean Tulard, *Napoleon, The Myth of the Saviour*, p. 125

⁴⁰ Jean-Marie Thomasseau, 'Le Mélodrame et la Censure sous le Premier Empire et la Restauration', p.174

⁴¹ Georges Lefebvre, *Napoleon 1, From 18 Brumaire to Tilsit, 1799-1807*, p. 137

⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 133-34

the Concordat, religion is barely mentioned in Pixierécourt's plays. This is surprising, since religion was clearly important to the playwright, as illustrated by his reference to 'cette volonté de fer qui... [m'a]...soutenu dans les malheurs...[qui]...s'explique et se traduit par un seul mot: Dieu!'⁴³ A possible explanation for this omission may be that Pixierécourt simply judged it as too great a risk to include religion in his plays. Although Catholicism was reinstated, Napoleon retained control over the people. Therefore, Pixierécourt may not have wanted to risk presenting the Church as having too much power, knowing that Napoleon's censors may have regarded this as a threat. An in depth study into this question would be necessary to consider the reasons behind this.

Stability is a key theme in Pixierécourt's plays but it is not always consistently presented. On the contrary, characters are taken through an emotional journey that tests their virtuous qualities and disrupts the status quo. Devices that may destabilise the moral order, such as the presence of a villain, and those which underpin this order, such as stage directions and scenery are central to ensuring that the climax of each play leaves audiences satisfied with the result. Pixierécourt did not set out directly with the idea of promoting stability, but his work implicitly suggests that stability is what people seek. Clearly he is regarded as 'avoir contribué au retour à l'ordre (moral et social)'⁴⁴. Indeed, 'le mélodrame constitue ainsi une "machine" idéologique destinée à souder la communauté nationale autour de quelques valeurs d'ordre.'⁴⁵ All social classes watching the plays were unified by their shared access to melodrama. It meant that 'le public de l'Ambigu, éveille...chez les plus égoïstes le sens de la

⁴³Charles Nodier, 'Souvenirs du jeune âge' in *Théâtre choisi de Guilbert de Pixierécourt*, 4 vol. (Paris, Nancy, 1841-43), p.xxii, in Willie Hartog, *Guilbert de Pixierécourt: sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris, 1912), p. 18

⁴⁴ Simone Bernard-Griffiths, Jean Sgard (eds), *Mélodrames et romans noirs : 1750-1890*, p. 136

⁴⁵Jean-Claude Bonnet, *L'Empire des Muses. Napoléon, les Arts et les lettres*, p. 195

fraternité.’⁴⁶ This unification was achieved by taking them together on a journey in which the essential values of life, which everyone can possess, are communicated.

Was melodrama in fact a long metaphor for the French revolution? In a sense this is quite possible, since the characters, having survived a crisis, become stronger and more virtuous as a result. As a spectator watching any of these plays, the message of hope for the future was surely inescapable and this hope was based around the idea of stability, which is what the French people sought following a turbulent and disturbing period in their history.

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⁴⁶ E. Maulde in ‘Les Bienfaits du mélodrame’, in Jean-Marie Thomasseau, *Le Mélodrame*, p. 118

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